ESOL ADULT STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT IN A FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE IN THE UK

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

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Abstract

This study investigated adult Syrian refugee students' perceptions of assessment and its impact on learning English in a Further Education college (FE) in West Yorkshire, the UK. This study used the term "perception" to describe the students' reactions to the assessment practices in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) context. Depending on how each student describes their knowledge about perceived assessment practices, the perception could be either negative or positive, potentially impacting their learning activities. This thesis critically analysed students' perceptions of assessment practices in ESOL classrooms, and examined the impact of assessment on students' English language learning strategies, as well as the challenges they might encounter when learning English in an ESOL context. An interpretive qualitative case study was conducted in an FE college to achieve this aim. The study involved sixteen purposefully chosen ESOL students and an Entry 2 teacher. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with students; classroom observation; semi-structured interviews with the observed teacher and six students in the same classroom; focus groups with Entry 2 students; and document analysis. The study adopted Weir's socio-cognitive framework for test validity as the theoretical framework for its ability to conceptualise adequate evidence on how the ESOL exam constructs are interpreted. The findings showed that both types of assessment, formative and summative, had affected ESOL students' perceptions of assessment, which influenced how they carried out these practices. They also indicated that many factors affected students' perceptions of assessment. These factors included the variation between the previous educational experience in the Syrian context and the present experience in the ESOL context; the lack of alignment between ESOL assessment objectives and students' objectives; and the diversity of students' educational and social backgrounds. The participants' perceptions of assessment varied based on their previous experiences and their aim to learn English. Some of the students prioritised summative assessments, other participants believed that summative assessment practices did not assess their actual knowledge and language abilities; therefore, they called for a change in the evaluation policy to be consistent with their circumstances. The results further indicated that test preparation practices before the exam had a significant impact on students' learning practices at entry levels. Accordingly, students used different learning strategies to pass the exam, they depended on memorising and establishing test-taking techniques. This study's evidence demonstrated the impact of assessment experiences on the perceptions of ESOL adult Syrian students, leading to significant changes in their motivation and learning practices. This finding has significant implications for the development of assessment policy in further education colleges to meet adult students' objectives.

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Dedication

To my husband Dr Dlir Albarzenji, and my lovely children: Abdullah, Seren, and Naz.

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Contents

List of abbreviation

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BERA	British Education of Research Association
CEE	College Entrance Examination
CET-4 LCS	College English Test 4 Listening Comprehension Subtest
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ENE	English National Examination
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FCE	First Certificate in English
FE	Further Education
GEPT	General English Proficiency Test
GSE	General Secondary Education
L1	First Language
HKCEE	Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
TELC	Test of English Listening Comprehension
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UK	The United Kingdom

Chapter 1:   Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Over the last 20 years, various studies have underlined the importance of testing and evaluation in the educational process (Cheng, 2005; Black and Wiliam, 2006; Qi, 2007; Shohamy, 2007). This thesis investigates the perceptions of adult ESOL Syrian refugee students of assessment in a further education college in West Yorkshire, in the UK, using a qualitative research methodology. It also aims to inspect the influence of assessment on students' English language learning in ESOL classroom contexts. The evaluation of students' accomplishments and development is necessary to highlight learning challenges and to identify practical solutions for raising achievement standards. The outcomes of assessments are mostly seen as guidelines to provide teachers with the opportunity to increase students' learning. Furthermore, language exams are seen as instruments linked to educational, social, and political contexts according to (Shohamy, 2007). Therefore, all stakeholders need to understand the function and influence of testing and assessment concerning their values, effect, fairness, and consequences. This understanding enables teachers to quickly and easily identify and treat the learning difficulties of their students. In this thesis, the investigation includes both types of assessment practices: formative assessment (e.g. formative assessment practices, self-assessment, peer assessment, and feedback) and summative assessment as ESOL final exam. Formative assessment may be employed to enhance English language education, while the ESOL exam evaluates English language ability in the four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing at all levels for classification purposes.

Despite classroom assessment being a complicated phenomenon, fewer experiential researchers are analysing it in the literature compared to the significant literature on large-

scale proficiency examinations (Chinda et al., 2022). According to McNamara (2001) "too much language testing research is about high-stakes proficiency tests, ignoring classroom contexts, and focusing on the use of technically sophisticated quantitative methods to improve the quality of tests at the expense of methods more accessible to non-expert " (p. 329). Since the ultimate objective of washback research is to inspect how assessment impacts the development of effective teaching and learning, it is significant to investigate the influence of assessment on the learning practices of Syrian students in the ESOL context due to the increase in Syrian refugees settling in the UK.

1.2   Research Background

Thousands of Syrian refugees have been relocated to various countries during the last few years as a result of the country's ongoing civil war, which began in 2011, and the subsequent decline in political stability in the region. The Syrian crisis continues to be the greatest displacement in history with over 5.6 million registered refugees and over 6 million people internally displaced (UNHCR, 2023). The number of refugees in the UK has continuously increased since then (Dennis et al., 2016), therefore, it has been the government's priority to teach Syrian refugees the English language to help them integrate quickly into the new society (Haughton et al., 2017). Therefore, adult refugees who do not know English or have very basic knowledge have been urged to attend ESOL classes provided by local colleges in their area. Most ESOL students learn English to help them in their everyday life, such as attending their children's appointments at schools, studying, and getting a job (ibid).

It has been argued that the educational process and assessment should not be separated, therefore, the evaluation of student accomplishment and progress is

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necessary to highlight learning challenges and identify practical solutions for raising achievement standards (Shohamy, 2007; Cheng, 2005; Black and Wiliam, 1998; Qi, 2007). Assessment outcomes can be regarded as guidelines that allow teachers to enhance students' learning. They can also assist students in identifying their learning challenges so they can avoid them at subsequent educational levels.

My interest as a researcher stems from my experience in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in many educational institutions in the Middle East. It also stems from my lengthy experience as a student in these institutions, which focused on traditional teaching and evaluation methods. The premise of my research has been shaped after settling in the UK and joining the university as a postgraduate student. This experience was very similar to the educational experiences of the Syrian refugee students in this study. Their journey ended with enrolling in Further Education (FE) colleges to learn English as an urgent need despite their circumstances. The only difference was in the freedom of choice that I had to join the university, whilst adult Syrian students did not have this freedom, as the courses were imposed by the government. The spark of this research came from experiencing two different educational systems, including the assessment process, and their effect on learning English. I have been keen to investigate the students' perceptions of assessment compared to their previous experience in Syria, and to investigate how the assessment affects their learning. Generally, ESOL adult students have different educational and social backgrounds, prior learning experiences in Syria, English knowledge, and general interests. Therefore, there is scope to explore the differing perceptions adult ESOL Syrian students have of the assessment. Although the English language is now receiving more attention in Syria, traditional educational methods

continue to be an obstacle to achieving quality education (Armnzai and Alakrash, 2021). This situation resembles the participants' previous educational experiences in this study, where teaching and evaluation were conducted traditionally. Examinations and tests have been highly stressed in the Syrian educational context, compelling the students to simply focus on passing tests to progress into the following school year (Khoja and Mohapatra, 2017). Teaching and learning English in the ESOL context focuses on helping refugees fit in easily within the community (Strang and Ager, 2010); and increasing their chances for employment (Barrett et al., 2017). The difference between the educational systems in both contexts, the Syrian and the ESOL, in addition to the ultimate aim of the assessment process may affect students' English language learning. This impact of evaluation procedures on instruction and learning is referred to as "backwash or washback". 'Washback' is thought to be neutral with the probability to be either negative or positive (Qi, 2007, p.51). Hughes (2003) asserts that the test's methodology decides whether "washback" is beneficial or harmful (see Chapter 3). This also encouraged me, as a researcher, to undertake this study to inspect the perceptions of the students towards the assessment practices including ESOL examination in the college and their positive or negative effect on learning English.

Learning the language of the host country, English in this study is a vital step in facilitating the refugees' integration into the country. They can use the language to get access to social services, work opportunities, and education, in addition to being part of society. Since evaluation is a main component of the educational process, I felt the need to study its effect on learning English for Syrian refugees due to its role in enhancing the overall standard of education and, thus, facilitating integration. In this study, I decided to focus

on adult ESOL Syrian refugee students, instead of other ESOL students from different ethnicities and backgrounds for many reasons. Firstly, the Syrian students' unique circumstances and previous experiences made studying their perceptions a crucial area of research. Recognising these perceptions can assist teachers and other stakeholders in creating and using more efficient assessment practices that are compatible with the needs of this distinct group of students. Moreover, adult Syrian students are different from other ESOL students due to their previous learning experiences, as most of the public universities and institutions prioritise using Arabic as the teaching language of instruction, which impacts the English proficiency level of the students. Secondly, as a researcher from the Middle East, I share Arabic as my First Language (L1) with the Syrian refugee students. Sharing the same language with ESOL students made it easier for them to express their opinions freely and prevented misunderstanding. Each refugee has a difficult experience in beginning a new life in a foreign country, therefore, most of them are trying hard to become a part of the English community and to overcome their previous experiences. Unfortunately, the language barrier prevents most of them from integrating easily into society. Additionally, I had the chance, as a volunteer interpreter, to work closely with the Arab community, and to develop a good rapport with many of them. This relationship, especially with women, made me more aware of the obstacles they face when learning English. This experience has driven me to investigate their perceptions of assessment to understand how assessment improves or hinders learning the English language in college.

1.3   Statement of the Research Problem

My desire to conduct research in the area of language assessment arose from my experience as an English instructor for many years. The belief that I have formulated over time is that language assessment procedures used in ESOL courses in Further Education Colleges may affect students' learning and motivation positively or negatively depending on students' perceptions, needs, previous experiences, educational level, and background. Another factor which was explored in this study was that language evaluation and testing techniques, that had been applied in the Syrian setting. They were not founded on instructional methods to motivate students to acquire knowledge and enhance their linguistic proficiency in English, and in particular, their speaking abilities. Therefore, this affected students' perceptions, motivation, and learning strategies in both contexts. Most of the Syrian students are not accustomed to using alternate assessment methods, for example, peer and self-assessment and other forms of formative assessments. They had been only assessed via summative assessment as the main method to evaluate their competence during their learning journey in the educational institutions in Syria. According to Khoja and Mohapatra (2017), teachers in Syria primarily focus on teaching to pass tests which are frequently high stakes and have a significant impact on students' educational future. Therefore, unlike summative assessment practices and examinations, the students in this study did not trust the outcomes of formative assessment techniques and procedures, as they were not marked. This research emphasises the significance of language evaluation to the learning process for ESOL students who are learning English as new residents in an English-speaking country. Additionally, it explores the problems

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that ESOL students face and the impacts of language assessment on learning the English language.

However, the volume of research conducted on ESOL practices, regulations, and funding in the UK has increased during the last 20 years (Hubble & Kennedy, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2012; Roberts & Baynham, 2006). Although assessment is considered a main aspect of the learning process in the ESOL context, not many studies discussing the effect of assessment on ESOL students were found in the related literature. This gap in the literature is significant, considering the role language tests play in the residency and citizenship application process in many Western nations, including the UK. When applying for citizenship in the United Kingdom, English as a Second Language (ESOL) students are required to demonstrate a high level of English proficiency. Therefore, there is a need to study the effect of assessment on ESOL students, mainly their perceptions, since their future as citizens is directly related to their ability to pass the ESOL exam. In addition to my experience in teaching and assessing EFL students, I was inspired to research the field of language assessment in the ESOL context during my work closely with the refugees as a volunteer interpreter, where I observed the impact of the assessment on students, their identity and their language skills. The most important thing I noticed was that despite the lengthy time the students spent in college learning English, they still had difficulties in speaking English and socialising with society, which potentially affected their chances of getting jobs or even becoming citizens. Therefore, I was motivated to enter the college as a researcher to inspect how the assessment process in the ESOL context contributes to developing the students' competence and to understand the role of classroom assessment and final exams in assessing the real abilities of the

students, which can be seen in their performance. I also wanted to check if the evaluation system had helped them to achieve the set of goals that were set by the government, the college, and themselves as language learners.

1.4   Research Questions and Aims

The overall goal of this study is to create a sense of comprehension of how adult ESOL Syrian refugee students perceive assessment and how assessment practices affect their learning. It offers recommendations for future practices on ESOL assessment and language learning. The research attempts to accomplish the following particular objectives:

1. To comprehend and clarify the perceptions of ESOL Syrian students of assessment and its impact on learning English.

2. To determine how ESOL teachers' assessment methods correspond to the goals and expectations of their students.

3. To examine the washback impact of assessment on students' learning of English in the ESOL context.

4. To explore the causes of assessment impact in the ESOL context.

Research questions, as the name suggests, are frequently based on research, which allows researchers to modify them as they analyse pertinent literature and create the study's framework. In this study, the research questions can be classified as qualitative research questions (Doody and Bailey,2016). Qualitative research questions are considered by Creswell (2013) as the most flexible and 'non-directional' research questions, which aim to either explain, explore, or discover. Based on the classification of

Ritchie et al. (2014), these research questions can be categorised as explanatory research questions that look for explanations for the research phenomenon, as well as connections between existing factors. According to Doody and Bailey (2016), creating logical research questions from valid and pertinent issues can be challenging, thus, I followed some methods that are generally used in research question formulation to develop a relevant and meaningful research question (Stone,2002). After choosing the topic of the study I used a brainstorming technique to develop the possible research questions. This was achieved by discussing the topic with some Syrian students informally outside the college which helped in identifying relevant themes of the topic. Then, I conducted an initial review of related literature to discover what other researchers have covered in their studies, and to find any gaps or restrictions in the literature. After that, I concentrated on a particular area of the study to formulate a more focused research question. This step was referred to as the "gap-spotting" method (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011). It includes developing research questions from discovered literature gaps and unexplored study topics. When creating a research question, I considered my own experiences with assessment, as suggested by Lipowski (2008), to provide examples of possible research questions. The next step was the evaluation of the research questions' reliability, to make sure that the answers to these questions would be achieved through an analysis of evidence. I adopted these research questions as they were interesting and ethically appropriate to be used in this study, in addition to their feasibility, novelty, and relevance (Hulley et al., 2007). Finally, I formulated the research questions in a specific and concise way to guarantee clarity.

Research questions are considered precise questions that scholars aim to address (Creswell,2005). Therefore, this study addresses the following primary and secondary research questions:

Primary research question - What are the perceptions of adult ESOL Syrian refugee students of the assessment practices that are used by the teachers in ESOL courses in further education colleges?

Therefore, the secondary research questions are:

1- What assessment procedures are employed by teachers?

2- What is the primary impact of assessment techniques on language learning?

3- What are the causes of the assessment effect?

1.5　Data collection methods and sample size

The sample of this study contained one ESOL teacher and sixteen students at a further education college in West Yorkshire in the UK. This sample was made up of two groups. The members of each group participated in two separate data collection procedures; the first group consisted of twelve students, who participated in semi-structured interviews, and the other group involved one teacher and six students. The same students participated in the follow-up semi-structured interviews after class observation. I used a qualitative approach which suited the nature of the research philosophy and questions, and I used a variety of research methods to collect the necessary data and to give a precise description of the sample chosen for this study. This included semi-structured interviews with students, classroom observation followed by semi-structured interviews

with the class teacher and the students, and samples of students' classwork and homework, in addition to the college assessment policy.

1.6   Research and Study Important Gaps

Many studies have explored assessment influence on the practices of teaching and learning in the ESOL context including ESOL teachers and curriculum, but few studies involved the ESOL students within them. Wei (2017) reviewed thirteen empirical research on test impact over the last 20 years. He found that only two studies out of the thirteen took the learner into account. A revision of the related literature showed that several studies discussed aspects related to ESOL teachers and teaching (Abdelghany,2023; Bliss,2016; Brown,2018; Conrad,2019; Costello,2023; Fraser-Smith,2019; Greenhalgh, 2022; Peercy et al.,2017; Zschomler,2020); assessment and testing in the ESOL context (Allemano, 2013; Sidaway, 2018); while few reviewed studies discussed issues concerning ESOL students. For example, Potgieter (2017) focused on developing learners' awareness of their learning, while Choudhry (2022) investigated the obstacles faced by female Muslim ESOL students enrolled in full-time study at an FE college in England.

This study adds to the related literature as it specifically focuses on investigating students' perceptions. It has the potential to shine light on students' perceptions and attitudes regarding learning the English language, and the effect of assessment on the learning process. Therefore, my thesis is important in its focus on investigating the perceptions of adult Syrian refugee ESOL students of assessment, in addition to its effect on their learning in the context of further education colleges in the UK. Sheehan and Munro (2017) claim that exploring washback nature in diverse educational backgrounds is vital to

increasing our comprehension and perception of washback. It is also valuable for future washback studies in the ESOL context. Firstly, despite the growing investigation of the effect of washback on the educational process, there is still a shortage of studies concerning the students' perceptions of assessment and its effect on learning. This research analyses the washback impact of evaluation on adult Syrian refugees in the ESOL context in FE institutions. Therefore, studying a group of whom English assessment plays a vital part in integrating into British society is also valuable in understanding the wider impact of assessment on social skills. This can be considered as another contribution to the literature. The results of this study may help in developing language assessment practices in further education colleges, to improve learning and encourage progress in language learning for adult learners, especially refugees from Syria. I hope that the findings will be employed to provide valuable evidence to educational practitioners and policymakers to improve the quality of assessment of adult ESOL students to address their passions, desires, and learning abilities. Furthermore, the study aims to offer adult students the opportunity to express their views on assessment, since they are one of the main stakeholders, who are affected by the assessment process.

1.7 The Thesis Structure

There are six chapters in this thesis. The first one provides a summary of the entire study with an emphasis on the topic of the investigation and concerns, the research gap, the study's significance, and a summary of the research methodology. The second chapter explains the environment in which this study was conducted, it describes the background of the Syrian students and a quick summary of the Syrian system of education. It also highlights the background of the ESOL context in which the study took place. The third

chapter discusses the theoretical foundation of this study, introduces a theoretical review of previous works, and discusses the terms and concepts used in language testing and assessment. This chapter also introduces Weir's socio-cognitive approach which emphasises the importance of assessment criteria in determining the reliability of language testing and evaluation procedures. It also clarifies the effects of the washback on the learning process. The fourth chapter discusses the research methods and design, along with the study's research philosophy. This chapter demonstrates how the research topics and methodologies relate to one another and provides information about the participants of the study. It also provides a summary of the pilot study and how it affected the later stages of the overall data gathering, in addition to analysing the ethical issues considered in this research. The fifth chapter addresses the key results of the qualitative data acquired from semi-structured interviews with teachers and students. The chapter has two parts: the first section examines qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews, and the second section examines the data from observation, the follow-up interviews with the students and the teacher from the same college, and a focus group with Entry 2 participants. The sixth and final chapter highlights the main conclusions of the qualitative data and presents the research approach along with the key findings and their consequences, the study's limits, contributions, suggestions for improvement and suggestions for further studies.

1.8   Summary

The effectiveness of ESOL courses at FE colleges is significantly influenced by assessment practices, which have been introduced in this chapter. This chapter has served as guidance for the entire research process. In this chapter, I have outlined the

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justification of interest in this topic and identified the participants and research methods used in this study. I also provided the primary and secondary research questions for the study's subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2:

Context of the Study

2.1 Introduction

A thorough comprehension of both contexts, the Syrian and ESOL contexts, is essential to comprehend the factors influencing the perceptions of the students of assessment, and their effect on learning English at Further Education Colleges. This chapter offers a quick review of their experience with the Syrian educational system regarding learning English and evaluation. It also highlights the key information about the ESOL context in the UK. Finally, this chapter introduces the main difficulties that ESOL students face to provide a better comprehension of the research context.

2.2 The Participants' Experience within the Syrian Educational System

This section examines factors that affected the participants' perceptions of assessment based on their previous educational experiences in Syria. Therefore, it has been necessary to provide a brief background on this experience to understand the entire circumstances surrounding this study. The English language was introduced into the Syrian educational system in the 1950s. Since then, English education has evolved due to its significant position as the language of communication worldwide. In 2002 "education reform" took place in Syria and the language education policy was modified (Hos and Cinarbas, 2017, p.7). Consequently, the study of English has become mandatory at all educational levels (Armnzai and Alakrash, 2021), to increase students' language proficiency development (Gawi,2012). Thus, the English language is taught from the first grade. However, it is worth noting that all the participants, in this study, were adult students who started learning English before this "reform". Therefore, the participants' late experience of learning English may have affected their language acquisition as it has been found that age has an impact on EFL learning (ibid). The impact of their experiences

with learning and assessment on their perceptions towards the assessment practices in the ESOL context will be discussed later in the following sections.

2.3   Teaching and Evaluation of English in Syria

There were various challenges in the educational process in the Syrian context related to this study. Firstly, using Arabic as the main communication and instruction tool during English classes was one of the factors that affected language acquisition (Khoja and Mohapatra, 2017). Additionally, teachers' use of teacher-centred traditional methods ignoring the communicative approach continued to be an obstacle to achieving the main objectives of language teaching (Armnzai and Alakrash, 2021). Teachers were considered the main source of knowledge in classrooms, whereas students were mostly passive learners. They used to listen to the teacher unless they were requested to participate (ibid). The large class size and the absence of facilities or educational resources to accommodate this large number of students negatively affected the teaching and evaluation procedures (Rajab, 2013).

In most developing countries, the evaluation of academic performance depends heavily on memorisation and competition (Ahmadpour and Sheikhzadeh, 2017), however, assessment is considered a central aspect of student learning (Andrade and Brookhart, 2020). The educational process in the Syrian context was affected by the predominance of summative assessment practices over other formative assessment techniques. Teachers adopted traditional assessment methods to evaluate students' performance and neglected formative assessment practices, which affected the learning process. In schools, students' progress was evaluated through oral and written tests during the semester, midterm, and final exams. Moreover, the students had to pass the General

Secondary Education (GSE) final exam, to get access to university education upon completion of Grade 12 (Al Hessan et al., 2016). The students had to receive at least 50% in each subject to pass and move to the next grade/ level at the elementary stage. As a result, the majority of what they learnt was memorised to pass summative exams and advance to the following school year. This form of instruction is one of the main pedagogical issues with English language learning (Soliman, 2013).

2.4 ESOL Courses

One important factor in adult refugees' contentment with their settlement has been identified as mastering the language of their new home country (Akresh et al., 2014), in addition to their well-being (Ćatibušića et al., 2021). However, according to a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) report in 2019, "three-quarters of a million people in the UK still speak little or no English" (BBC, 2019, p.1). In a similar vein, the findings of a Canadian longitudinal study showed that 30% of the participants were refugees and only demonstrated "moderate competence" in English, and 8% had almost no English at all a decade after arriving in the country (Beiser,2009, p. 567). Therefore, ESOL courses are provided in English-speaking countries to enable people with limited English proficiency to acquire language skills (Garcia, 2000). The goal of these programs is to facilitate the easy integration of migrants and refugees into the wider society (Strang and Ager, 2010) and to increase their chances of employment (Barrett et al., 2017). There are two primary reasons, therefore, why adult ESOL students must pass the ESOL exams at the end of every level. Firstly, passing the exams is considered a good indicator of students' progression in English, which can help them join the labour market and achieve the goals of the government that funds ESOL courses (Baynham and Simpson,2016) by supporting

economic growth (McKay, 2001). This puts ESOL teachers under enormous pressure, as ESOL students at all levels must take and pass examinations, in order to maintain government funding (Haughton et al., 2017). Secondly, students must demonstrate a sufficient understanding of both the English language and British culture to attain citizenship (Office of Public Sector Information, 2002), which adds extra pressure on learners since gaining citizenship is linked to their language achievement (Cooke and Simpson, 2008).

2.5 English for Speakers of Other Languages Examination (ESOL)

The following section focuses on the ESOL examination, to give a general overview of the exam that is being studied. The ESOL examination was introduced to support immigrants living in the UK to integrate better within English society, access education, and find jobs. As this is a verified qualification in the UK, educational institutions, employers, in addition to other stakeholders may depend on the outcomes to help ESOL students get into jobs, enrol in courses, or become citizens. ESOL examination may be considered a low-stakes examination or a high-stakes examination according to how its results are used. If the outcomes of the exam are not used to make decisions that directly affect students' legal rights, such as obtaining British citizenship, it is comparatively regarded as a low-stakes exam. However, as the results of the ESOL exam are used to determine the progression of the students to the next learning level, the ESOL exam, then, might be viewed as a rather high-stakes test (Curcin et al., 2022). All four language skills-writing, reading, speaking, and listening-are tested in this exam. The speaking exam is usually conducted in person in the college, while the written exams, which cover reading, writing, and sometimes listening comprehension, are given in a paper-based

format. Reading comprehension is assessed through the use of written assignments that are quantitatively marked. The reading exam often includes some tasks depending on the students' level. The tasks may include a text and several questions (e.g. short-answer questions and multiple-choice) that are designed to test the reader's comprehension of the content. The writing test involves written papers with different tasks to evaluate writing such as filled-in questions, and open-ended written responses to specific subjects, like descriptive paragraphs. Speaking exams normally consist of three to four tasks to evaluate the proficiency of the speaking skill. In one of these exercises, students may speak continuously on a specific topic or provide the examiner with their personal information. After completing this task, additional tasks depending on the students' level, like roleplaying or debating on the same subject with other students or with the assessor/tutor are presented. The student's ability to listen is judged as part of the speaking evaluation in face-to-face communication. Additionally, students are typically required to listen to audio recordings and respond to follow-up written or oral questions during listening activities in other listening comprehension tasks. These summative tests are provided at all levels (Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1, and Level 2). At the end of the academic year, the exams' results are utilised to grade the abilities of students. The National Standards for Adult Literacy (NSAL) serves as the foundation of the main curriculum of the ESOL examination. It is considered a useful resource for ESOL teachers since it offers an outline for learning English and provides frameworks for the skills and information that students require to meet national English competence criteria.

The majority of written exams are planned by examiners who have been chosen or authorised by a specific awarding organisation. Written and speaking exams are

externally set, and the examination papers are marked in line with the assessment criteria. Each ESOL level has specific assessment criteria which are aligned to the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. ESOL teachers mark all levels of reading and writing examination papers concerning the specified criteria, relevant syllabuses, and marking guidelines. Candidates' responses to the reading assessment, for example, can be categorised as either "correct" or "incorrect" using an answer key that is used to objectively mark the test. The writing, speaking, and listening exams are marked by the assessors by combining the assessment criteria with the general performance descriptors. Each skill in the ESOL levels has an allocated mark. A candidate must obtain at least a passing grade to receive a module certificate. To get the ESOL Skills for Life certificate, candidates must complete all modules at the same level (Curcin, Cadwallader, Sweiry, 2022).

2.6 Obstacles to Language Learning

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, ESOL refugee students are defined in this study as those who lived outside their country (Syria in this case) and have resettled in the United Kingdom as a result of the ongoing persecution based on their political views. The government in the UK has relocated thousands of Syrian refugees in the last few years. Their English language proficiency was deemed insufficient for them to communicate appropriately, and they have insufficient knowledge of the English culture (Dennis, 2016). For instance, it has been found that the majority of the Syrian refugees in Ireland were utterly unfamiliar with the learning culture connected with language learning in an Irish context (Ćatibušić et al., 2019).

The government is concentrating on teaching English to refugees as a second language to help them become more fluent speakers and facilitate their integration into society and

the workforce (Haughton et al., 2017). Adult students have been urged to attend ESOL classes provided by the local colleges in their areas. These ESOL sessions often include individuals from many nations and backgrounds, representing the cultural diversity in British society. Consequently, several obstacles may emerge in ESOL lessons owing to the varied educational and social backgrounds of the refugees, including the worries and stresses associated with relocating to a new nation, as refugee students normally face difficulties in acclimating to the culture of their host nation. According to Al Hariri (2018), refugee students need extra time to acquire the language due to their lack of experience with the new educational setting, including new teachers and classmates. They may also face other difficulties because of the language (Aydin and Kaya, 2019), the institutions (Popov and Erik, 2015), and the new culture (Burgoyne and Hull, 2007). Many refugees also experience culture shock, which can be more noticeable in adults who may have a harder time adjusting to the new culture. Additionally, it has been found that refugee students may face institutional and/or social problems while learning English (Alefesha and Al-Jamal, 2019). Institutional challenges arise, for instance, when refugee students have trouble assimilating into their new classrooms and communities (Riggs et al., 2012). They may also experience social problems since their background prevents them from interacting with others from diverse backgrounds (Lee, 2016).

The conservative nature of most Syrian refugees, particularly female students, complicates their enrolment in coeducational classrooms. Popov and Erik (2015) demonstrate that most female immigrants were hesitant to participate in courses with male students, impeding their language acquisition. Additionally, cultural and religious barriers may prevent refugee students, especially women, from learning English. Women

refugees are often too preoccupied with caring for their families' children and elderly to enrol in ESOL programs (Watking et al., 2012). Furthermore, refugees' educational level in their first language is another important aspect of language acquisition. Frimberger (2016) asserts that refugee students' level of education in their country is vital to acquiring the target language. Syrian refugee students have different educational backgrounds and, as a result, their English proficiency has ranged widely (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). In a similar vein, Olliff and Couch (2005) discovered that refugee students who had no formal education in their countries may experience more difficulties in acquiring a second language than those who did. Many of the Syrian refugees either did not finish their formal education or stopped going to classes regularly for long periods due to the war, therefore, studying every day and having tests were deemed to be unrealistic under such circumstances (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). The refugee participants in this study were divided into four groups according to their educational backgrounds. Some refugees came with basic knowledge of English, others were qualified and educated, a small group had dropped out of school at a young age and others were 'pre-literate' in their first language, which was Arabic. Student's age is another significant factor that may affect language learning. It has been noted that some older students did not like the idea of joining ESOL classrooms because they believed that they were too old to learn a new language at this stage of their life (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). In some circumstances, this factor resulted in extremely low attendance rates and increased isolation. Although ESOL courses are generally designed for adults of all ages, some older students may still feel frustrated and powerless (ibid).

2.7   Summary

To understand the rationale for this study, this chapter evaluated the research background and offered context for the Syrian educational system, through its various levels, however, there have been several challenges with this educational system in terms of the pedagogical contexts. Using traditional teaching and assessment methods had a negative impact on student learning. This chapter also gave a brief outline of the ESOL courses and their aims. In the last section, a thorough description of the obstacles that may hinder Syrian refugee students from learning English was discussed. Adult refugee students may face difficulties during their learning journey, which need to be taken into consideration when planning and teaching ESOL. The theoretical framework, previous research, and effects of the assessment process on language teaching and learning processes will all be thoroughly reviewed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3:   Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of this study by reviewing the relevant literature. It consists of five sections. The first one explains the overlapping of the various terms of assessment and language testing by introducing definitions of these terms, showing how they relate to each other. Then, the socio-cognitive framework is introduced. Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive framework serves as the foundational model for validating the ESOL reading examination, emphasising the importance of accuracy and reliability in assessment. This framework guides the various phases of the study: designing the research, collecting data, analysing and validating procedure. The validation method employs a triangulation technique, integrating data from diverse sources such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents to infer conclusions. The value of adopting formative assessment as opposed to summative evaluation is addressed. The focus of the next section is on defining washback and discussing its complexity by highlighting the positives and drawbacks of washback on language learning. The fifth and final section discusses the washback mechanism, washback empirical studies, and the students' ignored perceptions, allowing for further discussion of the effect of washback on students' perceptions.

3.2 Terms and Concepts

There are many terms related to each other within the language testing and assessment field (Berry, 2008). It was asserted by Douglas (2010) that comprehending "the concepts of assessment, test, measurement, and evaluation" would facilitate comprehension of the rationale behind administering language tests and enable the interpretation of test takers' performance fairly and acceptably (p.5). This research will focus on defining the terms

assessment and testing since these are the most often used concepts, therefore, the distinctions between these two terminologies and their roles in the educational process are explained in the following subsections.

3.2.1 Assessment

The term "assessment" has many definitions that distinguish it from other concepts related to the process of assessment. It can be described as "a process of collecting data to make decisions about individuals and groups" (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2004, p.4). Assessment is distinct from testing since it includes a far broader range of activities (Green, 2014). Green argues that assessments may include several activities, including peer assessment, self- assessment, and portfolio. According to Cheng and Fox (2017, p.3), the term assessment refers to a broad concept that covers both regular classroom activities and "large-scale" testing. This study adopts Cheng and Fox's (2017) definition of assessment. In this research, the term "assessment" encompasses all assessment activities, including summative assessments (e.g., ESOL examinations) and formative assessments (e.g., self-assessment tasks) conducted inside the ESOL classroom. Throughout their academic journey in the college, ESOL students encounter many forms of assessment: initial assessments, summative assessments, and formative assessments. The process of assessment begins with the initial assessment prior to the commencement of the ESOL courses, marking the first stage in the process of assessment and the inaugural step in the learning journey of ESOL students. This assessment evaluates students' language proficiency to assign them to the most suitable class based on their level. Subsequently, the students may encounter many forms of assessment, including summative assessment and formative assessment throughout the

course. Formative assessment primarily focuses on instructional improvement, whereas summative assessment normally emphasises learning accomplishment (McDowell & Montgomery, 2013; Stiggins, 2002). As this study is situated within the washback domain, it will only delineate summative and formative assessment procedures employed in the ESOL classroom to examine participants' views of assessment and to explore the washback effect on students' learning.

3.2.2   Tests

Tests are regarded as one of the most significant assessment tools that are frequently used to gather information on students' performance through a certain teaching stage or level. They are described as "a form of systematic assessment, with standardized procedures, from which numerical scores are taken" (Boyle & Fisher, 2007, p.11). Standardised tests are classified as high-stakes, for instance, the national standardised school exam is an example of a high-stakes test (Zakaria et al., 2013). Tests are generally seen as high stakes as their outcomes can lead to important decisions that impact students' futures, educational institutions, and educators (Harlen, 2005). They may also negatively impact students' learning motivation, teaching methodology, and curriculum (Harlen & Deakin, 2003). Teachers in ESOL classrooms use different types of assessment practices to evaluate students' progression during the lesson, in addition to the exams at the end of each academic year. Language exams, such as ESOL exams, are used to evoke the knowledge and linguistic skills of the students and may have positive and negative effects on education known as washback. The washback effect will be discussed extensively in the following sections.

3.3 Assessment Quality

Some crucial criteria are frequently used to determine assessment quality in the educational assessment field. Test validity is a critical criterion that must be considered during the language evaluation process and testing to guarantee equitable and precise outcomes from any assessment activity or test (Boyle & Fisher, 2007). The validation processes for most contemporary language assessments tend to originate in a methodical and systematic approach designed to generate substantial evidence demonstrating the extent to which the test tasks properly represent the test takers' genuine language competencies and capabilities. Weir (2005) developed one of these techniques in the domain of language education and assessment. It is known as the socio-cognitive validation approach and is detailed in the next section.

3.3.1 The Theoretical Framework

The socio-cognitive framework of test validation proposed by Weir (2005) constituted the principal theoretical foundation guiding the data generation and analysis for this study. It was selected because of the complex nature of washback, in addition to other associated factors impacting the educational process in the research context. The socio-cognitive framework supports exploring students' perceptions, motivations, and experiences while being evaluated. It is also regarded as the ideal framework for gathering evidence at various stages about the effectiveness and usefulness of assessment practices in the context (Geranpayeh & Taylor, 2013). Most conducted washback research studies have highlighted the various connections between language teaching, learning, and evaluation by applying a variety of theoretical frameworks to study the complex phenomena of washback. Alderson & Wall (1993), Bailey's (1996), and Shih's (2007, 2009) washback

models are a few examples of the theoretical models used. Although these frameworks are popular in washback research, they have not been selected for the present study because of their limited nature which does not meet the objectives of the study. Bailey's (1996) basic washback model has not provided a clear description of the mechanism by which washback functions, whilst the Washback Model and washback hypothesis of Students' Learning are confined to the impact of evaluation in a micro context. For example, one of the significant theoretical frameworks influencing language policy and education is Bachman's communicative language capacity model (2005), which was criticised for diminishing the social and cognitive components. Its use in language assessments is significantly reduced by this restriction (Weir & O'Sullivan, 2011). Thus, the most suitable framework that prioritises understanding psychological and social perspectives while creating language assessments is the socio-cognitive framework. It describes the relationship between these perceptions and validation, which may assist in test creation, validation, and evaluation. Additionally, it has the potential to permit researchers to offer sufficient proof about the actual usage of testing design and content. Washback is vital to provide an argument about ESOL assessment effectiveness and practicality (validity) in the ESOL context when evaluating the effects of assessment on language acquisition. Given that many researchers have confirmed Weir's framework practicality (e.g., Khalifa & Weir, 2009), this study will adopt the socio-cognitive framework to analyse the washback and credibility of assessments within the ESOL context.

3.3.2 The Socio-Cognitive Approach

The 'socio-cognitive' approach was first introduced by Weir in his 2005 book, 'Language Testing and Validation: An Evidence-Based Approach', a transformative work which

inspired further research into the validation of language tests (e.g. O'Sullivan & Weir, 2011; Khalifa & Weir, 2009; Shaw & Weir, 2007). This framework provides test users-students, instructors and other stakeholders with intelligible evidence of how the numerous elements of the validation process interact to assess the performance of test-takers. Weir's framework emphasises validating the test's ability by taking into account the test taker's social and cognitive characteristics when establishing the test's reliability as a measure of the test-takers language proficiency. The framework consists of five components of validity: context validity, cognitive validity, scoring validity, consequential validity and criterion-related validity (Weir, 2005), which are used to give comprehensive evidence for validating various types of language exams. These are discussed below in further detail and were adopted as a part of the qualitative research to assess the validity of the ESOL test.

According to O'Sullivan (2012), the true power of this validation model is that it completely describes each of its aspects in enough depth to make it operational. Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationship between the different validity components. All five components of the socio-cognitive strategy for the validation of the language exam operate in two stages, before and after the exam. The prior validation stage consists of context and cognitive validities, and the posterior validation stage comprises scoring validity, consequential validity, and criterion-related validity (Weir, 2005). These elements should co-operate both before and after test administration, to find reliable proof of them supporting the interpretation of results.
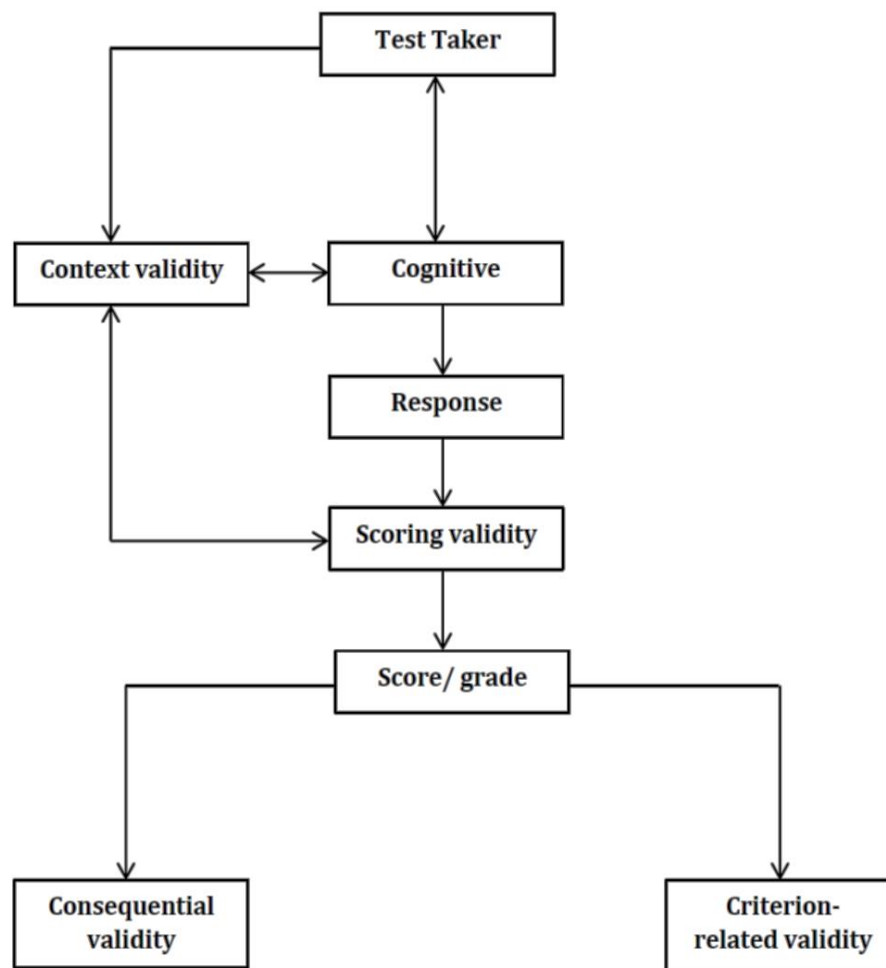
Figure 3.1: The socio-cognitive framework for test formulation and validation (taken from O'Sullivan & Weir, 2011).

The relationships among these components of validity, including the attributes of the test-taker, are elaborated upon in further detail below.

3.3.2.1   The Characteristics of Test Takers

The characteristics of test-takers may directly affect the cognitive processes that a test-taker uses to perform a test task in a particular context (Weir, 2005). O'Sullivan (2000), cited in Weir (2005), argues that these characteristics can be divided into three groups to

better understand how they may influence the performance of test-takers throughout the test. These are "physical" characteristics, such as headaches the test-taker may experience on the day, "psychological" characteristics, such as motivation and, "experiential" characteristics relating to the test-taker's educational background and familiarity with the exam. In this study, the ESOL test-takers were asked about their prior experience with exams to determine whether these characteristics related to their preparation for the final exam in the classroom, which may have an impact on cognitive and context validity. Test developers should take these individual characteristics into account to improve the test's fairness leading to more valid exams that accurately reflect the candidates' actual language abilities and skills.

3.3.2.2   Context Validity

Context Validity concerns the test task's language and content requirements and external social and cultural settings in which the test task is completed. It is useful in analysing the specific contextual factors of the testing system that may affect the test-taker's performance, therefore, prior to giving a language test, test developers should consider context validity. 'Situational authenticity' is considered to be an important component of context validity, and is described as "the contextual requirements of the tasks" (Shaw and Weird, 2007, p.9). It is also necessary to guarantee that the test tasks for a given exam reflect the same characteristics as the real-life activities that individuals would employ in an actual language setting. As stated by Sullivan (2006) and Douglas (2000), tests should ensure the validity of the situational and interactional components. That is, the setting of the test should be appropriate for both test takers and testers to evaluate a language skill. Weir (2005) highlights that candidates' knowledge affects how successfully they

accomplish the test task. He emphasises that test takers should be knowledgeable enough about the exam's linguistic genre to be able to use several skills and approaches to comprehend the text (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1:Context Validity Aspects in the Test System (Adapted from O'Sullivan, 2012,p.2)

Test task	Performance parameters	These are parameters such as timing, preparation, score weighting, and knowledge of how performance will be scored.
	Linguistic demands	This refers to the language of the input and the expected language of the output and can also include reference to the audience or interlocutor where appropriate.
Test Administration	Security	Refers to systems that are put in place to ensure the security of the entire administrative process.
	Physical organisation	Refers to room setup etc.
	Uniformity	Systems to ensure that all administrations of the test are the same.

3.3.2.3   Cognitive Validity

The term cognitive validity previously known as 'theory-based validity' will be used in this study to refer to the validity aspect in the socio-cognitive framework. Weir (2005) proposes two facets of cognitive validity. The first one can be achieved through oral reports from test-takers as it aids in providing a priori evidence before the test. Whereas the second one offers posterior evidence after the test and can be assessed statistically after the administration of the test. Cognitive validity focuses on comprehending and measuring the fundamental cognitive procedures that test-takers utilise to complete a specific test task. To establish the cognitive validity of a specific exam, these cognitive processes should be similar to the ordinary cognitive processes necessary for achieving a real-world task in the target language. That is to say, a valid exam should inspire the applicants to

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use cognitive (mental) processes similar to those used in a real-life task in the target language under non-testing conditions. It enables test developers to expect the test-taker's upcoming performance in a particular subject.

From a cognitive validity standpoint, a valid reading task, for example, would necessitate the involvement of test-takers in the internal mental processes (Weir, 2005), that have been divided into executive resources and executive processes. Goal-setting, monitoring, pattern synthesis, and visual recognition are examples of executive processes, while content knowledge and language knowledge make up executive resources. Language knowledge includes grammatical knowledge, functional knowledge, textual knowledge, and sociolinguistic knowledge. The content knowledge may be either (internal) as the previous knowledge of the test taker or task-specific knowledge (external). When designing test material, Douglas (2000) emphasises the significance of taking into account the link between the exam's content and candidates' general and cultural knowledge, as well as their knowledge in certain topic areas. Data on students' cognitive processes and abilities utilised to prepare for the ESOL exam were generated through interviews with the participants and through classroom observation. It was crucial to look at the variables that influenced the students' decisions about their language learning practices as well as the skills they used to be ready for the exam from their perspectives.

3.3.2.4   Scoring Validity

Scoring validity is one of the elements of the a posteriori validation phase in the socio-cognitive approach that helps in providing evidence of validity after the test event (Weir, 2005). The primary goal of scoring validity is to show how reliably, steadily, and fairly the test scores over time (ibid). It assesses how error-free the test score is in terms of

measuring and the validity of test results as a basis for judgements about test takers. As it can offer adequate proof of validity regarding the other criteria of validity, a test's lack of scoring validity poses a major danger to its reliability. However, as it should be balanced with the other components of validity, scoring validity does not always represent the quality of the exam. Test developers can accurately evaluate the performance of the test taker by using scoring validity to determine the degree to which test scores were free from measurement errors. Four different types of scoring validity are identified by the socio-cognitive framework according to Weir (2005): item analysis, internal consistency, measurement inaccuracy, and marker reliability. The number of raters, the exam type (objective or subjective), and the manner of scoring-manual or mechanical-all have an impact on how the test is scored (Khalifa and Weir, 2009; Weir, 2005).

To demonstrate the validity of the scoring process, this study aimed to provoke students' thoughts about their performance and score in ESOL exams in comparison to their English language knowledge and skills. These thoughts were considered to be compared to the ESOL curriculum's objectives to ascertain the relationship between the detected ability and the intended goals.

3.3.2.5   Consequential validity

The consequential validity's role follows the completion of test findings and scores. It discusses how the testing and evaluation process affects society as a whole as well as the educational system (Shaw & Weir, 2007; Khalifa & Weir, 2009). It underscores the possible implications that test stakeholders may experience as a result of scores' interpretation. Testing can influence language learning strategies positively or negatively and several studies have investigated how high-stakes exams affect classroom

instruction (Herman et al., 2007). Assessment can exert either a positive or negative influence on language teaching and acquisition methodologies. Therefore, test makers must address this factor to provide evidence pertaining to consequential validity, particularly in the context of high-stakes assessments. For example, it has been suggested that high-stakes tests are influential tools that significantly influence the formulation of certain policies and other elements such as immigration and job opportunities (Shohamy, 2001, 2013). If test takers prefer passing the test over studying, a language exam will not accurately reflect their proficiency in the language. Some teachers and learners may focus exclusively on passing the test when setting their teaching and learning goals. According to Green (2013), the primary aim of passing the exam may prevent language skills development. This may be the case, especially if the instructional program's main goal is exam preparation. The present research seeks to examine adult ESOL learners' views of assessment and the impact of assessment on their learning attitudes (washback), utilising data on test-taker characteristics and the factors affecting these attributes.

3.3.2.6   Criterion-related Validity

Validity related to this component aids in generating further validity evidence following the confirmation of test scores. It analyses the extent to which the scores of a particular test align with the outcomes generated by another suitable external evaluation instrument that measures the same skill (Hughes, 2003; Weir, 2005; Khalifa & Weir, 2009). This external evaluation serves as the benchmark for validating the test. According to the socio-cognitive paradigm, comparing the test with many similar versions and administering the same test on several occasions is regarded as an external measurement tool for

assessing criterion-related validity. In this study, the scores will not be compared with any external measurements as the students' scores are kept confidential to guarantee their privacy in alignment with the college's ethical policy.

3.4   The Impact of Washback on Language Learning and Teaching

This part of the chapter discusses several definitions of washback effects and explains the distinctions between "washback" and "impact". Furthermore, it examines the impact of washback on the teaching and learning process. Numerous researchers, such as Cheng et al. (2011), Pan (2009), Qi (2007), Scott (2007), Saif (2006), and Spratt (2005) have conducted subsequent investigations to analyse the impact of washback on various elements, including the content of the course, pedagogical methods, learning strategies, classroom activities, and the perceptions of stakeholders. This study seeks to investigate the impact of washback on English language acquisition within the ESOL framework.

3.4.1   Washback Definitions

"Washback" refers to the positive or negative impacts of various assessment methods and assessments on classroom learning and teaching (Bailey, 1996; Messick, 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993). According to Messick (1996, p. 241), "washback refers to the extent to which the introduction and use of a new test influence language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning". Hughes (2003) succinctly describes washback as "the effect of testing on teaching and learning" (p.1). The term "washback" according to Alderson and Wall (1993) "is common in the language teaching and testing literature, and tests are held to be powerful determiners of what happens in classrooms" (p.117)that is viewed as a result of

high-stakes testing. Whereas Cheng (2005) defines washback as "an intended or unintended direction and function of curriculum change on aspects of teaching and learning by means of a change of public examinations" (p. 112). This description suggests that washback is not confined to invisible or unexpected effects, but may also positively influence the curriculum and pedagogical methods. Researchers generally agree that washback refers to any impact, positively or negatively, intentional or unpredicted, that testing may have on learning, teaching, and all stakeholders involved in the process. All these definitions show extensive influences, but it appears that they were developed to fit particular circumstances rather than to provide a thorough conceptualization of the linked phenomenon. This study adopted Alderson & Wall's (1993) washback definition as the impact of exams on teachers' and students' classroom behaviour, which supports Hughes' (2003) as the basis for the washback definition in this study, due to their definition of washback including both the impact of the exam on learning and teaching processes, and learners' and teachers' behaviours in the classroom. Nevertheless, this definition excluded the impact of assessment on the behaviours of teachers or the process of teaching in the study as it focused only on inspecting this effect on learners and learning. The term "washback" in this case study corresponded specifically to the extent to which students' perceptions and learning habits were affected by assessment. The only way to consider these effects as a washback is when they are connected to the assessment in the context.

3.4.2 Washback or Impact

Various concepts associated with "washback" have been utilised to delineate the impact of tests and examinations on education. The term "test impact" was used by Andrews

(2004), Wall (1997), McNamara (2000), and Bachman and Palmer (1996) to delineate the consequences of assessments on educational institutions and society in their entirety. According to Wall (1997, p.291), washback is a facet of test impact. Wall provides more clarification and argues that test impact "refers to any of the effects that tests may have on individuals, policies or practices, within the classroom, the school, the educational system, or society as a whole." Bachman and Palmer (1996) similarly differentiate between "washback" and "impact." The term "impact" refers to the consequences of testing on society as well as its system of education, while "washback" pertains to the tests' impacts on learning and teaching inside the classroom at the micro level.

Cheng (1997, p. 43) also uses the intensity of washback to describe "the degree of washback effect in an area or a number of areas of teaching and learning affected by an examination". The term "test consequence" is also used to refer to washback and impact concepts. Both concepts are from the applied linguistics and language education fields included in the test consequence, which is frequently used in general educational research (Rea-Dickins & Scott, 2007). "Test consequence" pertains to the planned and unintentional impacts of test use on social and educational activities and policies, whether they possess positive or negative attributes. The concepts of "impact" and "washback" fall under the category of consequent validity within the framework of test validity established by Weir (2005) and Messick (1996). "Consequences" also consider the impact of test use and the interpretation of test findings (Weir, 2005; Cheng et al., 2015). These two aspects significantly influence social, political, cultural, and educational contexts. To understand the extent and impact of a test within its environment, it has been asserted that researchers of washback should interact with scholars in adjacent fields, including socio-

cognitive studies and policy analysis. This study utilised the framework of socio-cognitive for validation as its theoretical basis. In this study, the distinction between the numerous terms denoting test influence is disregarded. "Washback" denotes the influence of ESOL examinations and assessments on learning within the educational system. The study's aim is illustrated by the interchangeable use of the phrases "test impact" and "consequence" with washback, nevertheless, the term "test impact" may be considered rather too wide for this study. As a result, this study examines the influence of assessment on students' perceptions and language acquisition strategies.

3.4.3 Washback Complexity

The similarities between "washback" and "impact", as previously stated, highlight the intricacy of the phenomenon of washback which can be affected by several external and internal factors within the educational framework. Watanabe (2004) highlights many social-psychological elements that might promote washback, including academic pressure, educational experiences, and institutional culture, all of which influence instructors' classroom practices. Furthermore, studies indicate that several external socio-political and cultural factors might profoundly affect the washback nature (Ali &Hamid, 2020; Shohamy, 2007; Shih, 2010). A study conducted by Ali &Hamid (2020 p.129) to examine the factors that negatively affect the teaching of the English language in Bangladesh. The research indicates that teaching may be influenced by a variety of interrelated social, psychological, political, and economic factors, alongside assessment factors. This implies that all stakeholders, including policymakers, program designers, and teachers, must consider not just the immediate impacts of assessment practices on learning and teaching but also the broader social implications of washback effects. To

comprehend how these aspects influence the nature of washback effects, they must consider external societal influences, including policymakers, employers, and others.

Shih (2010, p.234) developed a conceptual model to comprehend and clarify washback effects for a comprehensive perspective. The model demonstrates that several elements, including student and parental influences, school factors, and educational aspects, significantly affect the washback process, as can be seen in Figure 3.2. Shih's model is complex and detailed, indicating that washback extends beyond the influence of assessment and testing on learning and teaching. Washback effects can influence several dimensions, including social, educational, personal, economic, and psychological factors. The contextual elements may interact with one another and concurrently operate with other internal factors associated with the psychological and educational consequences of assessment complicating the nature of washback.
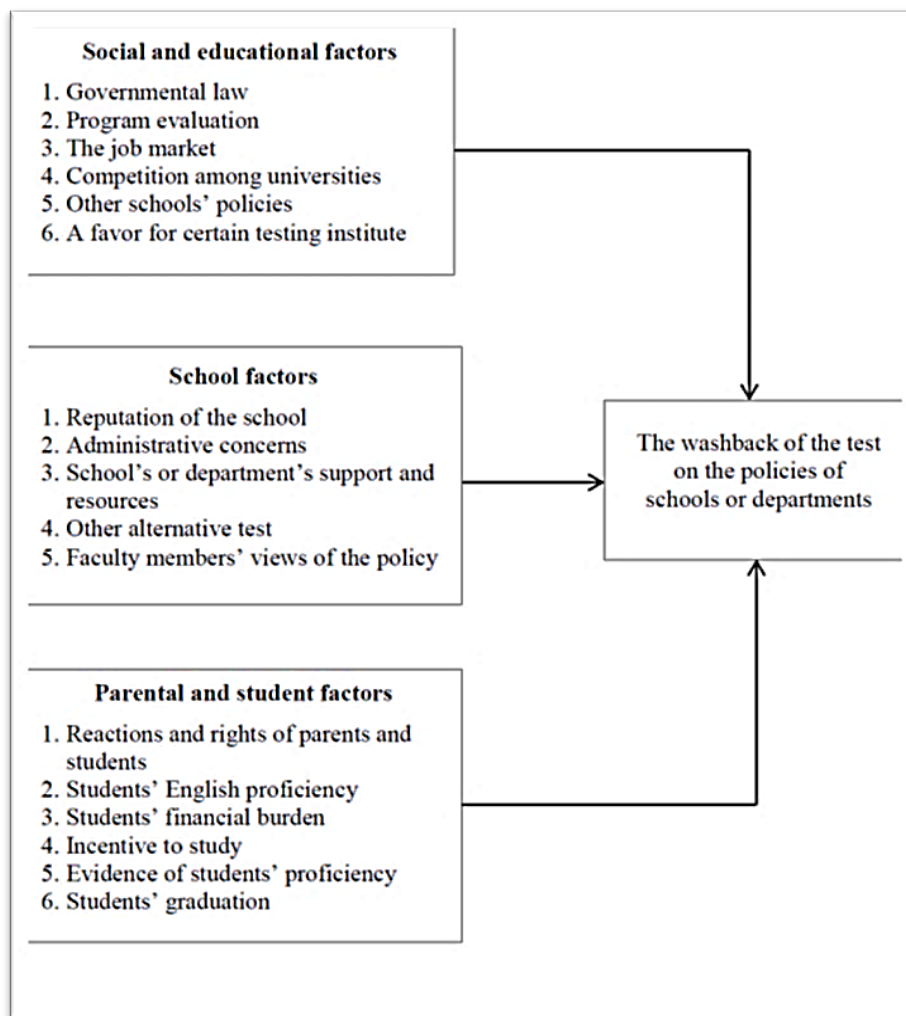
Figure 3.2: A washback model regarding the schools' policies (Adapted from Shih (2010, p.249)

3.4.4 Washback Directions: Positive or Negative

Language testing and education scholars have concluded that washback is bidirectional (e.g., Curtis, 2004; Bailey, 1999; Cheng and Alderson and Wall, 1993) depending on whether it has positive or negative impacts on the educational process. In certain circumstances, washback can act differently; it can either "be positive or negative according to the nature and implementation of examination" (Adnan & Mahmood, 2014,

p.133). The term is neutral since it can be interpreted positively or negatively depending on the context. Hughes (2003) argues that washback can be considered a neutral term. Moreover, washback may be deliberately designed to provide positive outcomes, or inadvertently result in either negative or positive influences (Qi, 2005; Andrews, 2004). Bailey (1996) states that "washback can be either positive or negative to the extent that it either promotes or impedes the accomplishment of educational goals held by learners and/or programme personnel" (p.268). The primary educational objectives may contradict other indirect aims, that educators should realise, like prioritising high-test results over developing students' competency in certain domains. Bailey (1996, p. 269) stated in this case "To the extent that students view the steps leading to these two goals as different, standardized exams can be seen as having negative washback to the learners." The "intensity" of washback was examined by Wu (2014), asserting that modest washback signifies a neutral orientation. According to Spratt (2005), washback intensity and test stakes have a linear connection. If the test stakes are higher than expected for the participants, washback will be stronger. Nevertheless, the washback's nature, existence, and intensity may be influenced by additional factors (Andrews, 2004). Thus, the determination of the direction of washback ought to occur after explaining the factors that influence or are influenced by an exam within the social and academic setting. Consequently, the washback effect of the ESOL examination in this study considers its influence on students' perspectives and learning practices. This study's objective aligns with Wang's (2010) assertion that the washback phenomena require redefinition and conceptualisation since each context possesses distinct traits that affect the nature of washback. Thus, instead of categorising washback as either positive or negative, this

research intends to introduce thorough explanations of the washback effect on language learning practices by inspecting the factors that lead to such an effect.

3.4.4.1   Positive Washback

Test washback can be positive in a classroom setting if it promotes good teaching, hence promoting constructive learning. "Positive washback" refers to the positive impacts of assessment on the educational practices (teaching and learning) in the classroom (Ahmad & Rao, 2012). Tylor (2005) claims that an obvious case of positive washback occurs when "an oral proficiency test is introduced in the expectation that it will promote the teaching of speaking skills" (p.154). By using tests appropriately, teachers can apply effective teaching strategies, encourage learning, and focus on weak students (Wall, 2005).

The literature shows that tests have a variety of effects on both students and teachers in several aspects. Shohamy et al. (1996) and Shohamy (1993) researched two language tests in Israel, concluding that both of them enhanced educational achievement. Assessments can also be used to acquire authentic learning according to Pan (2009) who believes that "tests are encouraged to promote the idea of lifelong learning and encourage people to learn English" (p. 260). Well-designed tests can serve as valuable pedagogical activities to enhance effective processes of teaching and learning. Bailey (1996) claims that tests will have good washback when they are designed to assist students meet the learning objectives established with their teachers, which includes enhancing their language proficiency, rather than merely pursuing high marks as the primary goal. Therefore, a test must evaluate the objectives of the educational program and the anticipated learning outcomes at the end. According to Bailey, a test "will promote

beneficial washback to programme if it is based on clearly articulated goals and objectives" (Bailey, 1996, p.276). The importance of the learners' role is emphasised in all stages of test development (Bachman &Palmer, 1996, p. 33), who argue that "one way to promote the potential for positive impact is through involving test-takers in the design and development of the test, as well as collecting information from them about their perceptions of the test and test tasks". Bachman and Palmer (1996) claim that students who engage actively in assessment procedures will demonstrate greater autonomy in their work without the need for direct management. This approach will encourage investigation among students, create learning objectives and develop effective strategies for accomplishing them, review their progress, and seek out new options as needed. Bailey (1999, p.14) commented on Bachman and Palmer's perspective and concluded that "if test-takers are involved in this way, they will perceive tests as more interactive and authentic, and will therefore be more motivated, which could lead to enhanced preparation and hence to better performance". Tasgari (2011, p. 439) claims that "familiarise students with the exam and give them a clear picture of the requirements of the exam" is vital for making positive washback and to help students feel less anxious before exams and provide satisfying results. Additionally, positive washback will be supported by providing test-takers with informative feedback (Shohamy, 1992; Tasgari, 2011).

3.4.4.2   Negative Washback

Until the beginning of the 1990s, it was believed that washback and the quality of a test's design were linearly connected (Tsagari, 2011). Heaton (1990) argues that an exam is considered good or bad based on its effect on teaching "If it is a good examination, it will

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have a useful effect on teaching; if bad, then it will have a damaging effect on teaching" (p.16). Other elements that might strongly correlate between tests and their impact have been found in later studies. Some of these are linked to micro-level classroom settings, including the attitudes and behaviours of teachers in addition to students towards the test, instructional techniques, and the material of the syllabus and curriculum. Additional aspects might contribute to the overarching political and social situation at the macro level (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Wall, 1996; Bailey, 1996).

Following the list of Pan (2009) regarding the negative washback effects that tests may produce, it can be noticed that tests inspire teachers to narrow their curriculum and reduce teaching time resulting in "teaching to the test" (p.261). They also may cause anxiety for both teachers and students which affects both performances. Students learn to study only discrete points of knowledge that will be examined, rather than real-life knowledge. As a result, their motivation to learn will change because of the negative washback towards exams resulting from cramming. Shohamy et al. (1996) assert that policymakers often employ assessments to endorse their political objectives, exercise gatekeeping, and exert control over educational institutions. Choi (2008) argues that EFL testing has profoundly influenced EFL education in Korea at three educational levels: elementary, secondary, and higher education. Students in elementary education were less motivated to learn the language as they had to prepare for the exam by practising test-taking strategies in secondary education. In higher education, high scores were required to be achieved as it "is deemed a prerequisite to successful graduation and employment" (p.55).

Tsagari (2011) also investigated the First Certificate in English (FCE) exam effect on the teachers' perceptions and their teaching strategies. The results indicated that activities

and topics unrelated to the test's requirements were ignored by both teachers and students, thereby leading to a negative modification of the curriculum due to the exam. It was asserted that both teachers and learners had been adversely impacted by the test. Moreover, students' attitudes towards language acquisition were influenced by the examination, resulting in anxiety and feelings of discouragement and boredom. Abu-Alhija (2007) similarly asserts that exams might negatively affect teachers if they induce anxiety. Teachers showed considerable levels of anxiety, stress, and nervousness due to the exam's high-stakes nature. The teachers stated that their instruction was influenced by the exam outcomes of their students. All of these elements had an impact on the type of teaching procedure used in FCE classrooms, in which measurement-driven instruction was adopted as a result. This involved cramming, narrowing the curriculum, and giving more emphasis to the activities and skills that were related to the exam. Another negative effect of examinations is promoting traditional ways of teaching, Gorsuch (1999) describes "traditional", or "dull", teaching as "a) teacher-centred; b) teacher-to-whole-class oriented; c) focused on the learning of discrete facts; d) product-oriented in that students are expected to repeat facts through recitation and written tests." (p. 25). Traditional teaching encourages learning through memorisation and rote learning, which are considered to be low cognitive processes instead of meaningful learning. They hinder teaching by compelling teachers to prioritise the amount of learning over its quality, and grades above progress, which might negatively affect the lowest performers and discourage them from learning (Black & Wiliam, 2006). Another potential negative impact of tests is the implementation of test preparation strategies that result in "teaching to the test", which is deemed unethical, to meet exam requirements and enhance students'

scores (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2010, p. 7). This would undoubtedly weaken the quality of education by neglecting essential aspects of language acquisition and distorting the curriculum, namely by narrowing the curriculum (Saif, 2006; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Shohamy, 2001). These effects will negatively impact the learning atmosphere at the micro-levels and the macro levels through education organisations and society.

The idea of encouraging positive washback while simultaneously minimising the negative washback effect has been covered in this section. The literature review clarifies that in order to create positive washback, both teachers and students must possess a comprehensive awareness of the objectives of the testing and assessment system in relation to the content of the course, student requirements, and instructional strategies. For example, teachers should familiarise their students with assessment practices and exams and provide a thorough understanding of their requirements. Assessment practices, including test content, should reflect students' actual learning and educational process objectives by measuring their real skills and abilities. Additionally, meaningful feedback concerning students' performance must be a key part of the educational strategies.

3.5   Washback and Test Validity

Washback and test validity have been related to each other in educational research. Messick (1989) links test validity with washback on the social and educational settings. Washback has been considered a consequential element in the theoretical framework of construct validity (Messick, 1996 cited in Nodoushan, 2021). He argues that the washback effect may contribute to a test's validity if it is connected directly to a test's usage or introduction. Similarly, the socio-cognitive framework was established by Weir

(2005), which incorporated washback within the realm of consequent validity. He asserts that evaluation ought to prioritise validity through an evidence-based approach. This entails providing evidence that links both 'theory-based' and 'context-based' validities to 'scoring validity'. Weir, however, believes that the validity of a test is complex and is manifested in its results. Therefore, he states that to support the assertions regarding the validity of test scores, it is essential to acquire a variety of evidence on validities. These empirical grounds are not alternatives, but rather complementing features of test interpretation, in which one validity facet cannot be viewed as superior to another. Thus, if any validity is shortage, it may lead to questioning the reliability of the test score interpretation. Weir (2005) and Messick (1989) were both concerned about the test's capacity to yield accurate scores that reflect the candidates' competency. If the findings, then, are consistent throughout using different versions at various periods, it may be argued that different tests are valid. This study used the socio-cognitive framework to assess the validity of the ESOL results from the perspectives of the test-takers, among additional validity concerns regarding how the teachers prepare students for the exam. Shohamy (2013) claims that many facets of the test's application in context should be taken into account as part of its validity. She stated that tests' value is evaluated not only by measuring language knowledge, but by evaluating the aims of introducing these tests on ethics and policy, in addition to their implications on people at political, social, and educational levels. Determining the relationship between teaching and learning techniques and test misuse or the washback of contextual factors would be challenging. As a result, Messick (1996) advocates researchers to prioritise test validity through design over considering the nature of its washback as a sign of validity.

3.6   Washback Mechanism

An expanding corpus of research has led to the formulation of numerous theoretical models and hypotheses to illustrate the mechanism of washback in genuine educational contexts (e.g., Saville, 2009; Shih, 2007; Watanabe, 2004; Burrows, 2004; Wall, 2000; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Messick, 1996; Bailey, 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993). Part of the main theoretical developments are discussed in this part of the thesis to outline the current research scope and methodology related to the field. This section of the thesis also analyses several important theoretical developments in the washback field.

3.6.1   Washback Hypothesis

In the past two decades, washback has drawn the interest of theoretical researchers, leading to the proposal of many models and theories to elucidate the washback mechanism. Alderson and Wall's "Washback Hypotheses" and Hughes and Bailey's "Washback Model" are two key contributions that have significantly influenced the growth of frameworks for washback research, with the former providing the foundational basis and the latter explaining the mechanism of washback (Rea-Dickens & Scott, 2007). Alderson & Hamp-Lyons (1996) and Alderson and Wall (1993) propose several hypotheses focusing on the influence of examinations on various aspects of learning and teaching within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The hypotheses aim to define the problems that washback research must address. Alderson and Wall (1993) assert that more study on washback is necessary within language education, and researchers should employ more specific definitions and diverse methodologies, including observation in the classroom. A foundational tripartite washback approach was created by Hughes (1993), as described by Bailey (1996) in Figure 3.3.

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PARTICIPANTS   PROCESS   PRODUCTS
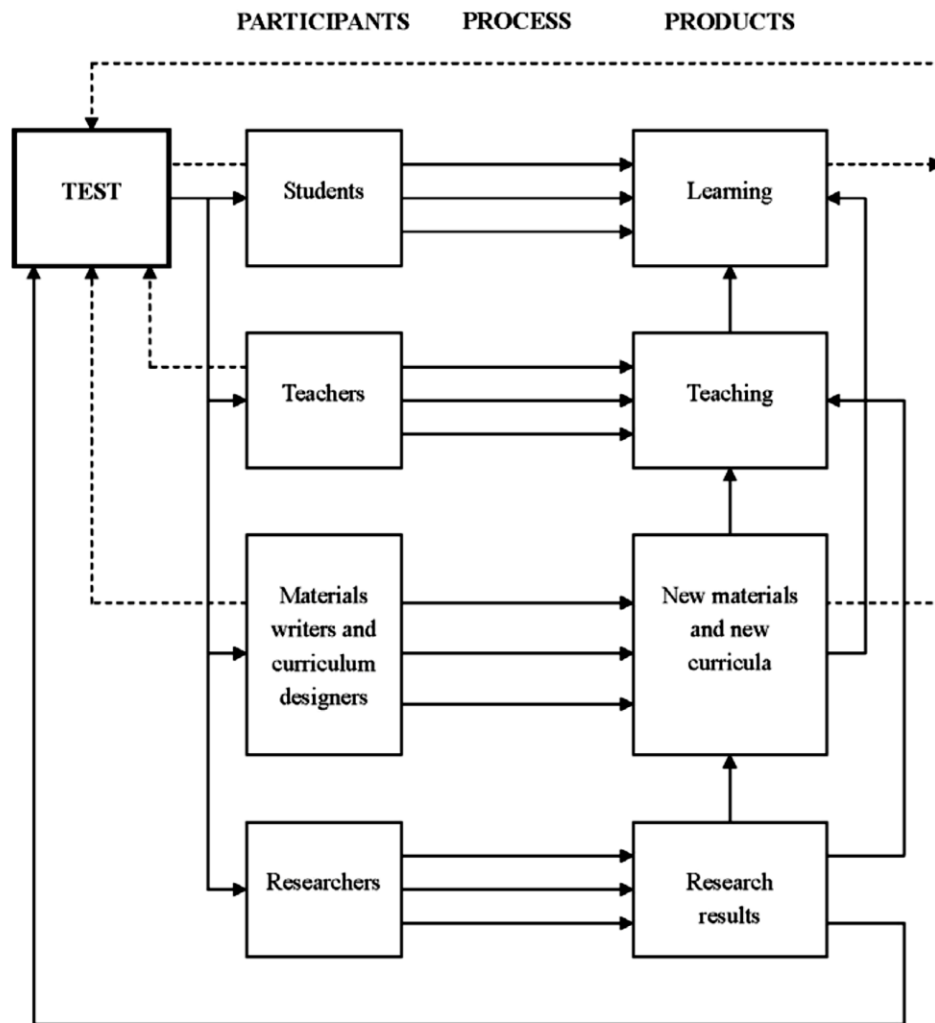
Figure 3.3: Bailey's (1996) Basic Washback Model.

A distinction exists regarding washback influence on the three components of an educational system: participants, processes, and products. The term "participants" includes classroom instructors, students, material creators, administrators, and publishers, namely anyone whose perspectives and attitudes towards their work may be influenced by a test (Hughes, 1993, p.2, quoted in Bailey, 1996, p. 262). The term "process" refers to any activity undertaken by students that may enhance the learning experience. This includes resource development, syllabus design, pedagogical

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modifications, and the implementation of test-taking techniques. Lastly, "product" refers to "what is learnt (facts, skills, etc.) and the quality of the learning (fluency, etc.)" (ibid). The above figure illustrates the interaction between these three factors. An exam may initially influence students' and teachers' comprehension and opinion of their learning and teaching activities, subsequently impacting task completion and finally affecting learning outcomes. This model clearly illustrates how a test directly influences the participants in several procedures, resulting in products that are distinct for every group of participants. It also demonstrates how products may offer feedback that might lead to alterations in testing. In this model, teaching has no direct effect on the examination, unlike the other three products (i.e., new curriculum and materials, new learning, and research results), which is considered according to Bailey (1996) as an issue. Thus, determining the type of washback is the initial step for researchers examining the washback phenomena. This study focuses on learners and learning methods. If the results are useful, they may attract the attention of curriculum designers, policymakers, or administrators. Alderson and Wall's hypotheses claim that the impact of washback includes two groups and two methods: teaching and learning, teachers and learners. The fundamental model of Hughes distinguishes between washback effects on participants, procedures, and outcomes. His model broadens and improves Alderson and Wall's (1993) Hypotheses by including curriculum designers, materials authors, and researchers alongside teachers and students. The preceding hypotheses have established a strong framework for the empirical research that will be addressed in the following section of this chapter.

3.6.2 Empirical Studies on Washback

Before the 1990s, a lot of washback research was constrained by the absence of direct empirical data. To address this gap, several empirical researches on washback have been conducted recently to investigate various test impacts in several contexts using many research techniques. This section includes reviews of some of the most significant or relevant ones.

Wall and Alderson (1993) conducted a longitudinal study investigating the impact of new O-level English tests on language instruction in Sri Lankan secondary schools, utilising document analysis, interviews, questionnaires, and comprehensive observations in the classroom to compare data collected before and following the implementation of the new assessment. The use of classroom observational data was significant and original compared to previous studies which only used interview and questionnaire data. Observation has been later used as a template for several more investigations in this field. They found that the impact of the new assessment was present, but it turned out less significant and widespread than previously assumed. The findings indicated that washback influenced, both positively and negatively, the content delivered and how teachers developed assessments in the classroom. Nonetheless, it did not influence their instructional methods, suggesting minimal impact on their teaching practices. The examination they inspected involved writing and reading components only; speaking and listening were excluded from the assessment. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) conducted a study in the United States utilising classroom interviews and observations with students and teachers throughout a five-week TOEFL preparation course to examine the presence and extent of washback associated with TOEFL. Observations were

conducted for both the TOEFL teacher preparation classes and non-TOEFL teacher preparation classes. The findings demonstrate that TOEFL had an impact on both: subject matter and teachers' teaching style, while the types and extent of this impact differed among them. According to the research, it may be very simple to use assessments to modify the teaching material, but it is harder to change the teaching techniques, which also supports Wall and Alderson's (1993) conclusions. Shohamy et al. (1996) and Shohamy (1993) used surveys, interviews, and document analysis to compare the washback impact of three national language examinations to look for any changes over time. They concluded that test washback effects may change over time. The difference was due to a variety of circumstances, including the test's stakes, high or low, the language's status, the use of the test findings, and the test structure, etc.

Watanabe (1996) analysed two different classroom types, including a single using translation in the new test, to examine the washback effect of an additional test element (translation) in college admission assessments on teaching methods. According to the study's findings, the added component of translation had a variety of effects on teachers. In accordance with Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996), Watanabe suggests that teaching will be more significantly impacted by the characteristics of the teacher than by the examination itself. These features include the teacher's pedagogical philosophy, educational background, and previous learning experiences.

Andrews et al. (2002) conducted, in Hong Kong, an empirical study. The research examined the impact of the high-stakes additional oral component on the speaking performance of test-takers. They aimed to examine the tests' impact on learning outcomes rather than on instructional methods in the classroom. The results provided

weak evidence supporting their hypotheses that tests may influence students' learning in addition to their spoken performance. Due to the disparities between students and teachers, washback has proven to be unexpected. Furthermore, several impacts were not deep, such as being acquainted with test-taking strategies. The study indicated that the impact of the exam on student performance was delayed (Andrews et al., 2002, p.207). A study on the anticipated washback impacts of a recently implemented verbal registration test in Israeli high schools was conducted by Ferman (2004). Document analysis, structured interviews, and structured questionnaires were used. The findings indicated a considerable positive and negative washback impact on the students, the learning process, and the outcome. The findings showed that speaking was given greater emphasis and attention which increased students' oral abilities showing a positive impact. Nevertheless, the students tended to memorise some topics rather than develop their skills, which narrowed the teaching and learning content. A study in New Zealand was carried out by Hayes and Read (2004) to examine the washback effect of IELTS. A comparative methodology was employed, analysing two unique courses: one focused on examinations and the other on skill development. Although washback was negative, it was evident in the exam-focused preparation course. Green (2007) conducted similar research regarding IELTS washback in the United Kingdom. He compared the student's scores in three different intensive courses. The first course emphasised test preparation, the second implementation of academic writing in university contexts, and the third was the two features combined. He concluded that the test-focused course had no visible benefits in terms of raising writing results. Saif (2006), and Munoz & Alvarez (2010) carried out additional empirical washback studies. They were carried out in diverse

settings and at different times using varied research approaches after the development of a particular test. Diverse results were provided regarding the washback effect from different viewpoints.

It can be noticed from the review above, that washback can be influenced by many interrelating aspects; teachers and students, the educational background, and the examination setting. Washback differs depending on the exam, as well as on the environment and the participants' reactions (Rea-Dickens & Scott, 2007).

3.6.3   Washback and Students' Perceptions

A washback study of the new English O-level test in Sri Lanka was carried out by Wall and Alderson (1993) to assess the influence of the exam on the content and technique of the observed lessons. However, this did not take into consideration students' thoughts and methods of their learning process. Ahmmed & Rahman (2019) examined ten empirical research on washback effects in language education. The examined research sought to assess the washback level, nature, as well as its influence on teaching tactics, attitudes of students and teachers, and test-taking techniques. Although the attitudes of teachers were positive and students scored better on examinations, teachers taught the abilities that were on the test and students memorised for the exam. Furthermore, due to differences in students' levels and situations, washback effects could be both negative and positive. Likewise, the extent to which the grammar-translation approach influenced the effect of washback of the Japanese university entrance examination was inspected by Watanabe (1996). The classroom observation included student activities, used materials, and the time allocated to the chosen activities inside the classroom. Although Watanabe believed that it was important to enquire students' views; nonetheless, he

focused on the time allocated to the questions, which may impact students' performance in subsequent examinations. Another example of excluding students' opinions and perceptions is Manjarrés's (2005) study that investigated the washback of the Colombian ICFES test. He observed five classrooms and interviewed both teachers and students, but only three students were chosen for the interviews. Consequently, the outcomes of students' interviews did not reflect their views or perceptions of the exam as they were provided in less than 150 words in his paper.

The literature review reveals that the common research of washback is done from the perspectives of the teachers, while student surveys or interviews are rarely employed in washback studies as the main study tool. For instance, in 2005, Luxia performed comprehensive semi-structured interviews with several stakeholders, including 10 students, to examine the washback effects of the NMET in China. Unfortunately, she did not explain how these students were chosen or how broadly applicable her results were to other situations. Therefore, further investigation is required to determine how well this study represents the perceptions of students. Cheng's (2005) extensive four-year longitudinal study of the HKCEE's sub-assessment Language was meticulously organised and incorporated surveys of teachers and students, interviews, observations of the classroom, and follow-up interviews with teachers. A subsequent group of students who undertook the following examination was contrasted with the last group of students who completed the preceding examination at the time the research was conducted. Then, the survey results were compared. The findings showed that the impact of washback on the learning of students was not significant, and the majority of the students' perceptions of the public tests remained unchanged. Cheng (2005) focused on the teacher's

behaviours throughout the follow-up classroom observations. She explicitly clarified that her main goals for the observation were to record "teachers' behavioural changes in the actual teaching and teaching contexts" and to conduct "detailed follow-up interviews with the three participant teachers" (p.74). In light of these circumstances, it was predictable that the English tests would influence the content of teaching rather than the teachers' pedagogical methods; specifically, they would not substantially affect the used practices (Wall &Alderson, 1993; Watanabe, 1996; Shohamy, 2001; Cheng2005; Luxia, 2005; Manjarrés, 2005). Although these results appear logical, they have undoubtedly lessened the implication that the test takers are the principal stakeholders in the testing process. More attention should be given to how testing affects students learning since both assessments and teachers serve as learning mediators for students' learning. This study will investigate students' perceptions of assessment to analyse its impact on their learning.

The depiction of washback cannot be accurately or fully achieved by either underestimating or overstressing the involvement of test takers, students, or teachers. Although it is believed that students require teachers to impart information, the change must ultimately be embraced by the students. A small amount of research has been conducted on students' perceptions regarding educational reform. Fullan (2007) asserts that "educational change, above all, is a people-related phenomenon for every individual. Students, even little ones, are people, too. Unless they have some meaningful (to them) role in the enterprise, most educational change, indeed most education, will fail" (p. 170). According to Shohamy (2001), the assessment authors showed a lack of interest in the perspectives of test takers noting that "in the testing literature, test takers are often kept

silent; their personal experiences are not heard or shared" (p. 97). She states that a crucial method for identifying diverse test applications is by listening to test-takers' voices.

3.6.4 Washback Studies on the Perceptions of the Students

There is a growing awareness of the need for more washback research from the perspectives of students, according to Wall (2000, p. 506), who recognises that "we know very little about students' perceptions of tests (as opposed to their teachers' impressions of their perceptions) and even less about how new tests influence what students know and can do". Similarly, Hamp-Lyons (1997) emphasises how diverse stakeholders interpret testing in different ways. She advocates for further washback research on the perspectives of students to enhance the professional responsibility of test writers in the development of language tests. Green (2007) asserts that students' viewpoints remain "under-investigated in the literature" (p. 314).

Huhta, Kalaja, and Pitkanen-Huhta (2006) conducted a washback study that focused solely on students' viewpoints. They examined the implications of test preparation, testing experience, and the reception of test results for test takers. The study emphasised the students' viewpoints on the complexity of the tests- taking procedure. Green (2007) conducted washback research examining the impact of several academic writing preparation programs in higher education. The study included 476 international students from fifty different countries enrolled at fifteen different universities in the UK at various levels, along with several teachers who engaged in surveys or focus groups. Each student either took IELTS preparation pre-sessional EAP, or both courses at once. The classroom observations added to the study as Green paid attention to the actions of both students and teachers equally. Green (2007) acknowledged how complex and varied washback

effects might be for students. Moreover, he determined that including the student's perspective was essential for understanding the total effects of washback.

3.6.5 Washback Influence on Learning

It is evident and without reasonable doubt that high-stakes examinations have a significant impact on the teaching and learning activities that take place in the classroom (Cheng, 2017; Tsagari, 2020). A substantial contribution to the success of the educational system in enhancing the quality of education could be made by gaining an understanding of washback in order to determine the quality of high-stakes assessments and the efficacy of their implementation. As a result, a significant body of data has been gathered via recent research projects that have investigated the washback of assessments in various settings. The focus of this study is on the washback impact of assessment on students' perceptions and learning. The purpose of this research is to contribute to the growth of the literature on washback both: in the ESOL context in particular and in general. A discussion of the washback impact of high-stakes test assessments on learning (including students' motivation, learning tactics, and learning outcomes) is presented in the next section.

3.6.5.1 Washback on Learners and Learning

This research aim is to examine the students' perceptions of assessment, as well as the impact of assessment on their learning within the ESOL setting. According to Cheng et al. (2004), it has been acknowledged that washback has an impact on the perspectives of language learners as well as teachers. Nevertheless, little research has been conducted to investigate the effects of washback on the learning processes despite the vast quantity of washback studies. Watanabe (2004) suggests that a greater emphasis

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should be put on learners in order to get an understanding of how teaching and test practices influence their motivations, perceptions, learning, and outcomes of language. As a result, the current research investigates the influence that assessment has on the perceptions of students and learning practices throughout the learning process. The following sections inspect the literature on the effects of washback on learning in language assessment.

3.6.5.2   The Effects of Washback on the Perceptions of Students

It has been claimed by Booth (2012) that there is little focus on investigating the impact of tests on the perceptions of learners. Nevertheless, few studies found that students' perceptions of exams were significantly correlated with their academic goals and results (Shih, 2007; Rahimi & Nazhand, 2010; Cheng et al., 2011). Learners' attitudes towards the objectives and practices of language learning were negatively affected by high-stakes exams. The first researcher who explored students' opinions and behaviours about the HKCEE test was Cheng (1998). The results indicated divergent sentiments among students towards the examination. The students recognised the positive influence of the test on their efforts to get high marks, although it did not accurately represent their language skills. Weili (2010) similarly found that the redesigned College English Test 4 Listening Comprehension Subtest (CET-4 LCS) positively influenced students' views of the test's structure, reliability, criteria of scoring, and design.

In examining the influence of washback on educational practices, Shih (2007) assessed the effect of the "General English Proficiency Test" (GEPT) on Taiwan learners by conducting interviews and observations in the classroom to collect research data. The findings indicated that the test material significantly influenced students' perceptions and

their learning practices and methods. Rahimi and Nazhand (2010) found that the preparation courses of IELTS positively influenced Iranian students' perceptions of the targeted learning outcomes in their research on the impact of test preparation courses on exam results. The findings indicated that these courses reduced the students' skills necessary for enhancing their English proficiency for several academic and professional aims since their primary aim was to pass the examination. Many factors must be considered when analysing washback since they might influence learners' learning practices, including their identity, confidence, motivation, and anxiety. Murray et al. (2012) linked applicants' views of a test with their previous demographic and backgrounds. They found that individual experiences, particularly failing an examination, led to adverse perceptions of the test. This study will identify significant factors related to this aspect of washback to address a gap in the literature.

3.6.5.3   Washback Impact on Learning Strategies and Practices

Even though there has been a substantial amount of study conducted on washback and its effects on teaching and instructors, empirical investigations on washback's effects on learning and students have just recently started to receive greater interest in this field. According to various research, it has been shown that the learning techniques of the learners may change depending on the assessment practice (for example, Phakiti, 2003; Mogapi, 2016; Damankesh and Babaii, 2015). Additionally, it has been found that high-stakes assessments have influenced students' choices of learning practices through adopting a measurement-driven learning strategy. In certain Asian countries, for example, where passing tests is related to decisions that would affect the future of the test-takers for the rest of their lives, the majority of students resort to cramming instead of

participating in a meaningful learning procedure. A study conducted by Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011) discovered that the Indonesian "English National Examination" (ENE) washback had an effect on students' classroom learning. The classroom practices of the students mostly focused on understanding the exam material and establishing test- taking skills. It has been found by Zhang (2016) and Weili (2010), who conducted research on the impact of CET -4 on Chinese college students, that the test motivated students to adopt an instrumental approach to their study. They believed that the sole purpose of the students' educational attempts was to achieve good scores. As a result, students normally make an effort to comprehend the material in order to increase their marks. The students engaged in standard learning practices to prepare for the tests, such as studying the questions related to the tests both inside and outside the school. A similar study was conducted by Chou (2015), which investigated the impact of Taiwan's "Test of English Listening Comprehension" (TELC). The outcomes of the research indicated that the students placed a higher value on reading, vocabulary, and grammar than they did on listening skills because these abilities were frequently emphasised in the College Entrance Examination (CEE). This is another good example of how exams might constrain students' attention to acquiring language skills. In a similar vein, Green (2007) argues that learning behaviour has a significant link with the design of tests because it encourages language learners to construct their techniques of test-taking rather than participating in lifetime learning practice. Additionally, Dörnyei (2005) noticed that learners who had an inadequate desire to study English language as a foreign or second language tended to adjust their learning to the exam behaviours. Research conducted by Stoneman (2006) indicates that the past test-taking and learning experiences of students had a

significant influence on the learning practice choices. Several studies have explained the impact that washback has on the attitudes, perceptions, and learning techniques of students. However, researchers continue to emphasise the significance of exploring the influence that washback has on the students' learning as well as the larger sociocultural context where test results are employed (e.g., Shohamy, 2001; Weir, 2005; Cheng et al., 2015).

3.7   Formative and Summative Assessment

Formative assessment was defined by Shepard (2008) as "the assessment carried out during the instructional process to improve teaching or learning" (p.281). It places a significant focus on integrating or aligning evaluation and classroom instruction to enhance teaching and learning practices (McDowell & Montgomery, 2013). Many formative assessment methods such as self-evaluation and constructive feedback rely on students' involvement in the educational and assessment procedures, which is essential to improve their learning practices (Black et al., 2003). One example of formative assessment approaches is providing students with the opportunity to make decisions on their language assessment and learning capacities while being guided by their teachers. Considering that students are aware that the outcomes of assessments are largely meant to offer constructive feedback, they can practise all of the communication skills in the target language, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, without experiencing any anxiety. One of the most important aspects of formative assessment, according to Shepard (2008), is the immediate provision of feedback in order to create new learnings, he asserts "what makes formative assessment formative is that it is immediately used to make adjustments to form new learning," (p. 281). In ESOL classrooms, different forms

of formative assessment are used by teachers in accordance with the assessment policy of the college as well as the goals of the curriculum, which are geared towards enhancing the learners' competence. It is common practice to place an emphasis on constructive feedback as an essential component of formative assessment methods in order to monitor the development of students' learning. Shute (2008) defines formative feedback as "Information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behaviour to improve learning," (p. 154) in her research about formative feedback. She clarifies that the primary objective of formative feedback is to assist students in the development of their skills and knowledge by bridging the gap between what they are currently doing and the required result, during a particular learning phase or assignment. On the other hand, it has been shown that summative assessments have an effect on the learning and motivation of students (Koenka et al., 2019). Although it plays a key part in the educational process, McDowell and Montgomery (2013) and Williams (2014) are two examples of educators who criticised its use. Williams (2014, p. 565) states that "Many quality assurance systems rely on high-stakes assessment for course certification". This kind of approach is not as objective as it may seem; it has the potential to have a negative impact on the motivation of students and may not be relevant to the requirements of degree programs. The majority of summative assessment is described as "the type of evaluation used at the end of a term, course, or program for purposes of grading, certification, evaluation of progress, or research on the effectiveness of a curriculum, course of study, or educational plan" (Bloom et al., 1971, p. 155), which applies to the majority of summative assessments that referred to as assessments of learning. In order to evaluate the impact that assessment has in the ESOL context, this study will use

different methods to collect data to investigate the effect of the various forms of assessment on students' learning practices and perceptions.

3.8   Learning Theories

This research aims to explore how assessment influences the learning of ESOL students. As a result, it would be beneficial to understand the relationship between assessment and learning, as well as the ways in which this connection may be used to enhance the learning practices of students. Therefore, it is vital to know how people acquire knowledge in order to use the most efficient assessment practices to enhance the learning of the target language. The next section will discuss the two main learning perspectives that are completely opposed to one another: constructivism and behaviourism, along with the assessment practices, which are influenced by these perspectives.

3.8.1   The Behaviourist Learning Theory: The Syrian Context

According to behaviourists, the learning process is a stimulus/ response process followed by direct reinforcement (Berry, 2008; James, 2013). This suggests that learning happens as a result of conditioned reactions to external stimuli, which are frequently reinforced. According to Berry (2008), two distinct forms of reinforcement exist: positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. Negative reinforcement is withholding encouragement in order to reinforce a response or behaviour, while positive reinforcement involves enhancing the reaction or performance in response to certain inputs. According to Moeller and Catalano (2015), learning a new language is seen as a practice that relies on repetition, they state "traditionally, learning a foreign language was thought to be a mimetic activity, involving students repeating or imitating new information"

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(p. 327). The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) teaching style was introduced in 1950 to the foreign language teaching field in reaction to the behaviourist theory, which claims that language learning is a process of practices maintained by memorisation and repetition (Griffiths & Parr, 2001). The essential requirements for learning a foreign language are practice and repetition as have been emphasised by this technique (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). According to the ALM, teachers often have essential roles in the educational process, while the only role of the students is to gain knowledge conveyed by the teacher. Language is learnt through repetition, for example, the grammatical structures of a target language are learnt by memorisation and practice (Wang, 2009). Opponents of the behaviourist theory of language acquisition believe that it places too much emphasis on external behavioural aspects and ignores the important role of cognitive abilities in learning a language. Furthermore, the ALM teaching and learning techniques have been criticised for disregarding students' participation in the educational process (Wang, 2009). The Syrian educational institutions were heavily affected by the ALM method in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Teachers were the main knowledge providers, whereas students were passive learners (Armnzai & Alakrash, 2021). This study will also explore the participants' previous learning experience strategy in the Syrian context in which foreign language instruction is based on behaviourist principles.

3.8.2 Constructivist View: The ESOL Context

According to constructivism, individuals build their knowledge and comprehension via earlier learning experiences (Berry, 2008). This theory lays a strong focus on the learners' involvement as a crucial component of the educational process (Boghossian, 2006), which involves numerous stages in which recent information is distinguished, altered,

rejected, and exchanged until new knowledge is created (Little, 2007, p. 19). According to Kalina and Powell (2009) "In cognitive constructivism, ideas are constructed in individuals through a personal process, as opposed to social constructivism where ideas are constructed through interaction with the teacher and other students" (p. 241). In other words, both viewpoints on learning are founded on two fundamental values "self-innovation" and "social interaction". Both social constructivist and cognitive perspectives influenced the language education domain, leading to the development of two prominent pedagogical methods grounded in these learning theories. The first approach is referred to as the "cognitive method". According to this approach, language learning is seen as a creative process in which learners are more actively involved (Celce-Murcia, 2001). The other one is referred to as the "communicative approach". According to this method, language acquisition is largely centred on communication and interaction among learners and educators in the classroom. Wang (2009) asserts that most classroom activities aim to develop students' communicative competence in the designated language. The teacher's responsibility is to promote the process of learning by observing and guiding the performance of students, and by offering appropriate feedback as needed. Students, from a constructivist perspective, are no longer considered inactive learners. Consequently, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged from these novel approaches. According to the CLT approach, learning a new language is accomplished by improving the learner's communicative skills. This may be accomplished through using ongoing assessment practices and formative assessment that promote the learner's active engagement in the classroom through using classroom activities that encourage interaction and collaboration. Several formative assessment practices, including self-

assessment and peer assessment, are helpful tools to include students in the educational process and increase their responsibility for their learning. Bennett (2011, p. 9) claims that "sharing expectations, questioning, feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment are intended to, among other things, help students develop internal standards for their work, reflect upon it, and take ownership of learning".

The importance of the role of active engagement and participation within cultural communities in developing human cognition was stressed by (Johnson, 2006; Moeller & Catalano, 2015) who are huge supporters of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. This indicates that "both participation and context are critical to human cognition" (Johnson, 2006, p. 238). As a result, the sociocultural aspects of the society in which the target language is taught may influence the instruction and acquisition of a foreign language. This holds true in the ESOL setting, as language learning occurs through active communication and interaction in the learning setting between learners and instructors. This did not happen in the Syrian context, in which the traditional teaching and learning methods were employed. Thus, one of the ways to support the Syrian students' learning abilities and methods within the ESOL context is by encouraging them to be part of the educational process and giving them the chance to discuss their learning objectives, ask questions, participate, and be involved in peer and self-assessment.

3.9   Summary

This chapter highlighted the importance of testing and assessment in education, exploring how evaluation methods can enhance teaching and learning. It explored various evaluation techniques and activities, detailing various types used for different objectives in the ESOL context. Research on summative and formative assessments revealed their

significant impact on learning, both positively and negatively. This chapter also discussed Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive framework provided the theoretical foundation for this research. It was developed based on evidence that both the cognitive processing of the linguistic information necessary for the exam and the social context in which a test is administered are important components of test validity. The framework is centred on the test-takers as the chief facets for developing and validating the ESOL exam. It is considered a useful tool for researchers to investigate washback or assess instructional strategies in a certain situation (O'Sullivan, 2011). It consists of three components: the characteristics of the test-takers and their cognitive and language capabilities, the test system, and test scoring which is influenced by the previous components. The framework is therefore extremely context-sensitive. Consequently, the socio-cognitive framework, including its essential components, offers investigators and test developers an integrated and methodical approach which takes into account many factors while developing and validating tests and inspecting the washback of a test. Furthermore, it facilitates the examination of the repercussions of language assessments, concentrating on washback at the micro as well as macro levels within a larger context. This research used a socio-cognitive framework to examine how the examination operationalises the language abilities of the students and impacts their motivation. The following chapter delineates the research methodology used in this study, including the research strategy, approach, and selection of survey methodologies. It also examines data gathering and analysis from a methodological and philosophical standpoint. The washback phenomenon and its influence on various aspects of education and learning, including test-takers and stakeholders, is presented. Factors such as test-takers and teachers' characteristics, test

format and usage, and education policies indirectly influence washback impact. The relationship among these factors determines washback's presence in various settings. However, there is no consensus on the type of washback promoted by each element, making it an unexpected phenomenon influenced by contextual elements and stakeholder features. In this study, the effect of assessment on ESOL adult students' perceptions and learning practices was investigated. Nevertheless, further research is needed in other educational settings to explore unique interactions between elements promoting washback in different teaching and learning contexts. The next chapter outlines the research methodology, strategy, approach, and survey methodologies used in the study, which involves collecting data from a selected sample to understand the topic under investigation.

Chapter 4:   Research

Methodology

4.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological framework employed to accomplish the study's aims and questions. It begins with addressing the epistemological and ontological standpoints of the researcher when inspecting adult ESOL Syrian students' perceptions and attitudes towards assessment, as well as how that could affect their learning practices in the ESOL context. Then, the case study is introduced to offer a full comprehension of the research topic. It also presents information about the employed data collection methods (focus group, document analysis, observation, and semi-structured interviews), the sampling method and the pilot study. Furthermore, the role of the data analysis process in achieving the study objectives is clarified in this chapter. Finally, it discusses how the ethical concerns were addressed to ensure the study's trustworthiness.

4.2   Aims, Objectives and Questions

The primary aim of conducting this research, as mentioned in the first chapter, is to provide a clear understanding of how adult ESOL learners perceive the assessment practices, and how such practices could affect their learning. With consideration of this primary aim of the study at hand linked to the relevant employed literature, the following objectives were addressed:

1. To comprehend and clarify the perceptions of ESOL Syrian students of assessment and its impact on learning English.
2. To determine how ESOL teachers' assessment methods correspond to the goals and expectations of their students.

3. To investigate the washback effect of assessment on students' learning in the ESOL context.

4. To explore the causes of the assessment effect in the ESOL context.

To achieve the research aims and objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the design of the study and the technique of data collection:

Primary research question What are the perceptions of adult ESOL Syrian refugee students of the assessment practices that are used by the teachers in ESOL courses in further education colleges?

Therefore, the secondary research questions are:

1- What are the assessment procedures employed by the teachers?

2- What is the primary impact of assessment techniques on language learning?

3- What are the causes of the assessment effect?

4.3   Research Design

In social science, discourse about research design refers to the research paradigm. Normally, the appropriate choice of research paradigm depends on the type of the conducted topic as well as the philosophical background of the researcher. Creswell (2009) indicates that there are a number of factors which may affect the choice of the well-served research design for every study, for instance; the investigated topic, the researcher's own experience, and the people who are interested in the study. However, the research design "involves the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific methods" to answer the research questions in this study (Creswell, 2009, p.5).

4.3.1   Research Philosophy, paradigm and approach

Researchers need to determine the adopted philosophical stance used in their research as it holds important presumptions about their worldviews that will support and strengthen their research strategy and selected methods (Cohen et al., 2017). The philosophical stance can be either literature evaluation, institutional investigation, or group or individual practices (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

However, the research philosophy is often formed by two main ways of thinking i.e., epistemology and ontology. Epistemology is the study of knowledge (what exactly is knowledge?), ontology is the study of theories of reality formation (what creates reality?), in addition to methodology, which is the study of how we learn about the world (Matsuda and Silva, 2005). Ontology is described by Gray (2004) as "the study of being, that is, the nature of existence" (p.16). It questions the presence and nature of the phenomena under study. The main question of ontology concerns the subjectivity and objectivity of reality. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), reality is subjective and varies based on how each individual interprets a phenomenon. Reality is considered personal and flexible from my perspective. This ontological stance is consistent with the nature of the studied phenomenon which is washback. Washback may exist or not, based on the explanation of the issues linked to whether assessment impacts students' perceptions and learning in the ESOL setting. If washback phenomena exist, then the answers of the participants and contextual elements will determine whether it is negative or positive (Wall, 1996). It is important to have an awareness of the socio-cultural environment as well as stakeholders' concerns and other participants' perceptions while inspecting the washback phenomenon. Accordingly, washback will be established as a result of explaining the

various perceptions of the participants in the educational setting. Understanding the nature of washback, including its existence, greatly relies on the perceptions of the participants of how language learning occurs in the research context. Discussing the ontology of this research helped in identifying my certainty, as a researcher, about the washback nature and existence that is under investigation.

Epistemology is defined by Henn et al. (2006) as the study of comprehending what is connected to individuals' perceptions regarding knowledge, nature and extent, as well as their presumptions. The following study aims to inspect students' perceptions towards assessment and how assessment practices affect their learning in further education colleges in the UK. As I think that the evaluation methods used in the ESOL context have an impact on learning English, I try to identify and describe this effect. That is, I aim to determine what exactly leads to this effect, and if it affects the learning process positively or negatively. To accomplish this goal, suitable research strategies and methods have been adopted to address the research goals and objectives in line with the study's philosophical viewpoint. The epistemological philosophy that is adopted for this research indicates that knowledge is based on social interaction, and is acquired through an approach that respects individual differences (Grix, 2004). As a result, I was allowed to consider the unique features of the participants and the research setting, since washback is a situated contextual phenomenon.

The pragmatic paradigm has been adopted for this research, which means that any judgement about the study design is based on "what works" (Robson, 2011). The main characteristics of the pragmatic approach are observation, experience and experimentation. According to Robson (2011), those are all key valuable strategies to gain

a wider awareness of individuals, their cultural habits, their environments, and the ways in which they consider their own unique experiences. Moreover, the pragmatic approach takes into consideration the understanding of participant perspectives, perceptions and beliefs by assessing the informants at points where they take a participatory role in practical contexts. There are three main reasons for employing a pragmatic approach in this research. Firstly, it allowed me to pursue a deep understanding of the topic from the viewpoints and perceptions of those involved, and as a result that helped me to understand a set of rules within the context of the study. Secondly, the pragmatic approach provided me with the opportunity to focus on the potential applicability and usefulness of my research in line with the use of a variety of methods in order to address the discussed issues in the appropriate way. Finally, it enabled me to develop a holistic analysis in order to fully incorporate a number of relevant factors into my study.

In line with the pragmatic paradigm, this research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm as well, based on some epistemological and ontological interpretations. The basis of this paradigm is grounded on the notion that access to reality is mostly influenced by the experiences of individuals. This includes their real-world interpretations and comprehensions of a phenomenon. As a result, people may behave differently in the same circumstances depending on their perceptions of their surroundings (Hammersley, 2007). A reality, according to interpretivism, cannot exist without our awareness of it. Consequently, my values are evident throughout the whole study process.

Interpretivism was defined by Collins (2010) as a meaning-focused study that may include a variety of methodologies to represent different aspects of the problem being studied. It highlights the significance of perceptions and opinions in real-world situations. Therefore,

when investigating the washback phenomenon, the participants' perceptions and attitudes should be considered. According to Shohamy et al. (1996), washback is a multifaceted concept that includes numerous extents, which requires the use of various collection methods. The interpretivist paradigm was adopted in this study because it embraces a naturalistic method of study. One of the most common criticisms of interpretivism is its subjectivity as its research is influenced by the bias of the researcher. The findings of such a study cannot be generalised because data is significantly impacted by the researcher's own opinion and beliefs. However, the detailed generated data produced through interpretivism studies may achieve trustworthiness through its high level of credibility and dependability.

However, in order to offer a thorough understanding of the phenomena under study, the selection of the research approach is decided based on the core of the questions of the research (Creswell, 2007). The study at hand adopted a qualitative research approach to address its research questions by gathering data using a variety of techniques, including document analysis, focus groups, interviews, and observation. One of the advantages of qualitative research is that it includes additional relevant stakeholders, because of its capacity to investigate complicated phenomena and offer in-depth accounts of the experiences of the individuals involved in the event under study. Qualitative research aims to comprehend individuals' formed meanings by employing various instruments to collect data (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). This approach allowed me to consider various factors impacting or being impacted via washback, for example, the college, the society, personal factors, and exam aspects. The decision to adopt the qualitative approach for this study was led by research objectives and questions which provided a thorough comprehension

and complete evidence to investigate students' views and opinions towards assessment and its effect on language learning. According to Watanabe (1996), adopting a qualitative research approach in examining washback is important to thoroughly understand the phenomenon under investigation. The qualitative research distinguishing characteristic is its acknowledgement of the crucial role of the researcher in the research procedure.

Accordingly, this research intended to focus on the participants' perceptions during interviews and observations, where some acts from the participants (students and teachers) could not be measured through quantitative data; such as the perceptions and the roles both students and teachers play in assessment practices. In this regard, qualitative data could provide an opportunity to explore and understand their perceptions about the employed assessment practices in this context and their impacts on the language learning processes and outcomes.

4.3.2   Case Study Strategy

A case study is identified as a thorough analysis of a setting or specific incident (Yin, 2013). It is frequently considered the main strategy in educational research for developing educational theories and improving educational practices. It also permits obtaining an inclusive comprehension of the participants' viewpoints and experiences in a natural setting (Yin, 2009). Case study strategy was adopted in this study to establish authentic and significant information as it agrees with the pragmatist and interpretivist paradigms. According to the interpretivism paradigm, in which this study is located, the investigation is an interpretative process of the issue under enquiry. For this study, the context of the case study is a further education college in West Yorkshire in the UK, from where the

participants were purposely chosen in order to achieve the factor of variety in their levels, experiences, and educational backgrounds.

Moreover, case study research is typically associated with research seeking thorough knowledge by asking "how?" and "why?". This feature supported focusing the research questions about understanding how assessment affects the ESOL students' perceptions and learning practices. The "why?" question is used to understand what these perceptions and practices constitute. Accordingly, a case study strategy allows for a thorough explanation of the washback phenomenon. It uses numerous data methods including interviews, observations, and documentation to create a full understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Denscombe, 2010; Yin, 2009). The large amount of the gathered data allowed me to create systematic connections between students' perceptions of assessment and learning practices. Interviews, a focus group, and a classroom observation were used to gather qualitative data from ESOL students and an Entry 2 teacher for this study. They were conducted at separate times because a case study is considered a flexible approach that does not depend on time or limit itself by data collection methods (Simons,2009).

The credibility of a case study is increased by its contextualisation because the phenomenon is investigated in its natural setting. This feature is consistent with my epistemological viewpoints. Thus, each situation has unique features that directly influence the development of its participants' perceptions, experiences and opinions (Merriam, 2009). It is also appropriate to investigate the study phenomenon in depth from various perspectives while taking into account the complexity and distinctiveness of a

specific programme, institution, and policy in a real-life setting (Creswell, 2007; Thomas, 2011).

As a result, it might concentrate on the particular features of a person, a particular social context, an institution, a group, or the entire nation. The setting was critical to creating the interactions that formulate students' perceptions of assessment and language learning, which were investigated in their natural settings. The context of this study was in the ESOL classrooms in a further education college, and it focused on ESOL classes for adult Syrian ESOL students. Watanabe (2004) stated that tests are utilised for specific settings and goals in washback studies. This study is considered a single case study and its chief unit is the ESOL classes and the concerns impacting participants' practices.

Furthermore, the case study research is sometimes criticised for the generalising difficulty. Subjectivity, such as pragmatism and interpretivism, are seen as a key feature of this type of research. Nevertheless, subjectivity cannot be avoided regardless of the methods used in a qualitative investigation (Simons, 2009). It may be reduced by illustrating how the principles, preconceptions, and feelings of a researcher, as well as their connection to the study setting, have impacted the research process (ibid).

4.4   The Context of the Study

The present study was carried out in a further education college in West Yorkshire in the UK. The college offers English, Math and IT courses for adult students whose English is not their first language. Nevertheless, this study only focuses on English language courses. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) English courses start from the Pre-entry level upwards, till Level 2. They focus on improving students' micro-skills

(listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar). The college also offers the students the opportunity to get qualifications that are nationally recognised. In the 2018/2019 academic year, adult ESOL classes capacity was between 120 to 150 students distributed on six levels: Pre- Entry, Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1, and Level 2. The number of students could change depending on how many students join the college. Eight teachers were teaching English courses for all levels. The participants attended college four times a week to study English and the other two subjects. The college is situated near the town centre, which makes accessibility to its premises easy. The college also offers many facilities for refugee students, in addition to the free courses, which contribute to creating a welcoming environment for all the students.

The best setting for qualitative research depends on many factors, including the ability to develop trustworthy relationships with the participants, the ability to communicate flexibly with them in the chosen place, and the trustworthiness of the generated data. Similarly, the study location should be chosen in consideration of the participant's willingness to collaborate, accessibility, and where relationships are already formed so that research objectives may be met. Taking the previous factors into account, I chose this further education college as a case study for different reasons, including its accessibility and the participant's willingness to participate. The college that I have chosen has two main centres in two different towns, but I have decided to conduct the study in only one of them as it offers ESOL courses for adults, while the other one offers ESOL courses for students between the ages of 16 and 18.

The number of students who agreed to take part in the study was reasonable, which was one of the reasons for choosing this college. Furthermore, I did not have any problem

accessing the college, as I was welcomed to conduct the interviews in the college, after obtaining their consent. Also, it was easy to attend the college with no obstacles as I used to live in the same town where the college is located. This made it convenient for me to access the college anytime for data collection, and to meet the participants for any extra clarification during the process of data generation. This provided me with the opportunity to create well-trusted relationships with the participants; as being a member of their community. All that helped me to grasp an idea about the research problem.

However, in order to increase our understanding of any research issue, Dörnyei (2007) noted that participants must engage willingly in the study to provide rich and comprehensive data. A trustworthy connection with participants and the assurance of data quality and reliability are more likely to be established when there is a greater interest in doing the study at the level of people, programmes, and processes (Marshall and Rossman, 2006) Thus, a careful consideration was made in selecting the college and obtaining practitioners' and students' consent to be observed and interviewed as part of their involvement in the study.

4.5 The Sampling Process

Sampling is a significant process for any qualitative research; as it can be difficult for a researcher to investigate the entire population. The sampling process refers to "the segment of the population that is selected for investigation" (Bryman, 2008, p.87). Polkinghorne (2005) asserts the importance of choosing a "fertile sample" to enrich the investigation process of the phenomenon (p.140). In qualitative and case-study research, purposive sampling is a commonly used method (Maxwell, 2012), which is considered a trustworthy technique, since the research focus is on obtaining a comprehensive

understanding instead of just relying on descriptive research (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling was used in this study, as a frequently used method in qualitative and case-study research (Maxwell, 2012). The purpose of this study led to the selection of a purposive sample, where the chosen participants are significant informative elements with regard to research on this subject (Blumberg, 2008).

In this research, the purposive sampling process was based on the aims of the study. It was used as a means to enable the researcher to get the best information from the most likely individuals who could have relevant backgrounds, experiences or expertise in order to provide quality information and valuable insights on the research topic (Denscombe, 2010). Also, purposive sampling is the most common sampling technique utilised in case study research, which effectively emerged as a practical choice for the current study. In short, purposive sampling was chosen to symbolise a limited group of people who are "privileged witnesses to an event," and who seem to be particularly informative and competent (Maxwell, 2012, p.97).

To achieve a successful purposive sampling, the students were provided with a short overview of the study by the head of the ESOL department, before the researcher distributed the consent forms to ensure the voluntary participation of the students from different levels, genders, and educational backgrounds. Later, on my next visit to the college, I met the head of the department to collect the forms that were signed. The decision regarding the number of students was based on the aim of the research, and the inclusion of various backgrounds and levels. Denscombe (2007) urges to employ a diversity of individuals with a range of diverse personalities, levels of education, ages, and cultural backgrounds when conducting studies on learning and teaching. According

to Cohen et al. (2007, p.101), "The correct sample size depends on the purpose of the study". Since the study was only concerned with the perceptions of Syrian students of assessment, twelve students from various social and educational backgrounds, ages, genders, and ESOL levels were selected for the semi-structured interviews while keeping the study objectives in mind. Other students from different ethnicities, nationalities, and countries were excluded. In addition, the student's first language was a main factor in excluding the other students who do not speak Arabic for many reasons. First, as this study investigated the perceptions of ESOL students, I assumed that their English knowledge was not good enough to allow me to collect enough data using the English language. Therefore, there was a need to find a shared language to communicate with them. As an Arab researcher, I found it hard to collect data from non-Arab students, therefore, the main reason for choosing only Syrian students for this study was their native language, which we both had in common. I also aimed to ensure that the interviewees could speak freely and that no misunderstanding between us would take place. Furthermore, the good relationship that I had with the Syrian community gave me the chance to learn more about the difficulties that they face while learning English. I always heard the students complaining about the ESOL exams and their purpose. These perceptions provoked me to conduct this research to know how assessment practices including the ESOL exam contributed to creating these perceptions. The number of ESOL Syrian students, at the time of collecting data, was about twenty- four students at a rate of about four to five students per level. They were from different levels, backgrounds, and genders. Sixteen students were chosen from all levels to take part in this study. They were from both genders with different educational and professional backgrounds. I chose

two students from each level for the semi-structured interviews and six students from the observed classroom for the follow-up interviews. They were all Syrian students at the Entry 2 level.

Later, I provided the students with a clear explanation of the research and its purpose to create a relaxed atmosphere and to motivate them to participate and answer the questions. I placed a strong focus on trust to expand and enhance the possibility of collecting reliable data. This was because the participants in the study were more likely to disclose information freely and openly without making any effort to confine any details when they trusted me and felt comfortable towards the objectives of the study (Denscombe, 2002, p.75). Later, I chose an Entry 2 classroom to be observed. The observation focused on the classroom assessment practices used by the teacher, and on the students' attitudes towards these practices during the lesson. After that, both the teacher and all six Syrian students were interviewed. I conducted the follow-up interviews with the students after the observation session to investigate their views and perceptions towards assessment and investigate to what extent these practices affected their language learning negatively or positively. Remenyi (1998, quoted in Saunders et al., 2003) asserts that the specifics of the situation must be carefully investigated to attain reality and comprehend a phenomenon. Because of this, the interviews' purpose was to compare and contrast the perceptions of the students based on their educational background and assessment experiences, which in turn provided rich and detailed data on the situation in the ESOL context in a further education college.

4.5.1   The Participants

The participants in this study were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of the teachers (see Table 4.1), while the second group consisted of the students(see Table 4.2 & Table 4.3). It is worth mentioning that not many teachers agreed to participate in this study due to their busy schedules, which limited the amount of data collected from teachers. Nevertheless, one teacher agreed to be observed and interviewed in the Entry 2 classroom. As a result, the study focused mainly on investigating students' perceptions and opinions.

4.5.1.1   Teachers

Only one teacher participated in this study. This teacher was chosen, because she was willing to be observed in her classroom, and to be interviewed after the observation session. Observation was a vital technique in this study as it was used to explore the classroom assessment practices in the Entry 2 classroom and to observe how the students act within the authentic context. The observation was followed by follow-up interviews with the teacher and the students to discuss what had been observed and how the classroom assessment practices affected students' perceptions. It was important to interview the teachers in the ESOL context to get a comprehensive understanding of the teaching approach and the assessment process. The chosen teacher had seven years of experience teaching ESOL adult students, which could help in gaining more information about the ESOL context, assessment policy, and difficulties that might affect the teachers. The teacher's reflection on her assessment practices and teaching strategies, in addition to the students' outcomes and learning practices, was employed to recognise the effect of washback on students' perceptions and learning practices.

Table 4.1: The main information of the participant teacher

Teacher's Name	Teaching Experience	Level Taught
Liz	7 years	Entry 2

4.5.1.2 Students

Sixteen students participated in this study (8 females and 8 males). They were distributed in two groups. The first group was made up of twelve students divided equally between each gender. The ages of the students ranged between 22 to 65 years old across all levels. Two students were chosen from each level (Pre-Entry, Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1, and Level 2) to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The students were native speakers of Arabic who were studying English in an FE college during the 2018/2019 academic year. They had different educational and social backgrounds and experiences. They came to the UK as refugees after the civil war in Syria (see Table 2). The students' age, gender, and level, in addition to their backgrounds, were mentioned to gain comprehensive evidence of the effect of these factors on their perceptions, motivations, and learning practices. Students' academic and professional backgrounds had a great effect on their English language proficiency, which might affect their perceptions and learning practices. Students' age was also included to inspect the effect of age on language learning and students' perceptions of assessment practices. The students were distributed across different ESOL levels based on their English language proficiency and their assessment outcomes. The table shows examples of the student's level and background (see Table 4.2). For instance, students who were illiterate or had left school at an early age joined the basic level of ESOL (pre-entry) based on their initial

exam results. They were initially assessed before joining the college. Although the other participants had appropriate educational and professional backgrounds, their English language did not meet the requirements of employment or education in the UK. Therefore, they joined the college to further their skills in the English language. The fact that all the participants were adults added another dimension to this study. Most of them had previously experienced the educational procedures and assessment methods in Syria. The students shared these experiences during the data generation phase, enabling the comparison of these experiences in different contexts.

However, all of the students voluntarily participated in the study. They were interviewed to explore the effect of classroom assessment practices (formative assessment) and ESOL exams (summative assessment) on their perceptions and learning practices. The generated data from these interviews were used to answer the research questions regarding the assessment practices used in the classroom, and the effect of assessment on students' perceptions, motivation and learning.

Table 4.2: The main demographic features of the participants in semi-structured interviews.

Names	Gender	Age	Academic/Professional background	Level
Alia	Female	45	Secondary school	Pre-Entry
Suad	Female	47	No qualifications	Pre-Entry
Nisreen	Female	30	Diploma/ Hairdresser	Entry 1
Salma	Female	58	Elementary Teacher	Entry 1
Ali	Male	63	Barber	Entry 2
Mohammad	Male	22	Secondary school	Entry 2

Hala	Female	38	Math teacher	Entry 3
Ahmad	Male	55	Engineer	Entry 3
Hussam	Male	28	Teacher	Level 1
Abeer	Female	33	Nurse	Level 1
Abdullah	Male	24	Secondary school	Level 2
Qais	Male	32	Electrician	Level 2

One focus group interview was conducted in the college with a group of students from the same level. Six adult participants from both genders participated in this focus group. They met for one hour in their classroom to discuss the effect of the ESOL exam (summative assessment) on their learning. This second data collection phase was conducted after the follow-up semi-structured interviews with the observed Entry 2 teacher and students. The focus group with the students was conducted after the ESOL exam at the end of the academic year, and after receiving their exam results (outcomes) before the summer holiday. The collected data provided me with valuable information about students' perceptions of the ESOL exam, its advantages and drawbacks, and the effect of the test preparation practices on their learning practices and outcomes. The collected data supported answering the part concerning the effect of assessment (washback) on students' learning.

Table 4.3: The Entry 2 participants

Student's Name	Gender	Age	Background
Ali	Male	63	Barber
Mohammad	Male	22	Secondary School
Laila	Female	30	Housewife
Eman	Female	36	Teacher
Sara	Female	45	Housewife
Jamal	Male	34	Plumber

Two students (Ali and Mohammad) from the Entry 2 level were chosen to participate in the second phase of collecting data (focus group). They were observed in their classroom during a reading lesson and were interviewed after the observation session. The reason for choosing the same two students was because they were the only two students from the same level, who agreed to be interviewed at the beginning of the data collection phase.

4.6 Data Collection Tools

Polkinghrne (2005) considers data collection as a methodical process of gathering comprehensive data from the participants of the study. Different data-collection tools were used to generate data in this research study, which were used to control any restrictions that might result from using one method and to provide a means of validating data. They were also used to collect in-depth data and to answer the research questions of this study. As a result, combining these methods, which were extensively used in washback studies, would generate richer data and a deeper comprehension of the effect of assessment (washback) on students' perceptions and learning practices. The following sections

provide more thorough details and justifications for the specific instrument selection and action procedures.

Table 4.4: Data production tool to address the research questions.

Research Questions	Data collection tools
What are the perceptions of adult ESOL Syrian refugee students of the assessment practices that are used by the teachers in ESOL courses in further education colleges?	Interviews Observation Assessment Policy Focus -group
What are the assessment methods used by teachers?	Interviews Observation Focus -group An analysis of documents (worksheet, a copy of Mock Exam)
What are the main impacts of the assessment methods on language learning?	Interviews Observation Focus -group
What are the causes of the assessment effect?	Interviews Focus -group

4.6.1 Observation

Observation is considered the most effective method to obtain direct access to real-life situations and to record the behaviours of others, gaining a comprehensive account of educational or social contexts (Robson, 2002). The observation was used, in this study, to acquire authentic data about the nature of classroom assessment practices and teaching and learning strategies. As observation inspects individuals in their natural settings, it is considered as a valuable source of data, thus, I aimed to get detailed information regarding the employed assessment practices and to observe how the students interact with these practices in their natural settings (Baker, 2006). I had the

opportunity to observe and record students' reactions to what they had experienced during the lesson (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

Observation was also used to spot facts that had been either missed or forgotten by the reluctant participants themselves (Denscombe, 2010). However, this key feature can be one of the observation's main drawbacks, since the observers are restricted to the seen behaviours and incapable of gauging the actual motivators for participants' behaviours such as their feelings, beliefs, and intentions. As a result, the observers may fail to comprehend the meanings of these behaviours since they "will have their own focus and will interpret significant events in their own way," (Bell and Waters, 2014, p.211). Thus, the motivations and assumptions underlying the participants' behaviours had to be identified to understand them.

The observation took place in an Entry 2 classroom in the college. It aimed to gain comprehensive knowledge about the used classroom assessment practices and to observe how the students interact with these practices. The data was gathered through observation which was followed by semi-structured interviews with the classroom teacher and six Syrian students. The lesson was delivered to twenty students: eight male and twelve female students. The students were from different backgrounds, three out of eight male students and three out of twelve female students were from Syria. The lesson lasted for two and a half hours. The Syrian students were only interviewed out of the twenty students since this study aimed to investigate adult Syrian students' perceptions of assessment. The students were later interviewed to identify their perceptions of the assessment practices and how they affected their language learning. The classroom observation was recorded using an audio recorder after getting consent from both; the

teacher and the students. I would have preferred to record the lesson using video recording to obtain an appropriate method of gaining a thorough understanding of the classroom atmosphere, but I did not get consent from the female students. I also intended to get a better view about assessment activities, and interactions between the students and the teacher throughout the lesson, or between the students themselves while answering the worksheets in groups. Thus, I scheduled an advance visit to the Entry 2 classroom to introduce myself to the students and the classroom teacher, to explain the aim of the observation, and my role as a researcher. I also aimed to reassure the students that their information, actions, and behaviours would be secure and that I would be the only one to view them. This was done to minimise the participants' concern about their performance during the lesson. In addition, I explained to them that this observation was not intended to evaluate them, which reassured them in their setting (Hennink et al., 2011).

However, the observational data offered a thorough description of the work that characterised the students' behaviour during the lesson and highlighted the degree to which these behaviours reflected the goals and objectives of the assessment. After the observation session, I interviewed the teacher to discuss what had been observed and to get further insight into the classroom assessment methods. The teacher and students had the opportunity during the follow-up interviews to discuss assessment practices and their impact on language learning. This could make it easier to identify the main causes for adopting different perceptions towards assessment that affected their learning. Nevertheless, observation sessions by themselves were insufficient to comprehend the motivations and assumptions that guided the students' perceptions or the reasons behind

their behaviour. Therefore, follow-up interviews and a focus group were conducted following the classroom observation to fully comprehend the observed students' perceptions rather than relying just on my interpretations.

In short, as suggested by Saven-Baden (2007), there could be some considerable challenges in the classification and interpretation of observed behaviours; particularly as the act of observation has a significant effect on individual behaviours. Due to such limitations and to ensure the complementarity of data and to promote a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of a subject, observation must be employed in conjunction with other qualitative methods; such as interviews. The observation method under the pragmatic and interpretive views aims to understand the perceptions of students and teachers towards the employed assessment practices through real-life situations as well as the learning outcomes.

4.6.2   Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews aim to comprehend and collect data from others through purposeful conversation, which is mostly led by one person (Bogdan and Biklen,1998, p.93). It is considered a popular method for collecting data in research designs (Robson, 2002). This study used interviews to get extensive data from the participants about how they perceived assessment and how it affected(washback) learning. Andrews et al. (2002) and Wu (2014) believe that interviews are the most frequently used tool to generate data in a washback study in both language and general education. Nevertheless, it has two drawbacks: first, it is considered a subjective approach; as the viewpoint of the researcher may affect the behaviours of the participants, and how the acquired data is perceived and presented. Second, it consumes much time as a data collection method. Robson (2002)

regards interviews as the main method in qualitative research to accumulate a thorough comprehension of the interviewees' participation.

According to Robson (2011), interviews are divided into three different kinds: semi-structured, unstructured, and structured. Semi-structured interviews are considered to be more useful since they are flexible, permitting more enquiries from the researcher to explain any unclear answers depending on the participants' responses (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Therefore, I employed semi-structured interviews to meet the research goal of acquiring a thorough knowledge of washback in the study environment. The aim and goals of the research ultimately determine the choice of a suitable interview.

Semi-structured interviews with the students and the ESOL teacher were conducted to explore their experiences and perceptions of classroom assessment including testing and learning in the ESOL context. Semi-structured interviews provided the participants with the freedom to state their thoughts, discuss their expectations and concerns, and reflect on their assessment experiences and learning practices, which increased the acquired data validity. The semi-structured interview method met the pragmatic paradigm because the interviews with students and teachers aimed to find out how they viewed their own experiences in regard to the employed assessment practices and the learning outcomes.

The interviews were originally planned to be carried out inside the college. As I was the interviewer, it was important to maintain control of the interview and reduce any divergence because of the limited time. Arabic was used throughout the student interviews so the participants could discuss their perceptions and opinions easily and freely, while the teacher was interviewed in English. Later the interview data gathered from the students was translated into English. The collected data was regarded as the

participants' perceptions of their reality, from the epistemological point of view, which aligns with the theoretical stances of this study.

As a starting point for the interview, a list of themes and questions was created while the questions of the interviews consisted of main and secondary questions to inspire in-depth details. Data from washback studies was conceptualised to develop the secondary questions to answer the research questions and to achieve its objectives. Prior themes as suggested by (Weir, 2005; Yang, 2013) were identified from the literature review. The interview questions were based on students' perceptions, the assessment's effect on learning English, and their learning practices

It is crucial to carefully and attentively listen to the interviewees' responses since this helps identify new significant themes that may be explored further with more questions. Gray (2004) stresses keeping in mind that "an interview is not a normal conversation" to clarify the significance of listening since interviews require a higher level of focus, i.e., paying attention to what has been said and interpreting it. He also calls for analysing the interviewee's tone and how the dialogue has been delivered to detect any signs of frustration, misunderstanding or tediousness (Gray, 2004, p.226). However, to guarantee that relevant data was obtained, the interview focused on straightforward questions that aligned with the study goals and questions.

Initial contact was made with the participants to ask them to participate in the interview and to decide where and when to meet (Legard et al.,2003). To guarantee successfully conducting the interviews, the participants were given the option of selecting the time and setting for the interviews. The interviews were preceded by a brief introduction about the research's aim and process, in addition to their rights. Most of the interviews were held in

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the college inside the classrooms that had been offered by the head of ESOL departments, one was held outside the college upon the request of the student who was a female participant. She asked me to meet at her house, as she could not stay at the college after the classes finished. Most of the interviews lasted for 45 minutes, while some of them lasted one hour with certain participants who shared so many experiences and much personal information.

4.6.3 Document Analysis

Documents can be utilised independently to produce data for the study (Creswell, 2005). Their value offers significant support for understanding the generated data from observations and interviews and supports research with evidence. However, according to Cohen et al. (2011) and Denscombe (2003), it might also be used as an additional tool with careful analysis and interpretation to aid in the discovery of precise responses to the questions of the research. This strategy was applied as an additional means of elucidating the participants' replies in this study. Analysing documents can offer extra evidence of some instructional strategies used in classrooms. College assessment policy, students' worksheets and handouts were analysed to get a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon, to reduce the research bias, and to confirm the reliability of the obtained data.

Several documents were obtained from various participants during the data generation process that were either directly or indirectly related to the classroom assessment. For instance, I was able to collect samples of worksheets and mock exams given to the students to be answered in the classroom. These samples were used to inspect the relation and influence of the classroom assessments and mock exams on teachers'

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teaching and students' learning, which might be interpreted as a sign of washback. The college assessment policy, received from the head of the department, was also analysed. These materials served as a comprehensive description of the techniques used by the teachers and students in the ESOL classrooms. These explanations offered a more comprehensive account of the contextual data that defined the social components of the research framework and facilitated the analysis, comprehension, and clarification of the generated data. Additionally, these documents made it easier for me to understand how assessment might affect students' perceptions.

4.6.4   Student Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews are mostly based on participants' interaction while discussing an issue that is provided by the researcher. The focus group, in this study, aimed to acquire more information about the washback effect on students' learning outcomes. Liamputtong (2011, p.3) defines a focus group interview as: "Focus group interviews involve a group of 6–8 people who come from similar social and cultural backgrounds or who have similar experiences or concerns. They gather together to discuss a specific issue with the help of a moderator in a particular setting where participants feel comfortable enough to engage in a dynamic discussion for one or two hours".

In this study, the focus group was conducted after the follow-up interviews with the observed Entry 2 students in the college, two weeks following the completion of the ESOL exam and after receiving their exam results at the end of the academic year 2018/2019. They met for one hour to discuss the effect of the ESOL exam on their learning practices. The whole number of adult participants was six from both genders. Although the focus group was planned early in the data collection stage, I faced some difficulties before it

took place. The main difficulty was the effect of the students' beliefs and backgrounds on their attitudes. The female students were reluctant, at the beginning, to participate in the focus group because of the male students' presence. They preferred to be interviewed alone or in separate groups (one for women and the other for men). Unfortunately, it was hard to fulfil their request for many reasons. First, the number of Syrian students in Entry 2 was only six, equally divided between the two genders. Secondly, the focus group was conducted shortly before the summer holiday, during which the college would break for the holiday. This made it hard for me to find a suitable place and to reschedule a new appointment that suited all the participants' schedules. Thus, I explained my point to the students and I reassured them that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The female students understood the difficulty of the situation and decided to join the group after all. One of the reasons that made the students change their decision was because of the good rapport that we had. They told me that they trusted me and wanted to participate in the study. They finally met in the college to discuss the issue under investigation.

According to Liamputtong (2011), there are many significant benefits of focus group interviews. For example, a focus group interview allows a thorough discussion about a specific topic among a group of people to obtain more understanding of the discussed topic. The interviews with Entry 2 students aimed to get additional data concerning the washback effect of the exam and the test preparation period on students' results and learning practices. The collected data helped me to get a thorough knowledge of the students' perceptions of the test preparation practices and their attitudes towards their exam results. Using Arabic through the interview helped the students to express

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themselves more clearly. The gathered data considerably helped to answer the study's second sub-research question about assessment's effect (washback) on language learning.

4.7   The Pilot Study

A pilot study is used to evaluate various components of a study design and to enable any required modifications before committing to that design (Robson, 2011). The questions of the interviews were piloted in March 2018 with four adult ESOL Syrian students who joined the ESOL courses in the further education college before 2018. The students used to live in the same neighbourhood (two friends, a husband and a wife). They were part of the same Arab community as me, in which we met on different occasions and established a good rapport with each other, especially with the wife. The students were willing to participate in the pilot interviews to ensure that the questions were clear enough to be used effectively in real interviews. I interviewed the students individually in the college. Thematic analysis was used to examine the transcriptions from the pilot interviews. Through the process of evaluating the questions' clarity and comprehensibility with the help of the pilot research, I was able to make changes to them, including adding new questions. The feasibility and appropriateness of the questions were confirmed by the pilot study. According to the findings of the pilot study, I felt that 45 minutes was the perfect amount of time for interviews because no more information seemed to be acquired beyond that point. I was able to assess the interviewing technique during the piloting stage.

4.8   Data Analysis

Flick (2014) defines qualitative data analysis as "the interpretation and classification of linguistic (or visual) material" (p.370). It aims to interpret a huge amount of data within a framework to provide an explanation and presentation of the revealed results. A variety of goals might be the focus of qualitative data analysis such as describing a phenomenon or developing a hypothesis, while the ultimate goal is "to arrive at statements that can be generalised in one way or the other by comparing various materials or various texts or several cases" (Flick, 2014, p.370). Flick's definition highlights the idea that the study of qualitative data typically involves many levels of meaning "to make meaningful statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it" (ibid). Therefore, it is essential to read "between the lines" as has been suggested by Flick, as there could be some unconscious factors influencing people's attitudes and practices. Such factors might be expressed in a variety of ways according to Howitt (2013) including pauses, laughs, physical gestures, and indirect words. Sometimes what is not spoken can also be important and interesting. Data analysis begins at an early stage in the data collection phase, which is theoretically a key element of qualitative research. This is important because it "enables 'progressive focusing and selection of key issues for further investigation to be conducted" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.539). However, the objectives of the study and the nature of the collected data all have a sizable impact on choosing suitable methods and analytic strategies.

4.8.1   Thematic Approach

Thematic analysis is described as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes)" (Braun and Clarke,2006, p.79). It is commonly used for data analysis,

due to its relative simplicity and accessibility to different qualitative analysis techniques. Howitt (2013) considered it "an important and straightforward form of qualitative analysis that requires the researcher to identify a limited number of themes in order to adequately describe what is happening in textual data such as interviews" (p.157). Thematic analysis was adopted for its accessibility and applicability, its ability to provide a thorough understanding of the issues covered in the present study, its simplicity as it does not have a strict theoretical or methodological perspective, and its adaptability to fit with the employed theoretical framework of the study at hand.

Regardless, researchers using thematic analysis must provide specific details about how the analysis is carried out because it has been criticised for lacking reliable and dependable procedures (Howitt, 2013). Therefore, a researcher must obtain a full understanding of the data, which is acquired throughout the data-collecting stage during transcription and many readings of the data. A chief drawback of this is making the researcher's direct contribution to the analytical process seem insignificant as mentioned by Howitt (2013) "The task seems to be too easy - so long as a few themes are suggested and a few illustrative quotes are found, then the job of analysis is done" (p.177). In this study, it was used accompanied by the adopted theoretical framework to offer a clear understanding of the information gathered and how it will be properly evaluated.

I identified certain a priori themes through the literature which are related to the research aims and questions, the adopted framework, the pragmatic and interpretive paradigm, and the themes that emerged from the gathered data. The next section discusses the three primary steps in a thematic analysis: transcription, analysis, and theme identification (Howitt and Cramer, 2011, quoted in Howitt, 2013, p.178).

4.8.1.1   Transcription Process

Howitt (2013, p.179) argues that the transcribing process is "an early push or stimulus towards trying to understand and, therefore, analyse the data". Thus, it is considered an initial step for researchers to familiarise themselves with data, even though it should start during the data-collecting phase. In this study, I carried out data transcription while collecting data.

4.8.1.2   Analytic Process

As have been mentioned earlier, transcripts were examined to identify and develop themes. This process which is called the 'analytic offer' has many steps. The first step is getting familiar with the collected data. It is followed by coding and conceptualization, "processing and reprocessing" of data analysis to make sure that it is consistent with the data, dealing with challenges that arise during analysis and resolving them, and ongoing checks (Howitt, 2013).

1. **Themes and Sub-themes Identification**

Since the generated themes are meant to represent what is happening in data, the researcher has to refine and classify the themes and sub-themes that characterise them. Thematic analysis according to Clarke (2006) includes: data familiarisation through careful reading to find meanings, first codes production, codes classification into potential themes, themes purification, themes identification and labelling, and reports production (p.87-93). The next subsections discuss the data analysis approach.

2. **Familiarisation and Organisation**

Familiarising ones' self with the collected data is considered the initial phase of thematic analysis. This occurs through listening many times to the recorded data to guarantee

data's accessibility and to identify additional data that had significant value for the analysis procedure (Ritchie and Lewis,2003). According to Guest et al. (2012), the entire data should be transcribed. Thus, I transcribed the data generated from the interviews with the ESOL teacher and students, which helped me to remember the context of the interviews and to produce preliminary codes.

The transcription process was carried out in two steps. Firstly, the data was transcribed into Arabic, and then the transcript was translated into English. From the beginning, I chose to transcribe the entire interviews instead of summarising them. Then, the transcripts were checked with the participants to confirm that they accurately reflected their answers before moving to the second stage.

I moved to the next step, which is the translation process after the participants had checked the transcript and confirmed the connection between their replies and the transcript. Despite my translation background as a voluntary interpreter, translating was a hard process that required a deep understanding of word usage in social contexts. It was crucial to distinguish both the real meaning of the words and their translation. In situations where the students use terms that have different meanings in different contexts, I translated the meaning exactly from Arabic to English to ensure that the meanings were as similar as possible and that the message was understood effectively.

Accurate translation is an ethical obligation and it is crucial for the data's validity. On occasion, I added to or changed words that were unable to convey accurately from Arabic to English due to the lack of an equivalent term. Regmi et al. (2010) refer to this procedure as "Transliteration". Thus, I went over the translation several times to make sure that I was getting the most precise meaning and underlined certain key passages.

I validated the translation using member-check to ensure its trustworthiness. I sent distinct segments of several interviews to a reliable colleague who specialises in English to revise it. She double-checked the translated portions, particularly the ones marked as significant. This procedure was carried out in reverse, from Arabic to English and English to Arabic. There was a great deal of agreement among the interpretations. Some tips were taken from the member check regarding the translation process.

I chose those procedures for several reasons. The first was to make sure the overall background of every interview session was kept unique and understandable. Secondly, the technique helped me to become familiar with the data set by understanding and classifying data. Dörnyei (2007) refers to the stage of qualitative analysis as "pre-coding" and describes it as a concurrent phase in the transcribing process. As a result, I began to write down my overall remarks and notes on my ideas and problems that were developed from the data in the margins. These tactics served as the basis for the development of codes, subcodes, and themes of the research.

3. **Initial Codes Production**

Coding is described as the "brief descriptions of small chunks of data" (Howitt,2013, p. 176). It is the initial step in the process of generating themes by which data is broken down into manageable chunks for analysis (Denscombe, 2007). According to Maxwell (2005), researchers should start analysing data as soon as the first interview or observation is completed, and they should keep doing so for the duration of the research. This process allowed me to familiarise myself with the collected data to categorise important themes that may be investigated further while collecting data. I made a list of the key concepts and themes from each interview, along with suggestions for how they

may be expanded upon in the following ones. I continued tracking patterns emerging from the data with some explanations and analysis of potential relations. When I was coding my research data, I used a coding procedure similar to the one that was suggested by Creswell (2007), coding was merged into the transcribing and translating processes from the beginning. Consequently, I emphasised the essential and pertinent sections in the transcript that pertained to the subject under investigation and recorded my own observations. The codes were ultimately classified, identified, clarified, and revised until I became happy with their appropriateness and interrelation.

4. Themes Exploration

Finding themes requires classifying various codes into prospective themes and combining all related coded extracts and data into these themes. This procedure represented the beginning of organising and integrating several codes into a main theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In this step, comparing and contrasting the codes led to categorising the pertinent codes into groups of proper themes. By doing this, I created priori themes from these codes. Then, some other additional themes emerged (see Appendix 15 and 16) I identified themes by combining codes that contained the same notion and comparing codes with distinct ideas. Certain codes were categorised in accordance with the research pre-themes that were found via a washback literature search; as a theoretical framework for the study. It is crucial to make sure that thematic data from each of the identified topics fit together in a meaningful and unique way during this procedure.

However, in order to minimise repetition and to enable comparisons when needed, every theme was defined and distinguished from other themes. Therefore, an ongoing re-check

for the data with the coding was needed to optimise the match between the data, codes, and themes (Howitt, 2013).

5. Reports Presentation

In this last step of the thematic analysis, the data was thoroughly and methodically analysed under the recognised themes to address the research questions. I kept revising and distinguishing the themes on many occasions until they adequately reflected the extracts and the coded data. By the time I reached this point, these themes were classified and organised in a way to tell their tale in connection to the research questions.

However, I kept a research journal in which I documented my thoughts about the whole process of analysis and data collection stages. It was a crucial component of this study's analysis tools. As has been suggested by Stake (1995), this showed that I was continuously engaged in an analytical process.

4.9 Trustworthiness

Interpretive research uses the term "trustworthiness" as an equal measurement of validity and reliability in positivism (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004; Silverman, 2001). It was developed to highlight the distinctions between naturalistic and positivist research methods. In contrast to the ideas in positivist research, Guba (1981) develops four criteria that should be taken into account to guarantee reliability in qualitative research:

1- **Credibility**: refers to the techniques used to ensure that a truthful representation of participants' perspectives on the phenomena under consideration is being conveyed (Erlandson et al., 1993). Various strategies can be used to ensure that participants' opinions properly reflect the topic under investigation.

- The use of widely recognised research methodologies: I evaluated certain pre-themes from other studies with similar emphasis and features

- Long-term commitment involves establishing an initial understanding of the culture of organisations that participate to foster a sense of confidence amongst the investigator and participants before the commencement of the first data-collecting sessions. I established a strong rapport with most students who participated in the study, and I maintained communication with them throughout the entire data collection process. Nevertheless, I was conscious of the impact of such a connection on my view of washback in the setting (Silverman's, 2000).

- Triangulation: In relation to this case study, triangulation was achieved through the integration of four various data gathering tools that produced comprehensive data that enabled a profound knowledge about the impact of washback within the context.

2- **Transferability**: In qualitative research, generalisability remains up for debate. An argument highlighting the significance of determining the contextual elements that affect the case in naturalistic study and how they may prevent generalisability was presented by Hammersley et al. (2000). Nevertheless, Stake (2005) contends that although a case might seem distinct, it also serves as an illustration of a larger group context. Therefore, it is not necessary to exclude the possibility of transferability at once. A variety of strategies, including purposive sampling and extensive explanation, might help promote transferability in addition to the use of a reflexive journal. The research context was adequately explained in this study to

allow others to decide whether the current context is comparable to another well-known context and to support the findings' applicability in a different situation (Hammersley, 2008; Denscombe, 2010). In order to facilitate decisions regarding the transferability of the research findings, comprehensive descriptions that include information about the connections and complexities of the study setting, in which the participants built their experience, in addition to adequate, thorough explanations of the data generation methods, were provided. Furthermore, a thorough explanation of every stage of the study process from a methodological standpoint was provided. One way to think of the audit trails used for collecting data is as a reflexive record that helps achieve transferability. It included information on the study's schedule, a private journal detailing events, methodological choices and their justifications, and a record of all methodological choices and their justifications.

3- **Dependability:** is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the study results can be repeated with the same or comparable individuals. Creswell (2012) believes that this would be accomplished by maintaining a thorough record of the procedures and choices that were made about the study. Dependability can be accomplished by the use of interrelating data-gathering techniques and sources. The prototype model of research design, in which the procedures of the study should be disclosed in full, is another approach that might be used to solve this issue. Consequently, this would make it possible for other researchers to carry out the same study, even if they did not necessarily get the same findings. These

methods are consistent with my standard research methodology, which includes

data triangulation and dense explanation.

4- **Confirmability**: According to Patton (2005), confirmability is the process used to

make sure that the research findings represent the participant's thoughts and

experiences instead of the researcher's traits and preferences. To reduce the

impact of bias in the research, it is necessary to highlight the role that triangulation

plays in fostering such confirmability. The purpose of the pilot study was to make

sure that the produced data was appropriate for addressing the research questions

and that the participants could respond to the interview questions without being

misinterpreted. Thus, the researchers should explain and recognise the limitations

of their research methods as well as acknowledge and describe all of their views

and perceptions that affect their choices of research approaches compared to

alternative techniques in their settings.

4.10 Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

Ensuring that data-collecting techniques and findings are reliable and accurate in all

types of research is crucial. Validity and credibility are commonly employed in qualitative

research because they are essential in confirming the accuracy of the findings from both

perspectives: the participants and the researcher (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Internal

validity may be used in numerous contexts, such as using a research design and a variety

of techniques to gather data from various sources. According to Silverman (2011), the

level of validity might be determined by comparing the various data-gathering techniques.

External validity refers to how broadly the research findings can be generalised to other

situations and individuals. Cohen et al. (2010) state that to assess the settings and

participants and ascertain how the data may be applied to other contexts, including cultures, a comparison with other groups and situations may be made. However, due to possible differences in context and history, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that there may be threats to external validity if the research is applied to one group but not to another group.

Since the background and several other factors, like curriculum, assessment policy, and teaching techniques, besides assessment methods are nearly the same, the case study in this research is likely to be pertinent, and the conclusions may be important to diverse ESOL instructors. A thorough description of data must be included alongside the working hypotheses to allow readers to judge to what extent the results of the study are transferable to further comparable situations (Lincoln and Guba,1985). To accurately represent the study concerns through and after the process of data collection, the following procedures were used:

- I was highly aware of the potential effects of the political and social ideas, beliefs, feelings, or assumptions that may be seen as biased in the study discussions and conclusions owing to my convictions.

- I perceive my role as a researcher; thus, reflexivity was methodically used in my study to achieve consistency and reliability.

- I was able to gain a thorough grasp of participants' perceptions and experiences in the ESOL context by employing a variety of data collection methods, which improved research validity (Denscombe,2010).

- The external validity of this study was strengthened by my explanation of the investigated situation (Cohen et al., 2011).

- To motivate the participants, I explained the study's objectives which increased the research findings' validity and reliability.

- Interviews with the Entry 2 teacher and students were carried out after the observation to get direct information from the participants. Both approaches (observation and interviews) were utilised in conjunction with one another to assist in creating a complete image of the students' perspectives towards assessment and learning strategies.

- Semi-structured observation was used to ensure that no significant information was missed, which also improved the validity of the collected data.

- As a practical method for obtaining and confirming the accuracy and validity of the data, an audio recorder was used in the observation session.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in academic research is described as the suitability of the researcher's actions concerning the rights of participants and potential consequences. The following research was conducted following the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011). Several factors have been taken into account while performing this study. Since transparency is essential, I alerted the relevant authorities and other proper individuals to request permission to visit the college and meet the teachers and students. Similarly, the participants were provided with a clear knowledge of the research objectives to promote responses and to increase the validity and reliability of the research outcomes. Before the study, I explained verbally to the participants my major objectives and goals for conducting

this research, information about observation and interviews (how and why), and what would happen to the collected data. They were provided with a comprehensive view of the entire process of deciding whether or not to take part in the research (Bell, 2010). However, the participants were informed that they may leave the research at any moment without having to give a reason. Additionally, their personal information was anonymized, and their real names were not used in the analysis section (Creswell, 2012). The data was safely secured and only used for research purposes.

4.12   Summary

The philosophical viewpoints that guide the study paradigm and methodology were covered in this chapter. It also included an overview of the methodology, the study setting and design, as well as the sampling strategies, tools for gathering data, and methods for analysing data. The chapter has also discussed the study's ethical issues and the methodological framework of this study. The philosophical paradigm, research design, and research technique were also outlined in this chapter to give a complete account of the research. It further included details about the participants and the standards by which they were selected. Additionally, it included comprehensive explanations of the methods used for collecting data. Research data was scrutinised by identifying codes and themes using thematic data analysis techniques. The washback effect on the participants and the students' learning practices in the classroom will be presented in the following chapter. The chapters will offer an analysis and discussion of the data in light of the research objectives and theoretical considerations.

Chapter 5:

Qualitative Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The analytic results from twelve semi-structured interviews with adult participants are introduced and examined in this chapter. The interviews aimed to explore how the students felt about assessment procedures in the context of ESOL. A classroom observation took place in an Entry 2 classroom. It aimed to inspect the assessment practices used by the teacher, either directly or indirectly, and how the observed students interacted with these practices. Follow-up semi-structured interviews with six students from the observed classroom in addition to the observed teacher took place after the observation. They were followed by a focus group with the same six Entry 2 students after the ESOL exam. It aimed to inspect the impact of test preparation practices on students' learning practices and exam results.

5.2 Data Analysis for Students' Interviews

The qualitative data obtained from interviewing twelve students was applied to answer the study's research questions. The thematic analysis approach was used to achieve this goal since it was seen as a useful and adaptable strategy (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The names of the interviewed participants were treated with total confidentiality during the data analysis. They were given pseudonyms as had been agreed upon before the interviews. The following themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis procedure following the study questions:

Theme 1: Assessment approaches used throughout ESOL courses.

Theme 2: Students' perceptions of assessment.

Theme 3: The impact of evaluations on learning.

Theme 4: Causes of assessment effect.

5.3   Assessment Approaches

It is important to note that assessment approaches in this study refer to assessment methods and activities that teachers used to evaluate their students in the ESOL classrooms at all levels, in addition to the ESOL examination that took place at the end of the academic year.

The analysed data showed that different assessment methods were used to evaluate students' language proficiency and progress, as shown in Table 5.1. They were divided into summative assessment and formative assessment practices. The analysed data revealed that summative evaluation (e.g. exams) was not the primary instrument in the assessment process. The ESOL exam was only used to assess students' progression at the end of the academic year for classification purposes.

Table 5. 1: Current Assessment Methods in ESOL classrooms

Level Taught	Assessment Methods
Pre-entry	Summative Assessment Format Assessment Constrictive Feed Back Peer assessment
Entry 1	Summative Assessment Format Assessment Constrictive Feed Back Peer assessment Self-assessment
Level 2	Summative Assessment Format Assessment Constrictive Feed Back Peer assessment Self-assessment

5.4   Students' Perceptions of Assessment

The analysed data revealed that students' perceptions of assessment practices varied. It showed that the students had two types of perceptions: negative and positive as a result of the assessment impact on their perceptions.

5.4.1   Students' Perceptions of Summative Assessment

The students recognised that moving from one level to another depended mainly on their results on the ESOL exam. They believed that achieving this goal would help them to achieve their objectives regarding finding jobs or continuing their studies, as well as integrating into society, thus, their main focus during the course was on passing the exams. Students' perceptions towards the ESOL exam varied according to their circumstances and objectives. Some of the students supported having exams while others were against using them. Abdullah, a Level 2 student, considered using the ESOL exams to evaluate his English proficiency as acceptable. He stated:

"I still believe that exams are important to evaluate us and to determine our level based on their results. I prefer to take exams as it is the only way to get a certificate to help me pursue my studies in the future, and to have a decent job."

Similarly, Abeer, Level 1, believed that the ESOL exam provided her with genuine results compared to other assessment methods. She claimed that:

"Exams can measure our abilities fairly, unlike other assessment methods which can be affected by students' circumstances or teachers' bias."

Students, similar to Abeer, believed that exams were more reliable than other assessment practices to evaluate their abilities without being affected by students' circumstances or

teachers' preconceptions. Accordingly, students who preferred exams over other assessment practices believed that exams were better and easier than other assessment methods. Mohammad said:

"I think that exams are a more familiar method as nearly most of us tried exams before. They are better than other new assessment methods that require different ways of answering."

Some of the participants, like Ali, held a belief that scored exams were more reliable. They proclaimed that feedback-based assessment may be influenced by teachers' prejudgment. The students who had positive perceptions of summative assessment were more concerned about assessment fairness. For example, Ali said:

"The use of other assessment methods for evaluation is not preferable for two reasons. First, they may not assess my real skills properly. Second, the results may be affected by the teacher's prejudgment. Therefore, having an exam is the best method to ensure success."

In contrast, some students had different perceptions that contrasted the above-mentioned attitudes towards summative assessment.

Students' previous comments revealed two different attitudes towards summative assessment. Some students thought that exams were a more acceptable and unbiased method to evaluate their progression. Therefore, they supported using exams for evaluation instead of formative assessment methods. Whereas, exams were criticised because of their difficulty and negative effect on students' learning and motivation compared to other assessment methods. The students' attitudes were based on their

circumstances and previous experiences in which exams were regarded as the main tool for assessing students' progression.

In the next section, the students' reasons for their perceptions of formative assessment methods will be explained.

5.4.2   Students' Perceptions of Formative Assessment

Some students at Entry levels had negative perceptions of some formative practices (e.g. peer assessment/self-assessment). They expressed their dissatisfaction with the use of these practices as they were considered higher than their language proficiency level. The students believed that these practices would not assess their true competence fairly and, thus, affect their learning progression. Consequently, some assessment practices as peer assessment were considered a waste of time by the students who lacked the required knowledge to implement them. Nisreen, Entry 1, said:

"It was the first time that I had ever been asked to assess others' work. I did not know how to do this and I did not know why I was doing it. How can I assess others' work when I am not sure about my work? I think this activity is just a waste of time."

The student's comment raised an important point regarding the importance of clarifying the objectives and mechanism of each assessment practice early in the course. This will help ESOL students to work towards achieving these goals and, as a result, to improve their learning. This point aligns with John Biggs' (1999) belief that "what and how students learn depends to a major extent on how they think they will be assessed" (p. 141).

Most of the participants who opposed using self or peer assessment believed that it was the teachers' role to check their work and to provide them with the appropriate feedback.

These attitudes were based on their previous experience with assessment in the Syrian context in which the teacher-centred approach and summative assessment practices had been dominant. Harlen and Crick (2003, p.170) state that "the use of tests not only inhibits the practice of formative assessment but has a negative impact on motivation for learning".

On the other hand, other participants also showed positive attitudes toward formative assessment practices due to their role in improving their language skills and learning in a stress-free environment. Consequently, the majority of participants preferred formative assessment. They believed that it could be used for motivational purposes to improve language learning. Ali commented on this issue by saying:

"I believe that formative assessment can also evaluate students' real knowledge and abilities better than the examination."

The next section discusses the impact of the assessment practices on students' learning.

5.5   The Effects of Assessment on the Learning Process

Based on the student's responses, the positive and negative impacts of assessment methods on their learning in ESOL classrooms will be investigated in this section.

5.5.1   Summative Assessment

Mostly 67% (eight students out of twelve) of the interviewed students believed that summative assessment methods negatively affected their learning objectives and practices, while the other students believed the opposite (four students out of twelve).

5.5.1.1 Positive Effect

The summative assessment was one of the methods used in both contexts: Syrian and ESOL. Thus, the students' perceptions were mainly based on their previous experiences where exams were considered the main tool to assess students' progression. Most of the students who preferred to be evaluated using exams believed that they had a positive effect on their learning.

- **Evaluating the learning process**

Mohammad thought that using exams at the end of the term was acceptable to identify their learning problems. He stated:

"Although exams are not the only way to assess our competence, I believe that they motivate us to study and to identify the gaps in our learning process."

Some students thought that exams were a more acceptable and unbiased way to evaluate their progression, thus they supported using them over other alternative assessment methods.

5.5.1.2 Negative Effect

Most of the participants agreed that the use of summative assessment might result in some negative effects on their learning process, as explained in the following sub-sections

- **Adopting Rote Learning**

Most of the participants believed that summative assessment practices did not help in improving their real skills and abilities. The analysed data showed that the ESOL exam forced some students to unwillingly adopt some learning methods that rely on memorisation to pass the exam, which would affect their language learning. This has been

stated by Hughes (2003) who believes that focusing on memorisation will neglect other skills that are critical to acquiring the language successfully.

Most of the interviewed students claimed that summative assessment methods encouraged rote learning instead of understanding. This washback effect was pointed out by Pan (2009) who claims that learning small parts of the knowledge for the exam will disregard authentic learning. In this context, Mohammad said:

"Nearly all of us have experienced memorising to pass the exam. We used to focus on memorising the grammatical rules and new vocabulary, and ignored applying them in our speaking or writing which affected our learning negatively."

- **Anxiety**

Despite the student's acceptance of the use of the summative assessment methods, exams were criticised for increasing students' stress and anxiety. Hala commented on this issue, she said:

"I feel too anxious before the exams. I do not want to fail because I do not want to stay at the same level. My friends share the same feeling, especially those whose English is not as good as others."

The interviewed students also stated that the ESOL exam affected their motivation to learn and increased their anxiety before and after the exam (Pan, 2009, p. 261). Some students claimed that they became more concerned about the exam's results, as these results would be used for deciding their level.

- **Studying to Test**

Assigning the exam material by the teacher was another negative effect of the assessment methods. Although test preparation strategies may improve students' performance on the test, they could affect the development of their skills (Ahmmed and Rahman, 2019). Alia commented on her experience as a pre-entry student with these strategies. She said:

"Our teacher sometimes tells us what to focus on for the reading exam, especially in the revision period before the exam. She also specifies the material for speaking and writing exams. We mostly memorise the material that we have already studied in the class to pass the exam."

5.5.2 Formative Assessment

The positive and negative impacts of formative assessment methods on students' learning in ESOL classrooms will be investigated in this section.

5.5.2.1 Positive Effect

Based on students' perceptions of assessment, formative assessment is still believed to have more positive effects on the learning process. Therefore, the majority of the students supported using formative assessment in the classroom to develop their language proficiency.

1. Improving Language Skills

Some participants, from the advanced levels (Level 1 and Level 2), described their experience with formative assessment as useful since they improved their language skills

and knowledge positively. Abeer described her experience with self-assessment, she said:

"The teacher sometimes asks us to evaluate our answers by comparing them with the given criteria. At the beginning, I did not know how to evaluate my work by myself, but it helped me later to reflect on my learning and increased my motivation."

The above extract shows that the student's positive experience with formative assessment affected her learning positively. It provided her with the opportunity to reflect on her learning which increased her awareness of its strengths and weaknesses as well as her learning motivation. The students, who adopted positive perceptions, believed that formative assessment practices helped them to improve their language skills as well as their achievement (Ainsworth and Viegut, 2006).

2. **Learning in a Cooperative Environment**

Most of the interviewed students claimed that assessment methods encouraged them to be more involved in the assessment process and to be more active learners, which affected their learning positively. They became, for example, more aware of their learning goals and developed critical thinking to reflect on their learning. Abeer commented on this by saying:

"The different assessment methods helped me to explore my abilities as a language learner. For example, working in groups improved my speaking skills and self-confidence Self-assessment and peer assessment encouraged me to reflect critically on my learning, to improve my weaknesses and to support my strengths. In general, they developed my learning experience and reinforced my understanding of the evaluation system."

3. Constructive Feedback

The students also argued that assessment methods permitted them to observe their learning and to improve their learning strategies. They claimed that the teacher's feedback, for example, guided them to improve their performance. It also helped them to increase their self-awareness and to gain more confidence. The students normally received feedback after their written or oral activities. Qais declared how feedback was helpful. He explained:

"I regularly receive feedback after each assessment practice or activity; thus, I became more self-confident and motivated to learn. It teaches me how to avoid my mistakes in the future."

4. Motivated/ Active Learners

Based on data analysis, the findings show that positive washback affected students' motivation to learn and to engage in the educational process. One of the reasons was the role of these practices in encouraging students to engage in the educational and evaluation processes. As a result, they became more responsible for their learning and active learners instead of passive receptors of information.

5.5.2.2   Negative Effect

Four out of the twelve interviewed students showed negative perceptions of formative assessment. They believed that some assessment methods, such as self and peer assessment, affected them negatively and left them demotivated.

1.   **Ignoring Individual Differences**

Other students showed different opinions when they were asked about self-assessment practice. Salma, an Entry 1 student, believed that self-assessment was more suitable for students in advanced levels. She said:

"I think that this type of assessment is more suitable for students at higher levels who have better language knowledge. It is unfair to ask me to evaluate my answers as I am unfamiliar with this type of assessment. I do not believe that these practices will help me to improve my learning."

2. **Adoption of Unfavourable Practices**

The students' negative perceptions and attitudes towards the assessment practices affected their motivation to participate in the learning process. These negative perceptions of assessment encouraged the adoption of unfavourable practices that affected assessment objectives, such as relying on other students to accomplish the assessment tasks or copying others' answers. These practices created unreliable outcomes for assessment (Weir, 2005), and negative washback since these outcomes did not represent the students' real knowledge and language proficiency. Abeer, for example, believed that homework was another load added to her responsibilities as a mum. She complained:

"I prefer to go home and relax after a long day in the college. I am a busy mum and I do not have time to study at home, thus, I may just copy the answers from my classmates, or I may ask for help."

In the earlier extract, the participant student justified her practice because of her personal circumstances. Asking for help, in such situations, might negatively impact students' learning, especially if it is about copying the answers without thinking.

3. Anxiety

Suad, a Pre-entry student, described her experience with formative assessment forms. She said:

"I always get anxious when the teacher asks us to work in groups or pairs because my English is not good enough."

The students also claimed that they always had to be ready despite their knowledge and language proficiency, which increased pressure on them. Consequently, some students claimed that to avoid that feeling, they relied on other students to explain and answer the activities for them, especially during group work. Assessment in such cases could negatively affect their language learning and progression.

5.6 The Causes of Assessment Effect on Learning

This section focuses on the main reasons that resulted in the previous effects, and how students reacted to these effects during the course. In this section, the reasons which had been given by the students were explored and analysed.

5.6.1 Previous Learning Experience

The participants of this research study revealed several factors which had some positive and negative effects on the educational process. Hala, for example, clarified her negative perception by saying:

"I spent many years memorising for the exams and forgetting most of the memorised information. I do not care about marks; I just want to develop my speaking skills and use the language efficiently."

Hala's previous experience with examinations and their effect on her learning was the keystone of her perception of summative assessment. The analysed data showed that memorisation was the main learning method in Syria, which had a negative effect on knowledge acquisition. In most cases, memorisation resulted in forgetting most of the acquired information, leaving the students with insufficient competence since their motivation was associated with passing the exam and moving to the next level (Pan and Newfields, 2012). Students with no or little knowledge about the different types of assessment practices may find it hard to follow the teacher's instructions. Based on this, it can be argued that students' unfamiliarity and lack of experience with the formative assessment practices hindered them from accomplishing the assessment tasks and from achieving their goals.

5.6.2 Language Proficiency Level

On the other hand, some students formed negative attitudes towards self and peer assessment. These attitudes were due to their belief that these methods did not correspond with their language abilities, or with their learning experience. As a result, they

considered these methods to be a waste of time, as they could not assess either their work (self-assessment) or others' work (peer assessment) due to their language proficiency.

5.6.3 Unfamiliarity with Assessment Practices and Objectives

One of the reasons for the students' negative perceptions was due to their unfamiliarity with assessment practices used in the ESOL context since their knowledge of assessment was mostly limited to their previous experience with assessment in the Syrian context. According to Weir (2005), students' success on a task depends on how familiar they are with the content knowledge needed to complete that task. Therefore, students should be familiarised with the assessment tasks to have sufficient knowledge to carry them out.

Similarly, the students' unfamiliarity with the aims of assessment goals, in addition to their poor linguistic level, affected their perceptions of formative assessment practices. Mohammad, Nesreen, and Ali criticised this type of assessment due to the previously mentioned reasons. Ali, Entry 2, justified his opinion by saying:

"I do not know the purpose of most of the assessment activities; thus, I may end in most cases without accomplishing the task or even achieving the desired goal."

Nearly all the interviewed students agreed that the exams aimed to evaluate their progress and language proficiency. However, not all of the students exactly knew the aim of formative assessment practices, which affected their perceptions negatively. They criticised formative assessment because the aims of some assessment methods were not clear. Students' unfamiliarity with the objectives of the assessment practices made it

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hard for them to achieve their goals. Therefore, students should be familiarised with the objectives and different types of assessment practices.

5.6.4   Age and Personal Circumstances

Students' age and circumstances may negatively affect their perceptions of summative assessment. Ali said:

"I do not believe that I should be examined at the end of the year for many reasons. Firstly, I am a 63-year-old barber, and I think that I am old enough to study for exams. Secondly, I am not looking forward to pursuing a degree or having a certificate. I just want to learn how to speak English fluently so I can work again in a barber shop."

Another cause behind these effects was students' personal or social background which interfered with students' learning. Some of the students, especially female students, were uncomfortable learning or participating in gender mix sessions, which negatively affected their learning process. This resulted from their conservative beliefs, influenced by Syrian culture, as a result, they refrained from speaking or sharing their ideas with men.

The next section will analyse the data generated from Entry 2 classroom observation, followed by follow-up interviews with the classroom teacher and participants.

5.7   Data Analysis for Classroom Observation

The observational data provided a detailed description of the assessment practices used during the lesson and showed the extent to which those practices affected students' perceptions. In analysing the observational data, the focus was mainly on describing the assessment methods that were used and how the students interacted with them. The main aim of this section is to provide a clear image of the assessment practices in ESOL

classes, and their effect on students' perceptions and learning. The next section introduces the observed classroom teaching and assessment practices that took place in the Entry 2 classroom.

5.7.1 Classroom Assessment Activities

The observed teacher used various assessment activities during the lesson, which was noticed during the observation. The lesson was designed to develop students' cultural awareness and English language proficiency. Febrina (2017) suggests that the way a language is used by native speakers should be reflected in classroom teaching to motivate students to communicate in an authentic environment. The teacher asked the students to work in pairs and to use the taught grammatical rules in their sentences. It has been noticed that Syrian female students hesitated to participate in many speaking activities as they found it hard to talk about their hobbies in front of other students. Karya et al. (2022) believe that the majority of English language learners find it difficult to practise speaking since they are scared to initiate conversations or express themselves in English. The teacher used pair work and group work activities to encourage the students to participate and to speak. Then, she asked them to evaluate each other's work, which is considered a peer assessment activity. The analysed data revealed that students' previous experience of learning affected the way they perceived the assessment practices. Arabic was used among the female participants throughout the activity for clarification purposes. The intervention of the first language helped the students to understand the assessment task (Khan et al., 2021). Weir (2005) claims that teachers frequently provide students with instructions regarding the test to familiarise them with the format of the test, and explicitly explain how much time should be assigned to each

question. The same has been observed in the classroom as the teacher explained to the students how to accomplish the exam task by using the time effectively. The impact of the cultural background of the Syrian female students was noticed in this activity, which emphasises the importance of understanding students' cultural and social backgrounds since they might affect the educational process (Matulionienė and Pundziuvienė, 2014).

The next section explores the teacher's teaching approach and assessment practices that were used throughout the lesson during classroom observation.

5.7.2 Classroom Teaching Approaches

The teacher's choice of teaching approach and assessment activities was based on the ESOL curriculum and her experience as an ESOL teacher (Johnson, 1994). She stressed the importance of using non-traditional teaching methods to achieve the intended objectives of the curriculum. The findings from the classroom observation and follow-up interview with the participant teacher reveal that the teacher used the student-centred approach to achieve the objectives of the lesson. The alignment between the curriculum objectives and assessment objectives enhanced the effective use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is considered one of the teaching methods that is consistent with the student-centred teaching approach, in the observed classroom. The teacher's use of this approach was opposed to what the students had experienced before in the Syrian context. The CLT approach was used in the classroom to encourage the development of the students' language skills and to prepare them to speak confidently in real life. This objective aligned with the objectives of the assessment process in the ESOL context. It also positively affected students' learning and perceptions towards assessment practices.

5.7.2.1 Student-Centred Teaching Approach

The teacher depended on the student-centred approach in teaching the ESOL content in the Entry 2 classroom. Her choice of using this approach allowed her to focus on achieving the educational objectives and not on teaching "to the exam". The teacher's role was clear during the classroom observation as she served as a facilitator, whilst the students were more active in their learning. The subsequent interview excerpt with one of the students demonstrates the significant impact of this teaching approach on his learning. Jamal said:

"I remember that our teachers in Syria used to spend most of the class time explaining, which left us with no time for practising the language skills. They always aimed to finish the textbook before the end of the year. When I joined the college, everything was different. The teachers used to encourage us to communicate most of the time. Although it was hard to do so at the beginning, it helped me to develop my skills."

This extract illustrates the effect of using a student-centred teaching approach on students' perceptions and learning. The use of this approach increased the student's opportunities to participate in classroom activities and to acquire the English language, unlike the one that had been used in Syrian classrooms. This finding shows that the focus of the ESOL teacher was on teaching the language communicatively and not on teaching "to the exam", and indicates the existence of positive washback in the setting of the study. Overall, the analysed data showed a good alignment between the aims of assessment practices and the teaching approach. An explanation of the role of the teacher concerning assessment methods in the classroom is covered in the following section.

5.7.2.2   ESOL Teacher's Role

The classroom observation showed that the role of the teacher in the classroom varied as she used to be a "co-communicator", counsellor, and facilitator (Alam, 2013, p.29). She used to explain, give examples, involve students in the learning process, and provide feedback. Her way of teaching and carrying out the activities showed an alignment between teaching and assessment objectives. Her CLT approach to teaching was different from the traditional teaching approach that had been used in the Syrian context, which has been always criticised (Scrivener,2005). Back then, the teacher had controlled the class and explained most of the lesson time while the students had mostly been passive learners. That learning atmosphere had demotivated the students, while the learning background of the ESOL classroom has been more appealing for the students to participate. The taught topic was attractive, authentic, culturally appropriate, and related to the student's real life. It helped to increase learners' awareness of the language (Dogancay,2005). On the other hand, the teacher kept providing the students with constructive feedback, supporting them, and considering their needs and abilities. She explained her view by saying.

"I try to create a suitable environment for my students to learn, through encouraging them and engaging them in the learning process and to be more confident to use the language without being worried of making mistakes."

Raising students' self-confidence, motivating them to participate, and helping them to improve their four skills were the objectives of the lesson, as the teacher suggested during the interview. To achieve all these objectives, she used different assessment practices throughout the lesson. She used classroom discussion, peer assessment, formative

assessment activities, classroom observation, and feedback. During the observation, the teacher referred to the exam and suggested some helpful techniques to pass it. For instance, when she was asked about the exam, she explained the techniques of answering the questions in both listening and reading activities. Her guidelines about the test came due to students' continuous requests to know everything about the exam. This situation was noticed many times during the lesson as the students kept asking about the exam and the expected material after each activity. The final examination was not the main aim of the lesson for the teacher, but it has been mentioned since the college assessment policy includes examinations as a part of the evaluation process. The following section highlights the implemented learning material and its relation to assessment methods.

5.7.2.3 ESOL Learning Material

The analysed data showed that the ESOL curriculum was relevantly suitable for the student's level. The teacher emphasised that her assessment methods aimed to achieve the curriculum's objectives. She said:

"The curriculum has a variety of interesting topics relevant to students' interests. All the assessment methods are intended to achieve the curriculum objectives and to develop students' language skills".

The teacher claimed that she could make some alterations to the classroom material either by adding relevant materials or replacing some topics based on the students' needs. She also showed readiness to simplify her teaching and evaluation processes to meet these needs. The students' learning material consisted of the distributed worksheets during the lesson. The observed teacher stated that she was providing the students with

various worksheets during each lesson to check their knowledge and develop their competence. She added:

"I regularly use the curriculum as a guide to provide the students with the needed learning material. It provides me with the different topics that suit their level and achieve the lesson goals".

According to the teacher, ESOL teachers were required to adhere to the pedagogical instructions provided by the college either for teaching or evaluating students' competence. This was apparent in her teaching and evaluation methods during the observation. Since the final exam was just used for classification purposes, the teacher did not concentrate on preparing the students for the exams or teaching the exam. Nevertheless, she mentioned that the students had two weeks before the final exam to review the exam's material. During this period, the teacher reviewed the important material and gave the students the chance to practise some mock exams. The analysed data showed that the observed teacher's main aim was to help the students to master the language and pass the final exam, therefore, she focused on developing students' language skills and grammatical abilities by using different types of assessment practices and activities. The next section explores the aims of the observed students for learning English.

5.7.2.4 Students' Learning Practices

The findings reveal that the teaching methods used by the teacher had a substantial influence on affecting students' learning in ESOL courses. The analysed data revealed that students' learning practices had been affected by their motivation. Although passing the exam was not the main objective of the curriculum, students tended to adopt some

learning strategies to learn for the exam. This has been noticed through the students' behaviours in the classroom and their answers during the interviews. They asserted that they aimed to develop their English language knowledge and skills in addition to passing the exam. The findings show that passing the exam was another vital goal for most of the students who wanted to move to the next level and move out of college. To achieve this goal students might adopt some traditional learning practices since the results of the ESOL exam are used to determine their advancement to the subsequent level. Therefore, the ESOL final exam can be regarded as a high-stakes exam since its marks are used by teachers to render significant choices regarding grade promotion or graduation. Several research studies in various contexts considered learning to the test a typical washback of high-stakes exams (e.g. Mogapi, 2016; Xie and Andrews, 2013). According to these studies, students frequently focus on exam preparation materials. The study findings show that the observed students focused during the lesson on the exercises that would be included in the exam. The students would also practice the exam during the two-week review period, through practising the exam-related content and mock exam papers. The findings also revealed that the students developed some learning strategies to pass the exam such as rote learning, which contradicted the CLT teaching approach used by the teacher to encourage communicative learning. On the other hand, the students compared studying for the ESOL exam and their previous experience in the Syrian context. They claimed that both experiences were similar. Sara, for example, explained the similarity by saying:

"I think that studying for the ESOL exam is similar to studying for the final exams in Syria. We have to memorise the exam material to pass the exam."

The other reason for preferring memorisation as the best learning strategy was related to students' inadequate knowledge of different assessment practices during their earlier experiences in Syria. Accordingly, they considered memorising as the optimal learning technique for preparation for the ESOL exam. The findings of this study also found that rote learning among students was encouraged because the exam questions were similar to classroom activities. Ali highlighted that:

"The teacher keeps telling us that the exam will be similar to what we study in the classroom, even the speaking exam will be about the same topics. Therefore, I will memorise all the important material to pass the exam."

This extract shows that the agreement between the content of the teaching and exam materials was significant in directing students to adopt memorisation as a learning strategy (Foster, 2013; Saukah, 2015). This impact disagreed with the fact that the ESOL curriculum stressed the importance of applying language skills and not rote learning.

5.7.2.5 The Observed Assessment Activities

The analysed data indicated that the observed teacher verified her assessment practices to match the objectives of the curriculum. The study findings show that the assessment activities were directed towards improving students' progress. However, the teacher mentioned that she may limit these practices during the two-week revision period. She stated:

"I normally limit my teaching and assessment practices to fit in with the two-week review period. In the meantime, I continue using different assessment activities and methods to develop students' proficiency."

The students described their experience with the assessment practices used during the observed lesson as useful. Lila, for example, commented on the use of peer assessment activity. She said:

"The teacher always asks us to work together and to check each other work. Although this experience was new and confusing at the beginning, it improved my speaking skills and increased my self-confidence."

Although students' language skills would be tested in the exam, the teacher focused in the classroom on developing these skills in general and not on teaching the content of the test. She allocated her assessment activities to develop students' skills stated in the curriculum. By doing this, she avoided the negative impact of training students for the final exam during the lesson, which has been criticised by many researchers (e.g. Aftab et al., 2014; Shih, 2007). When the teacher was asked if the ESOL exam had an impact on her classroom assessment activities, she declined:

"No, but sometimes I focus on some key tasks that are expected in the exam. I allow the students enough time for practising, and I keep providing them with the needed feedback till they master them."

Throughout the observation, the instructor ignored answering the student's questions regarding the exam and focused on explaining the next activity. However, she clarified during the interview that students in Entry levels normally have a two-week revision period at the end of the course to practise for the exam. She illustrated her idea by saying:

"Before the reading exam, for example, I explain to the students what to expect and how to answer. They also have the chance to practice some mock exam papers to familiarise themselves with the nature of the exam."

The students were satisfied with this opportunity since it would help them to pass the exam. This finding supports Cheng et al.'s (2015) claim that the activities that are used to prepare students for the exam are preferred globally. Eman confirmed that by saying:

"Although the teacher did not highlight the possible questions that may come in the final examination, she promised to revise the important parts related to the exam at the end of the course. This will help me too much in the exam."

The previous extracts revealed that students' test-taking strategies would be developed through practising similar questions or mock-exam papers during the revision period. The teacher thought that practising the exam might be more helpful for the students at Entry levels despite its undesirable consequences on their learning methods since the students might neglect to develop their skills and knowledge in favour of passing the exam. The students would become more familiar with the questions of the exam when practising similar questions or versions of the ESOL exam through these strategies. This finding supports Barnes' (2017) argument that a test-preparation course may not exemplify optimal practices in language education or promote a communicative language approach, but it may ensure that students get satisfactory scores. The students' comments showed that they preferred these practices to ensure passing the exam. The effect of this strategy on students' learning will be discussed further in the next section.

5.7.2.6 Students' Aims Behind Learning English

After classroom observation, the students were enquired during the follow-up interviews about their primary objective for studying English. All the participants said that their primary objective was to communicate in English.

Although they all shared the same main aim, each of them had his or her own goal. These goals varied from finding a job, completing courses and getting a qualification, helping their children with their homework, socialising with other people, and passing the Life in the UK test to become a citizen. When they were also asked about their view of the various methods that were implemented during the lesson, and to what extent they helped them to achieve their aims, they criticised some of the assessment activities, as they were deemed to be incompatible with their aims. Lila said that her main aim as a mum was simply to help her children with their homework. When she was asked about the impact of classroom assessment techniques on achieving this goal, she claimed that they did not help her to achieve her goal quickly. She said:

"As a mum, I aim to learn how to speak English quickly to help my children inside and outside the school. I believe that some of these methods are unnecessary because they waste most of my time as an adult student and delay the achievement of my goal."

She argued that some assessment activities were not essential in her present situation as an adult learner since her main aim for joining the course was only to use English in her daily life. This prompts an inquiry into the congruence between students' learning goals and assessment methodologies. The student claimed that the assessment methods did not align with her aims and objectives. Other participants had different opinions that contradicted the above comment. They believed that the assessment methods helped

them master the language and achieve their learning objectives. The analysed data revealed that the diversity of students' aims could be one of the reasons behind the students' different perceptions of assessment. The findings suggest that sharing the objectives of the various assessment methods with students may help them to be more responsible for their learning.

5.8   Washback Effect

The analysed data revealed that the pressure of the exam was noticed during the observational session. The teacher felt that pressure as the students kept constantly asking about the exam's material. She tried hard to comfort the students by giving hints about the included material, especially speaking skills activities. She also explained how to answer the exam questions. This focus on the examination material might lead to adopting memorising as a learning strategy. Some of the students believed that exams were just a source of pressure that should not be experienced at their age as adult learners. Weir (2005) states that test-taker's motivation may have an impact on their test-taking strategies and results. As a result, some students would adopt cramming to pass the exam, since they believed that examinations were the only way to motivate them to learn.

After the examination, teachers evaluate their students' progress and decide their level based on their results. All the students' macro skills are assessed at the end of the academic year, while in the Syrian context, skills such as speaking and listening were disregarded since they were excluded from the mid-term or final examinations. The effect of the Syrian educational experience led students to develop certain views about assessment methods. They believed that examinations were the main assessment

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practice based on their previous experiences, which influenced their perceptions and their learning methods. The pressure of the final exams was criticised by most of the students. In the next section, students' beliefs about the curriculum will be discussed.

5.9   Students' Beliefs about the Curriculum

Students, in general, believed that the learnt materials (content) were acceptable as they met their level and needs. Ali referred to a similar idea that has been raised about the used material. He said:

"I think that this curriculum is somehow easy and interesting. I do not have any problem with it, on the contrary, I feel comfortable learning it this way as it matches my level."

In contrast, some of the participants believed that the provided materials were somehow hard which restricted their learning process and negatively affected their motivation to study. They considered learning grammar, for example, irrelevant and it demotivated them (Richard and Renandya, 2002). The findings of the follow-up semi-structured interviews with the observed teacher and Entry 2 students will be addressed in the subsequent section.

5.10   The Findings of the Follow-up Interviews

The findings of the follow-up interviews are presented in the following sub-sections.

5.10.1 ESOL participants' perceptions of assessment

This sub-section starts with analysing the participants' perception of the connection between the ESOL curriculum, teaching, and classroom assessment practices which generated washback in the ESOL setting. Then, it discusses the impact of assessment

on the ESOL students' motivation. A discussion of the perceptions of the observed teacher and students of the ESOL exam used for assessing their learning outcomes is also presented. For ethical considerations, the participants are anonymised in the data narrative by using pseudonyms.

5.10.2 ESOL Curriculum, teaching, and assessment practices

The methods of teaching and learning are significantly affected by the purpose and design of the test. It has been suggested that teaching approaches and curriculum objectives must align with assessment to evaluate students' achievements of these objectives (Earl, 2003). Thus, students' motivation and learning results can be hindered by assessment when it does not align with the teaching approaches or learning objectives. The findings in this study showed an alignment between the ESOL curriculum and assessment practices in the ESOL classrooms. In addition, the participants' perceptions contributed to providing clear insights into how the Entry 2 teacher and students experienced washback in the ESOL context.

5.10.3 Assessment and Curriculum Alignment

The observation of the Entry 2 classroom revealed that the aims of the English language curriculum and the assessment practices aligned with one another. The ESOL curriculum focused on helping students improve their language abilities, whereas the assessment practices aimed to assess these skills to identify which language abilities have to be improved. The teacher commented on this alignment as follows in the follow-up interview:

"There is a similarity between what I teach and the assessment practices that I use in the classroom. I think that they are compatible and the relation between them is useful."

The teacher's understanding of the objective of teaching English is reflected in the positive association she described in the previous statement. She asserted that her instructional goals followed the educational objectives specified in the curriculum. According to the teacher, the main goal of teaching the ESOL curriculum was to develop students' communicative competence. Therefore, the teacher concentrated on improving students' language abilities generally rather than preparing them for the test. She commented on this by saying:

"The curriculum aims to prepare the students to acquire the language and to integrate into society through developing their English language proficiency and cultural awareness. It also teaches them how to use the acquired knowledge in their daily life after finishing college."

The teacher's perception of language teaching purpose was attributed to the focus of the ESOL exam and the curriculum content material. Furthermore, it was found that the alignment had an impact on the perceptions of the students of the goal of ESOL English language education. The findings reveal that four out of the six participants (Mohammad, Laila, Eman, and Jamal) had positive perspectives of the objectives of curriculum and evaluation practices. The participants perceived English language education in the ESOL setting as comparable to the English language used in real life. Eman, for instance, said:

"The teacher helps us to develop our English skills in general and not only to pass the exam. Here, I have the opportunity to use the language and practise it. In Syria, the only focus of teaching was to finish the curriculum for the exam."

The student previously stressed the value of studying the curriculum to enhance their English knowledge and language abilities through assessment practices instead of just passing the exam. The participants' main objective was to improve all language skills and not to memorise test discrete points as they had experienced previously in Syria. The students valued the importance of language teaching and learning in the ESOL context. This study's results indicate that the alignment between the ESOL curriculum goals and the emphasis on assessment procedures significantly influenced students' views of the purpose of English teaching and learning.

5.10.4 The Assessment Effect on Teaching

The assessment impact on teaching is another finding in this study. Although teaching approaches used by the teacher during the observed lesson aligned with the curriculum's objectives, the study found that the teacher was expected to revise the exam-related material before the exam. Additionally, the students would have the opportunity, after finishing the curriculum, to revise the exam material for two weeks before the ESOL exam. The teacher said:

"One of the specified goals is to finish the curriculum before the end of the year since the final examination questions are related to the whole curriculum. Therefore, a two-week revision period will take place before the exam to make sure that the students have a decent knowledge about the exam."

The teacher's response illustrated how the ESOL exam had an impact on teaching before the exam since it represented the belief that introducing the exam-related material would help the students pass the exam. In the same vein, the teacher stated that ESOL students

should know the exam's structure and question type before having it. As a result, the teacher placed some priority on practising the material shortly before the exam to get her students ready for the examination. The students were trained to be able to respond to the test questions in the two-week revision period by practising the exam-related material. The students believed that revising the exam content and practising the important parts would prepare them for the final exam and help them pass the exam. Jamal stated:

"We normally have a two-week revision period before the examination in which we revise the previously explained material. The teacher also explains to us everything about the examination; how to study, what to study, and what to expect in the exam."

Jamal's views surrounding the ESOL test preparation are illustrative of the differing "psychological" characteristics different test-takers have, which affect their cognitive processes in the exam (O'Sullivan, 2000, cited in Weir, 2005). Students like Jamal can respond positively to the encouraging spirit of teachers and this can motivate them to perform well in the exam. This can be contrasted to his previous experience in Syria, which he states is void of motivating factors and did not psychologically influence him to want to do well in assessments.

Throughout the observation, the students kept asking the teacher to assign the exam-related material. The teacher tried to avoid directly responding to their inquiries as she did not aim to "teach to the test", as she claimed during the interview. She confirmed that she would continue teaching the lessons communicatively to the learners to enhance their language knowledge and skills during the course by implementing the CLT approach. She stated:

"I believe that the CLT teaching approach is helpful in the ESOL context since it focuses on students' interaction to improve their four language skills. Most adult students may find it different to what they have already experienced in their previous learning context, therefore, my role as a teacher is to motivate them to be part of the educational process. I also had to assess them continuously to evaluate their progression."

The teacher's statement demonstrates a positive perception of the role of the CLT approach in enhancing students' skills. This finding suggests agreement between the teacher's perception of her roles as a language teacher and as an assessor in the ESOL context. She balanced her role in applying the curriculum using the CLT teaching approach and her role as an "assessor" to evaluate the student's proficiency through the use of classroom assessment activities associated with the ESOL curriculum. Thus, it can be argued that the ESOL exam did not have a significant influence on the pedagogical methods in the ESOL context as the teacher kept implementing the CLT principles throughout the year, rather than "teaching to the test".

5.10.5 Students' Learning Motivation

The ESOL adult students' motivation to learn English varied based on their individual goals. All the observed students in Entry 2 had a desire to acquire proficiency in the English language to enhance their knowledge and abilities.

They believed that learning the language would help them to easily integrate into society. Various psychological characteristics connected to the students' characters and social situations are included in their motivation for learning (Ainley, 2006), which may also affect students' motivation to learn a language. They are divided into intrinsic and extrinsic

factors. The study's results indicate that the ESOL participants were intrinsically motivated to improve their English language proficiency, due to their favourable thoughts and attitudes toward English language acquisition. That is, they were not just motivated to learn English to pass the ESOL exam. The following was emphasised by Mohammad, who said:

"The English curriculum is very interesting; it teaches us about things that are related to real life and things we do every day, such as shopping."

This extract reflected the students' perception of the ESOL content. It discussed the cultural importance of using the target language and authentic material related to everyday life. Moreover, Holt and Van Duzer (2000) suggest including real-world materials such as job applications and payslips to demonstrate learner knowledge in the workplace. The students believed that this knowledge was crucial for them since it applied to situations in everyday life and increased their cultural awareness. According to Tsagari (2007), motivational behaviour is formed through time and impacted by the larger sociocultural and contextual setting that affects language learners. The study found that the primary element affecting student motivation was the usage of authentic materials in the curriculum. The students considered course content as an important aspect of language learning for developing their language skills. Similarly, the teacher had identical positive opinions and beliefs about the efficiency of the English language curriculum. She said:

"I think that the curriculum content is consistent with the educational needs of the students. They are motivated to learn about the new culture and how to use the language authentically".

The above-mentioned statement highlights the significance of connecting the ESOL content to the social setting and stresses the importance of using it within that context. This created a positive washback on students' motivation by encouraging communicative learning in the ESOL context as it has been significantly impacted by their perceptions of the learning material. On the other hand, this study found that the usage of the examination results (scores) was one of the extrinsic elements that greatly affected the learning motivation of the students to acquire the English language in the ESOL context. Some of the students were motivated by the significance of ESOL results to concentrate on test-oriented learning strategies. They aimed to complete the ESOL examination to attain their goals, such as continuing their education or finding suitable jobs. Sara revealed her aim in language learning, she said:

"I try to focus on passing all the exams to continue my studies, so I can have a better opportunity to find a job that is equivalent to my academic and professional background as a math teacher."

The study's results indicate that students' opinions and views about the English language syllabus along with evaluation processes did not affect their motivation to prepare for the exam. Although this aim could direct the student's motivation to study for the test, the teacher in the follow-up interview asserted that she would not adopt 'cramming' as a learning strategy to guarantee to pass the exam. Instead, she claimed that she would focus on improving students' English language proficiency. The subsequent section will analyse the data generated from focus group interviews with the participants.

5.11   Focus Group Interview

The focus group interview was carried out in the college after the students had received their ESOL exam results. It took place two weeks after the completion of the exam and before breaking up for the summer holiday. The six students who participated in this interview were volunteers from the observed Entry 2 classroom. The participants were previously interviewed after the classroom observation, where they mentioned the two-week revision period in which they practised for the exam. I used a copy of the Entry 2 sample exam to encourage students' participation.

The focus group aimed to investigate the effect of washback on students' learning outcomes. This section starts with a brief discussion of the students' ESOL exam results for the 2018/2019 academic year. Then, it investigates the effect of students' test-preparation learning practices on their performance on the ESOL reading test and their outcomes according to Weir's socio-cognitive framework. The students' perceptions of how their learning has progressed will be the basis for the discussion. These findings may provide further information to support students' language learning progress.

5.11.1 ESOL Examination Outcomes

It should be noted that this sub-section discusses only the exam results of Entry 2 students who participated in this focus group. The data was collected from the participants regarding their results of the exam for the 2018/2019 academic year. As their records were treated confidentiality in line with college policy, I did not know their exact scores. Accordingly, I asked the students about their results and noted that they were only provided with a Pass/Fail grade. Therefore, in this study, the term "result" will be used

alternatively with the term "score". Based on the analysed data, only four out of six students passed the overall language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading) in the ESOL exam. The word "unit" denotes the language skill examination in this research. The participants commented on their exam results. Mohammad, who passed the exam, described his experience with the test preparation practices and how they affected his results and learning practices. He said:

"To be honest, I was expecting to pass because I prepared very well before the exam. During the revision period, we focused on practising the important questions and exercises connected to the exam. We also had an exam similar to the real one. Practising for the exam was very useful as it helped us to know the type of exam questions."

While Eman had to repeat the year as she failed listening and writing units. She commented on her result of the reading exam, she said:

"I have passed reading and speaking but failed writing and listening. Reading was easy as the teacher told us what and how to study. We also practised many exercises before the exam. I memorised everything that related to the exam since most of the questions were nearly similar to the ones of the exam. She also gave us three topics and asked us to prepare ourselves to talk about one of them in the speaking exam. I chose to talk about shopping because I like shopping and the teacher had already explained it in the classroom. When I received the writing exam, I left it empty because I did not know what to write, the same happened with my listening exam as I couldn't finish the exam."

The findings showed that exam preparation strategies equipped the students with the knowledge they needed to pass the exam. They helped them to adopt learning practices

that contributed to their success, which were different from the ones that had been noticed during the observation. Mohammad mentioned memorisation as one of the practices that he adopted to study for the exam which contributed to his success. On the other hand, Eman claimed that she failed the exam because of her low English language proficiency level. Despite the good examination outcomes, the students felt that their language skills did not develop as much as they hoped. They stated that they did not have the necessary knowledge to use English for speaking. Lila explained her language skills as follows:

"I have a problem applying what I have learned in the classroom in real life. I learned many grammatical rules and new vocabulary, but I had a problem using them correctly while speaking or even writing."

The above extracts showed that some of the learning outcomes of the students were not satisfactory, especially those with low abilities in Entry 2. It is evident from the students' reflections on their skills that their English proficiency fell short of the desirable level. According to the objectives of the curriculum, students should meet the required level of skills, that is, the things they can say and do using the English language. This study clearly shows that the revision practices in the classroom during the two weeks focused on preparing students to pass the ESOL examination. It also shows that the students were not satisfied with their limited English proficiency at this level. Thus, the validity of the ESOL results (scores) is examined in the following section using the socio-cognitive framework for test validity (Weir,2005).

5.12 The Socio-Cognitive Framework

The socio-cognitive framework for test validation contains the following components: test-taker characteristics, cognitive validity, context validity, scoring validity, and consequential and criterion-related validity. The following section will talk about each component concerning the ESOL exam and washback.

5.12.1 Test-Taker Characteristics

The characteristics of the test-taker have an impact on the improvement of student's exam results and a strong effect on the context and cognitive validities. The study findings show that the test-takers psychological and experiential characteristics significantly affected the improvement of student's exam results. The following subsections will explain the effect of these characteristics on the exam outcomes.

5.12.1.1   Psychological Characteristics

Student motivation is one of the test-taker's psychological characteristics, which is considered important in students' effective preparation practices that lead to their performance in the ESOL exam. The analysed data showed that most of the participants aimed to pass the final exam, therefore, they were motivated to adopt test preparation practices as a result of their negative perceptions of the exam's goal. Most of the students believed that the exam was an unnecessary stress factor that did not truly support them in developing their abilities. Therefore, their primary objective was to effectively prepare for the exam to decrease the stress feeling and pass the ESOL exam. These negative perceptions resulted from the emphasis of the assessment policy on evaluating students' progress through the exam which affected their perceptions regarding the exams'

objectives. Alternatively, the students valued the exam results as they wanted to move successfully to the next level and achieve their objectives. Weir (2005) asserts that students' characteristics have a significant influence on how they handle the task of context validity. The students considered the two-week revision period before the exam as a supportive opportunity to prepare for the ESOL exam and to pass it, although the teacher did not focus on test preparation activities. Similarly, Huhta, Paula, and Pitkanen-Hutha (2006) used test preparation to assess learners' cognitive processes. The students discussed their exam preparation and the aspects that contributed to their failure or success. There were four distinct feelings and experiences that have been identified: hardworking or lazy students who attributed their success to their study efforts; skilled or inexperienced students who credited their understanding and learning strategy; confident or insecure students whose success or failure was related to personal qualities like being focused or anxious; and students who believed that they were either lucky or unfortunate exam takers who feel that failing.

5.12.1.2   Experiential Characteristics

The findings of the study suggest that ESOL students' experience with the examination was the main significant factor influencing English language acquisition methodologies within the research environment. For example, the students during the two-week revision period were encouraged to temporarily concentrate on test-preparation activities to pass the exam, besides practising samples of mock exams. These preparations were similar to what they had experienced in Syria. The students, as a result, became familiar with the nature of the exam which increased their self-confidence in adopting some test preparation activities that might have a positive impact on their performances. These

practices also succeeded in raising students' cognitive awareness of the linguistic resources required to take the ESOL reading exam, which motivated them to engage in these practices. Wei (2014) investigated the washback impacts on language acquisition by analysing the relationship between students' comprehension of combined skills tasks and their test preparation strategies. Wei determined that the differing degrees of awareness and comprehension of the new exam might elucidate the students' choices regarding their learning techniques. More precisely, it appeared that there was a link between students' understanding of the assessed skills and the usage of language techniques. In light of students' experiences with the exam, the current study argues that the learners constrained their acquisition with certain ESOL exam-related practices during this period which might affect the development of their comprehension skills.

5.12.2 Context Validity

According to O'Sullivan and Weir (2011), the students' achievements, construct validity, and score validity within the socio-cognitive framework are all influenced by context and cognitive validities. This study's results demonstrate that context validity elements led to students' cognitive processes. Weir (2005) asserts that to attain context validity, both testers and test-takers must accept the task context when evaluating a particular linguistic competence.

5.12.2.1   Task Setting

Weir (2005) asserts that having a comprehensive understanding of the task's demands facilitates goal-setting and allows students to choose the most suitable learning strategies. The students' knowledge of the test's objectives led them to realise that studying for the test in that period was important, thus, they adopted traditional practices

as their learning technique. The main goal of the ESOL revision techniques was to help the participants master the exam material and pass it. To achieve this goal, the participants were offered the chance to practise the material included in the exam to improve their performance. The students stated that being familiar with the reading exam and the way of responding to its questions had a positive impact on their performance. As Laila confirmed:

"I know how to answer the exam's questions, the teacher showed us what to do during the revision weeks. We also practised different types of questions that were similar to the exam. The teacher told us that our exam would be similar to what we had studied, which raised my confidence and score."

Additionally, the students also had the opportunity to practise mock exams which provided them with an understanding of the ESOL contextual circumstances. The students in the focus group interviews believed that test-taking strategies helped them to increase their possibility of passing the exam. The findings of some studies such as Damankesh and Babaii (2015) shared the same perception as this study regarding the use of test-taking techniques to assist students in getting better test results.

5.12.2.2   Task Demands

The requirements of the task also had an impact on how well the students performed in the ESOL English exam. According to Weir (2005), students' familiarity with the language requirements and test material could have a positive impact on increasing their exam scores. They would then ascertain the most efficacious learning procedures and identify the specific topic to be addressed. The fact that ESOL reading exam questions were nearly the same as that taught material increased the students' familiarity with the exam's

content. This familiarity directed the students to focus on the tested aspects of the ESOL exam, so they focused on practising the tested material in their two-week revision period after the course of study. The knowledge of the linguistic requirements of the exam positively impacted the ESOL results of the students, which implies that using test-preparation techniques before the exam helped most of the students to pass the exam (Pour-Mohammadi and Zainol Abidin, 2011).

5.12.2.3   Task Administration

Context validity last component that had an impact on students' exam results and learning practices within the socio-cognitive framework is task administration. Cheating was shown to be an important element that endangered the context validity of the ESOL exam. Eman stated:

"Sometimes I get help from my friends inside the classroom. Before the exam, we agree to use hand signs to give the correct answer, especially with true/ false, and choose the correct answer questions."

The findings show that assessment stress is the main factor that forces the students to seek help from others to avoid failing the course. The students considered such practice as a kind of assistance. As a result, it would be impossible for such activity to replicate a real-world setting of testing or evaluation Weir (2005), or to facilitate good teaching and learning activities that promote student language development. Overall, the study's findings demonstrate that students' familiarity with the ESOL requirements and the response style significantly improved their performance and ESOL results due to exam preparation before the exam, a result, it might be concluded that the ESOL examination lacked context validity.

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5.12.3 Cognitive Validity

Cognitive validity is the ability of an exam to elicit a mental representation of activities that are comparable to those seen in the actual world.. Weir (2005) asserts that the correlation between a test's task requirements and its executive abilities determines the nature of cognitive and context validity. The reading exam's tasks of ESOL Entry 2, in this study, were similar to the ESOL material employed in the classroom. The students were engaged in some activities connected to the demands of the ESOL exam during their revision period. Because the ESOL exam has comparable task demands and resources, these tasks reflect the students' mental abilities and ESOL resources. According to Khalifa and Weir (2009), a key element in determining the test's validity is what a task examines. As a method of evaluation, the students in Entry levels were mostly expected to remember similar task input through preparation exam practices to perform well in the exam. For this reason, the cognitive validity of the ESOL exam is explored in connection with the improvement of students' language abilities and knowledge. The students mostly relied on memorisation as a learning technique to pass the ESOL reading exam, similar to what they had experienced in their previous experience in Syria. They also prepared for the exam by using materials that were similar to the format of the ESOL exam. Teaching to the test was another result of test-preparation practices, which is considered test-related cheating (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2010, p. 7). It has been emphasised that if test-takers had a decent comprehension of the required information in the transcript, they would adopt the most suitable reading techniques (Weir, 2005). Ahmmed and Rahman's (2019) review of washback effects in language education found that the negative influence occurred when the emphasis changed from acquiring the language to adopting test-taking

tactics. The students' learning practices focused on studying specific information about the ESOL material as they clearly understood the requirements of the exam.

The results found that rote learning was considered the most suitable cognitive learning practice to pass the exam from the students' perception. These learning practices were similar to what the students had previously experienced in their previous experience in Syria. Although the students' performance on the ESOL exam was supported by memorisation, it seemed that this temporary learning process, which was only used during the revision period, did not contribute to improving students' comprehension skills. The students believed that the exam questions were simple and easy since they were related to the material that had been practised during the revision period. Hughes (2003) asserted that many abilities to students' success in language acquisition might be disregarded if the test concentrates only on evaluating memorised information. In this study, the students were encouraged to memorise certain aspects to remember in the exam that might be forgotten later, which might negatively affect their language knowledge. The participants claimed that they normally forget the memorised information after the exam, which is similar to what used to happen during their previous experience in Syria. The findings also show that the ESOL reading exam focus did not prompt processes comparable to those used in authentic contexts. The student's cognitive approach to language acquisition was strictly confined to memorising and recalling certain information. The study's results suggested that the ESOL exam could not meet the cognitive validity criteria.

5.12.4 Scoring Validity

The test's scoring validity relates to how accurately represents the student's actual proficiency in language comprehension and application. Entry 2 students revealed their perception of the effect of the exam's score on their real English language proficiency. The impact of the exam's score on the actual language proficiency of the students was acknowledged by the students who believed that their exam score did not represent their real English language knowledge and skill despite passing the ESOL exam. This perception was due to the exam- preparation practices they carried out before the exam. Therefore, they might use the same material or try to guess the answers, especially with multiple-choice and true/false questions. Other issues relating to the exam design and administration may negatively affect other parts of score validity. Many students stated that the ESOL reading exam was not difficult and that there was enough time to complete the questions. Jamal clarified:

"The final exam wasn't that challenging, on the contrary, it was easy. We went through several exam-related questions in class during revision."

According to this statement, the adoption of test-preparation techniques during the two-week review period before the exam had a significant influence on how easy the exam tasks were. As a result, the ESOL result may be viewed as a measure of students' development in a well-prepared assessment task, which does not indicate the students' real knowledge. The results, in this case, gave misleading information about the attainments of the students, which is considered professionally inappropriate and has the potential to produce adverse washback.

According to Haladyna et al. (1991), test score pollution occurs when students' test scores rise without corresponding increases in learning, and this can have negative impacts on learning and teaching at the micro level (Choi, 2008; Ferman, 2004; Andrews et al., 2002). The findings of the study suggest that students' results, in this study, might not represent the students' real achievement which would be considered a negative washback. It found that the students lacked adequate English knowledge and proficiency, as a result, their language proficiency did not meet the goals of the ESOL curriculum. Despite passing the ESOL exam, the participants indicated during the interview, that they still had problems in using English, especially in speaking.

5.12.5 Consequential Validity

The findings of this research show that the assessment policy had largely impacted the students' perceptions and learning methods. Although the exam succeeded in evaluating students' progression at this level, it forced the students to adopt some measurement-driven learning strategies that were similar to what they had experienced in their previous experience in the Syrian context. The students also held the perception that the exam was another unnecessary factor for stress, which affected their learning motivation. Most of the learning motivation of the students was focused on passing the exam to move to the next level by adopting exam-preparing practices which helped to improve their exam results, not their learning comprehension skills. Several washback studies have found that exams have taken over classroom instructional time, as teachers dedicate a significant amount of time to test-related activities. Andrews et al. (2002) report that exam-related subjects account for two-thirds of classroom teaching time. Nonetheless, in this

research, test preparation activities had no negative effect on teaching time throughout the course, which should be interpreted positively.

5.13   Summary

The findings in this part of the analysis explored the perceptions of ESOL adult Syrian students after observing an English lesson in Entry 2. The analysis discussed the classroom assessment methods and the factors that constructed students' perceptions. Students' perceptions were shaped as a result of many factors: students' previous learning experiences, their assessment methods experience, and other aspects such as educational and social background, in addition to age. The findings revealed the effect of gender and social background on constructing negative or positive perceptions of assessment and showed that mainly female students formed negative perceptions of certain methods and activities that contained mixed-gender groups.

The data presented in this section was collected through observation, a semi-structured interview with the observed students and classroom teacher, and worksheets. The observation suggested that the teaching and assessment methods were different from what the Syrian students had already experienced. The following part of the data analysis discusses students' perceptions and their effect on learning English as the main controller of students' participation in the classroom.

Chapter 6:   General Discussion

6.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings that were developed from data analysis. At the beginning of each section, a research sub-question will be introduced followed by a detailed investigation of the pertinent results. It also addresses the study's contribution, limitations, and recommendations.

6.2   Assessment Practices in the ESOL Context

The first sub-question will be used to analyse the findings about the evaluation procedures in the ESOL context.

- 'What are the assessment methods used by ESOL teachers at the college?'

The participants confirmed the use of two different assessment procedures during the course (see Table 6.1). These practices were divided into two categories: summative assessment (e.g. ESOL final exam) and formative assessment practices (e.g. self-assessment). The importance of both types of evaluation in the learning process has been emphasised by several scholars (e.g. Dunn and Mulvenon, 2019).

Table 6.1: The main features of the assessment methods in the ESOL context

Assessment Type	Summative Assessment	Formative Assessment
Use	At the end of the year	Throughout the course
Aim	Evaluate students' progression	Support students' learning
Example	ESOL Exam	Self- assessment
Students' attitude	Mostly Negative	Mostly Positive

The research findings show that formative assessment practices dominated summative practices in ESOL classes as they were used throughout the course, unlike summative practices, such as ESOL exams, that were only used at the end of the year. The findings reveal that formative assessment practices were mostly used in ESOL classes to support students' learning, while the ESOL exams were used for evaluating students' language progress. The findings also show that most of the students' attitudes towards various formative assessment practices were positive; believed that formative assessment practices would improve their language skills and learning. Many research studies inspected how various types of formative assessment affected the processes of teaching and learning. For example, the research findings of Black and Wiliam (1998) and Yüksel and Gündüz (2017) reveal that formative assessment practices could positively enhance both teaching and learning. Despite these positive views, students' proficiency level and educational background hindered the use of formative assessment at the Entry level, especially at Pre-Entry and Entry1.

Summative assessments were criticised for their negative effect on students' learning motivation. Most of the students considered the ESOL exam insufficient for assessing their actual skills or for improving their proficiency. Generally, exams are considered high stakes when significant decisions are made based on their results regarding students' future and educational institutions' status (Harlen, 2005). The ESOL exam was imposed by the college's assessment policy to get more reliable and objective results on students' achievements throughout the course and to make sure that the objectives of the ESOL course were achieved. In this study, the ESOL exam was considered a high-stakes exam, as its outcomes were used for classification purposes. As a result, students' motivation to

learn was negatively impacted by its high-stakes nature (Au, 2007), because it had a greater influence to impact the attitudes of the teacher and students (Munoz and Alvarez, 2010).

In the next sub-sections, the findings related to the main impact of the assessment and the reasons behind this impact will be discussed.

6.3　The Main Impact of Assessment on Learning

In light of the second sub-research question, this section addresses the findings about the influence of assessments on the educational process.

- **'What are the main impacts of the assessment methods on language learning?**

The use of various assessment practices can influence teaching and learning strategies positively and negatively (Qi, 2005; Andrews, 2004, 2014; Adnan and Mahmood; DeLuca et al., 2015). That is to say, assessment procedures can have a positive effect when they enhance learning strategies, but they can have a negative effect when they obstruct such strategies. As a result, the following section will provide a thorough analysis of the study's findings around the impact of washback on the learning methods used in the ESOL classes. The study's results confirm the hypothesis that assessment practices had a significant positive and negative influence on students' learning.

6.3.1　Negative Washback Effects

The results indicate that summative assessment, the ESOL exam in particular, might not be beneficial to the students' learning. Nevertheless, the exam's results could affect students' educational future since they were used to classify them into levels. It was also

found that the students modified their learning practices as a result of this impact. The findings demonstrate that the majority of learning strategies adopted by the students before the reading exam were focused on passing the exam. The ESOL exam results may prove to be problematic regarding their consequential validity (Weir, 2005), based on the findings mentioned earlier. The research findings also show that the aims and nature of the assessment practices used in the ESOL context might negatively affect test takers' psychological characteristics. Accordingly, students' learning motivation could be negatively impacted by the focus of the assessment policy on evaluating students' attainment through final exams.

6.3.2 Positive Washback Effects

The findings of this investigation demonstrate that a greater positive impact on teaching and learning could be achieved through formative assessment practices. This was reflected in the observed classroom where different formative assessment practices were applied. It was also found that the majority of the students believed that formative assessment practices had a more positive effect on their learning than summative assessment, as they encouraged the students to improve their language skills and knowledge and to accomplish their aims. Based on the research results, constructive feedback was considered one of the positive impacts of assessment on learning as it enhanced their learning, increased their confidence, and motivated learning. This finding was similar to other studies' findings in which the value of feedback in improving the teaching and learning quality was stressed (Hounsell, 2007; Shute, 2007; Carless et al., 2011). It was also found that the negative effect of assessment on students' motivation

could be avoided by providing continuous feedback. This finding supports the positive impacts of feedback on ESOL students' learning progress.

6.4   Causes of Assessment Effect

This section briefly discusses the main causes that affected students' perceptions of assessment methods.

"What are the causes of the assessment effect?"

The research results highlighted the factors that had either positive or negative impacts on the students' learning. Students' educational and social backgrounds, the absence of educational resources, previous educational experience, and assessment policy were among the primary factors that led to assessment's negative impacts on learning practices.

6.4.1   Previous Educational Experience

The study found that most of the interviewed students' perceptions were affected by their previous educational experiences, which was considered an important part of the test takers' characteristics as they had an impact on the assessment process (Weir, 2005). According to the socio-cognitive framework, test-takers characteristics may influence the validity of the evaluation and assessment procedures. The findings of this study reveal that students' previous experiences with assessment should be considered when applying assessment practices within an ESOL context. The findings also show that nearly all the students had experienced summative assessment practices, but not many formative assessment practices during their previous educational journey in Syria. The differences between both contexts, the traditional and the ESOL non-traditional context

led to the formation of two types of attitudes towards assessment. Some students thought that the only way to accomplish their goals was through traditional exams due to their objectivity, thus, they preferred traditional assessment methods as they found it hard to embrace non-traditional ones. As a result, they showed a negative attitude towards formative assessment. The other group showed negative attitudes towards exams since they were unable to support them to achieve their goals and improve their language skills. Therefore, they had positive perceptions towards the applied formative assessment practices, as they had a significant role in language learning. This belief prompted the students to favour formative assessment practises over summative assessment. Additionally, the students claimed that the college did not provide them with any instruction regarding the assessment practices or any information about the college's assessment policy before they joined the ESOL courses. This highlighted the absence of the college's role in informing the students about its assessment policy, different assessment practices, and objectives of assessment. Therefore, every effort should have been made to guarantee that students were familiar with the task before taking an exam or carrying out the assessment practices according to Weir (2005). For example, self-assessment practices could not be regarded as valid, since students at Entry level had no experience with this type of assessment practice.

6.4.2   Educational Background and Professional Experiences

In this study, student's educational background and professional experiences varied as adult learners, which can be considered part of the characteristics of the test-takers. Most of the students had experienced learning at various levels in different educational institutions in Syria, which led to their different perceptions and attitudes towards the

assessment process. The participants, in this study, were divided into three groups. The first group was made up of those who already had qualifications and work experience, and who aimed to learn English to continue working in the same field, or to find a job in proportion to their professional experiences. The second group was made up of those who aimed to pursue learning at the universities to expand their working opportunities. The last group was made up of those who were unqualified, and aimed to learn the language to find work and manage their daily life situations. For instance, the students who completed their postgraduate education were more receptive to the differences between the assessment practices, they were willingly open to accepting changes in the educational process that matched the new learning context, which influenced the construction of their perceptions positively. This factor can be linked to the students' objectives of learning the English language, as the results of the study found that most of the students' perceptions were affected by their adopted objectives for learning English.

6.4.3 Age and Gender

ESOL classes have students from different genders, ages, and social and cultural backgrounds may affect the construction of the students' perceptions. The findings show that female students from Syria had negative perceptions towards some of the assessment methods such as group work that requires mixing with other male students. These negative perceptions were formulated because of their cultural and social beliefs which considered mixing with male students during some activities unacceptable. Therefore, they preferred traditional exams over peer assessment or group work activities.

Age was another factor that affected the construction of assessment practices. Since all the participants were adults between 22- 65 years old, some of them believed that the applied assessment practices were not suitable for their age and circumstances. They called for learning English in a stress-free environment with no exams. Others, especially young students, preferred being evaluated through exams to achieve their future goals, such as continuing their studies or getting better work opportunities. This showed the impact of age and gender on the participants' perceptions of assessment in the ESOL context.

6.4.4   The Effect of Students' Social Background

Cultural background may have a significant role in forming certain perceptions as a result of some social beliefs that hinder the implementation of certain activities that are considered culturally inappropriate. This factor can be directly linked to the previous factor that discussed the effect of gender on shaping students' perceptions. The findings, of this study, clearly demonstrate some of the students' negative perceptions that were affected by their own beliefs. For example, most female students did not easily accept some assessment methods because they did not fit their traditional beliefs. A good example of the impact of social background on students' perceptions, which consequently influenced their learning was clear in the behaviour of female students during the observed lesson, as they tended to avoid participating in mixed-gender group work.

6.4.5 The Lack of Educational Resources

The findings reveal that the lack of educational resources, such as equipped language laboratories in ESOL programmes to practice listening and speaking skills was another

factor that affected their learning outcomes and speaking and listening skills. Weir (2005) asserted that "if the test is not well administered, unreliable results may occur" (p. 82), therefore, teachers should ensure that the examination area is sufficiently supplied with the necessary resources before the exam to optimise the context validity of the exam results of the test for an ability like listening (Weir, 2005).

6.4.6 Insufficient Assessment Knowledge

The study found that students' perception of assessment was influenced by their lack of knowledge of assessment types. They had not experienced most formative assessment practices during their previous learning experience, as their understanding was based on traditional summative techniques. Students at lower levels were unfamiliar with formative assessment practices, which negatively impacted their progress. Some students, particularly at the Entry level, believed that formative assessment should not be used to assess their language performance, as it may not provide a clear picture of their language development. They mentioned that they faced many difficulties while carrying out some practices, such as peer assessments, causing them to fear-producing unexpected results.

6.4.7 The assessment policy of the college

The findings reveal that students' lack of understanding of the college's assessment policy negatively impacted their perceptions of assessments. The policy imposed the evaluation method and assessment practices in the ESOL context on the students, negatively impacting their motivation as they needed to take the exam to advance to the next level. While most students viewed exams as a source of stress, some interviewed students emphasised the exam as a crucial component of passing the course. However, students'

attitudes towards formative assessment techniques showed satisfaction with their positive impact on learning, while others preferred formative assessment practices for a stress-free learning environment.

6.4.8 The Use of ESOL Test Scores.

The use of the ESOL exam score is another external factor that influences students' perceptions and learning practices. The college primarily categorizes the students into different levels based on their ESOL scores. The findings reveal that the participants' goals varied, some students aimed to learn English for daily use and integrate into society, while others aimed to develop language skills for career advancement or college studies. Although the majority of the students did not aim to achieve high scores, the assessment policy required passing the exam to advance to the next level. Therefore, the students diligently prepared for the exam using traditional learning methods, keeping in mind that the ESOL score was the primary determinant of the student level.

6.4.9 Limited Fundings of ESOL Courses

Another factor that influenced the assessment process in the ESOL context, according to the interviewed teacher, was the limited funding of ESOL courses. This factor put further pressure on the teachers to raise the number of students who successfully passed the exams to guarantee continuous funding. Therefore, ESOL teachers, particularly those at entry levels, often gave their students a two-week revision period to practice the exam content before the actual exam. These practices could potentially exacerbate the negative impact of assessment on students' learning practices, as they may resort to learning-to-test strategies in an attempt to pass the exam.

6.5   The Perceptions of the Students Towards Assessment Practices

This section discusses how the students perceived and interacted with the assessment process. The research findings show that the students had different perceptions and views towards assessment practices in the college. Most of the participants did not believe that summative assessment could promote or enhance their learning and language skills, nor would it accurately reflect their actual knowledge and understanding. The students claimed that, although they had passed the exam, the results did not represent their actual performance or real understanding. They attributed this to the test preparation practices that took place before the exam. The attitudes of some students towards summative assessment reflected their dissatisfaction with the use of the exam for evaluation, as it might have negative effects on their learning. This is supported by previous research suggesting that high-stakes assessment practices would undermine learning (Au, 2007; Irons, 2008; Falchion, 2013). Moreover, the students highlighted another reason for their attitudes towards summative assessment practices. They believed that the sole purpose of summative assessment was to evaluate their course achievements, not to enhance their learning. As a result, the students argued that summative assessment shouldn't serve as the primary form of evaluation, as it fails to motivate them to enhance their knowledge and skills. They held the belief that utilising summative assessment alongside formative assessment could enhance their learning (Heritage, 2010; Fluckiger et al., 2010; So and Lee, 2011). In contrast, a group of students believed that exams could accurately measure and represent their true knowledge and understanding, based on their previous experience with assessments in Syria. They also believed that exam results had a considerable impact on their plans regarding their

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education or work in the future. Therefore, they were willing to adopt traditional learning strategies to achieve their goals since passing the exam was their main objective. They believed that formative assessment practices wasted class time; therefore, they formed a negative perception of this type of assessment.

6.5.1   Washback on ESOL Exam Results and Students' Learning Practices

The findings show that the ESOL students before the exam adopted a learning-to-test strategy during the two-week preparation period, which was similar to what they had experienced within the Syrian context. Exam preparation practices, including memorisation for the examination and mock exams, were part of their engagement (Damankesh and Babaii, 2015). However, using exam questions similar to the taught material encouraged the students to adopt the rote learning technique to pass the exam rather than focusing on the use of the learning outcomes effectively. The study's findings also reveal that the participants expressed satisfaction with their pre-exam preparation practices, as it aided them in grasping the exam material and facilitated their exam success, as the use of exam questions similar to the taught content made the exam score a reflection of the exam content in some ways. Although the adopted learning methods and techniques affected the students' performance positively, most of the students successfully passed the reading ESOL exam. The students felt that these practices did not progress their language knowledge and skills or enhance the purposeful use of their language in real contexts. The findings also show that some students sought assistance from their peers during the reading exam, particularly with alternative-response (multiple-choice) questions, thereby jeopardising the validity of the ESOL exam's scores. The findings show that the exam preparation practices improved students' results (scores),

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achieving the intended washback effect. However, an unintended negative washback on students' learning practices was detected, as the students resorted to traditional learning methods to pass the exam. The findings suggest that passing the exam with a good score may not always accurately represent the students' actual language proficiency and knowledge. They also suggest that exam preparation practices did not contribute to improving students' learning outcomes as they aimed to help students pass the exam.

6.6 The Limitations

Although this study was beneficial in portraying an accurate depiction of ESOL students' opinions and perceptions of assessment, it has a few limitations, which are listed and explained below.

1-   This research is limited to investigating adult ESOL refugee students' perceptions of assessment and the assessment procedures' effects on learning in the ESOL context in the UK. It did not investigate the perceptions of other adult ESOL students from other ethnic backgrounds or the impact of assessment practices on the teaching process. Semi-structured interviews with students, a focus group with students, and an observation followed by interviews with the observed students and an ESOL teacher were the research methodologies employed to get the required data for the study.

2-   This study was conducted in a further education college in an area of Northern England. Only sixteen students and a teacher were chosen to participate in the study, which might affect the findings of the study and the representativeness of the community under investigation. The sample size was deemed adequate, which was the primary justification for not including additional participants from different colleges. Thus, the results gained from a single college in a particular setting might not apply to other colleges

in similar or different settings. As I was satisfied with the sample size, I did not expand the search to include other colleges from other regions. Therefore, the study's findings might not be a true reflection of those of other UK colleges. Although the reviewed themes in this study could be found somewhere else in the ESOL contexts, the results of this research cannot be applied to other further education colleges and generalisability cannot be claimed.

3-   One ESOL teacher participated in this study, which was less than what originally was planned. This was due to the busy schedule of the other teachers.

Considering these limitations, I think the research has produced valuable data that has helped to clarify the connection between assessment and students' perceptions and the learning process.

6.7   Recommendations

I recommend to all those involved in the ESOL domain to consider implementing the subsequent recommendations in the ESOL context, given the study's findings. The first part of the recommendations focuses on the absence of educational facilities in the ESOL context. The findings show that additional educational facilities should be provided in the college to support students' learning and the assessment process. The students claimed that the absence of language laboratories, for example, affected their skill development. Therefore, it is advised that the college should provide a language lab for ESOL students to motivate them to engage in speaking and listening activities.

The results also indicate that adult ESOL students must be trained to use several types of formative assessment practices before enrolment or throughout the course. According

to the students, their previous learning experiences had not contributed to developing their assessment literacy; therefore, the majority of the participants needed to develop their assessment literacy. Thus, the college should provide orientation workshops before each level, especially for new students, to promote assessment literacy among ESOL students besides confirming their knowledge of the nature and aim of the various assessment practices. Teachers should also consider the language knowledge and level of their students while designing assessment activities to ensure that they can use them successfully. By doing this, the students will be inspired to engage in the assessment processes and to enhance their language ability.

On the other hand, students were required under the assessment policy to take the ESOL exam for classification purposes. This graded exam negatively impacted students' motivation and learning since they were adults who desired to learn in a stress-free atmosphere. Therefore, it is highly recommended to adopt some adjustments to the assessment policy to lessen assessment negative effects on learning practices and motivation. On the other hand, the students should be introduced earlier to the assessment policy and its objectives to increase their awareness of the objectives of the assessment practices, which may in turn reflect positively on students' learning habits and promote the student-centred learning approach.

Since the students' major goal for enrolling in college is to speak English efficiently and to integrate into society, they should be given more time to practise speaking and listening skills. The college should offer more resources to enhance learning skills for which more funding is needed, as the students should listen to authentic dialogues in the target language to improve their communication skills. To provide the necessary resources. For

instance, a language lab should be provided to teach listening and speaking skills in an authentic environment, and more time should be allocated for practising productive skills. This would support the students with their learning and provide them with the appropriate chance to practise speaking authentically in the classrooms, leading to a positive effect on their motivation and confidence.

The lack of alignment between students' goals and the assessment policy objectives is one of the primary causes of how students' perceptions and learning were affected by the assessment practices in the ESOL context. As a result, students need to participate in the assessment process and exchange information with teachers about the suitable assessment techniques that could be used to achieve their objectives. By asking students about their perceptions and attitudes towards assessment practices, teachers can determine the degree to which assessment practices can assist the students in developing better learning habits. They can also use the results of the survey to prevent any undesirable effects in the future. This involvement will positively affect students' learning since it will enhance their self-confidence and desire to learn. Teachers can engage the students in the evaluation process at the beginning of the academic year or near its end. They may also create a questionnaire that students can fill out to investigate the primary learning issues that have a direct or indirect connection to the evaluation procedure and to discover how assessment has influenced their learning quality positively or negatively, which can be used in making plans for efficient assessment procedures based on the findings of the questionnaire.

During the assessment process, instructors must be aware of the distinctive learning characteristics of their students and give them more consideration. These learning

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differences can significantly impact the effectiveness of assessment practices. Teachers should know the best method of assessing and providing feedback for each student or group of students in class. For instance, certain learners prefer working alone and try to avoid working in groups for many reasons. One of the reasons is related to their beliefs and social background. A relevant example of this was the case of the female student, who felt embarrassed to work in a mixed group due to her cultural background and her self-perception of her English level, which she considered to be poor. This may affect students' confidence to participate, especially during speaking skill activities. Therefore, teachers should support these students and include them in the learning process with consideration given to their cultural beliefs. This can be done through good planning to improve students' attainment and self-esteem. Furthermore, including students as collaborators in the assessment process is another effective strategy that can be used to lessen the negative effects of distinct learning variations in the classroom. Students should be encouraged to take part in some formative assessment activities, share feedback with their classmates, and become more autonomous and interactive. It is also vital to consider students' circumstances and try to challenge all the obstacles that hinder their learning. The teachers, for example, can offer a more welcoming environment that includes all the students regardless of their gender, beliefs, previous experiences, and level to encourage them to adopt new assessment experiences and to improve their learning skills.

6.8   Suggestions for Further Research

Further study would be beneficial to investigate the influence of assessment procedures on the efficiency of ESOL teachers' teaching practices within the ESOL sector. Another

similar study can be conducted with English learners from different contexts to explore their perceptions of assessment and its effect on the educational process. The results of both studies can be compared to support students' learning not only at the college but also at other educational bodies that teach English to students whose English is not their first language. Collaborative research investigations studying the washback of a specific exam inside a similar setting have been strongly suggested to get a complete image of the washback phenomenon in the same context. As a result, the replication of this study in other FE colleges in the UK would be extremely beneficial to have a better knowledge of the assessment effect (washback) in adult education. These studies can also be done through extra investigation considering the washback effect on ESOL students aged between 16 and 18 in FE colleges to increase our knowledge about the effect of assessment on language education in the ESOL context. Further studies should also include more stakeholders, including teachers, policymakers, and exam developers within the ESOL system, to create a comprehensive understanding of the issues that hinder language development in the ESOL context.

6.9   Originality and Contribution

The significance of this research lies in its ability to provide novel insights into how assessment and the ESOL exam affect students' attitudes and learning within the ESOL context. Before starting this research, I conducted a thorough search to find previous studies on this topic in the ESOL setting. Most of the prior studies in this field were limited to investigating other issues related to the context of ESOL. The results have, therefore, helped to highlight the chief impacts of assessment practices on adult ESOL Syrian students' perceptions and English language acquisition in the UK. The study findings and

recommendations can potentially contribute to improving the ESOL evaluation system in further education colleges, taking into account students' needs, social and educational backgrounds, and objectives. It is feasible that improving the evaluation system will positively reflect on students' learning and language acquisition. ESOL students will become citizens of the English society; they will use the language in their daily lives to find jobs and to complete their studies; consequently, their level of social integration will be influenced by the calibre of their college education.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the primary research topic as well as its sub-questions. The findings demonstrate that there was, to some extent, agreement among the participants that formative assessments were the predominant form of assessment practices. Despite its limited usage in ESOL classes, summative assessment was used in the form of an ESOL final exam for classification purposes. The study findings also show that summative assessment exams had negative impacts on students' learning practices, particularly those connected to learning to the exam and memorisation. The study's findings are somewhat consistent with studies mentioned in the literature. Additionally, it was made clear that the results of the data analysis of the classroom observation, follow-up interviews with the observed teacher and students, semi-structured interviews with the students, and the focus group interview were very comparable. The observed teacher and the participant students seemed to share similar perceptions of assessment practices. They all agreed that different formative assessment practices were used to improve students' performance while summative testing was used for evaluative purposes. Formative assessment techniques appeared to be positively perceived by the

students to improve their learning, as the majority of the learners, who took part in the present research, confirmed that focusing on formative assessment methods improved the positive effects of assessment on their learning. The students agreed that the ESOL exam affected their learning practices forcing them to adopt test preparation and traditional learning practices as memorisation. Therefore, their motivation was focusing on passing the exam as it would affect their decision regarding their next level. This chapter has also introduced the research's main findings, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for further studies. The originality of the research study and its contribution to knowledge were also been discussed in this chapter.

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Appendix 1: Brief Background of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian conflict and its effect on Syrian students as language learners

The brutal government suppression of crowds supporting youths detained for anti-government graffiti in the southern town of Daraa in March 2011 marked the start of the Syrian refugee crisis. The civil war broke out as the situation swiftly grew worse, forcing millions of Syrian families to escape their homes. The Syrian crisis has had various degrees of impact across the whole country (OCHA, 2019a), as a result of the conflict, more than 15.3 million people in Syria require humanitarian aid (UNHCR, 2023) as half of the population has been displaced since then (UNHCR, 2021). The crisis continues to be the greatest displacement crisis in history with over 5.6 million registered refugees and over 6 million people internally displaced (UNHCR &UNDP, 2019).

Education in Syria Before and After 2011

Before 2011, the beginning of the civil war, education in Syria had gone through positive developments. According to Karyotis, Mulvey, and Skleparis (2021), Syria had one of the most developed educational systems in the region before the conflict started. The Syrian government has regularly emphasised that by 2015, illiteracy would be eradicated from Syria. As a result, Syria's literacy rates were greater than those of Iraq and Egypt and were on a level with those of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (Syrian Ministry of Education, 2021b). The Ministry of Education (MoE) is in charge of all elements of school education, including curriculum creation and development, school establishment, reform implementation, planning, and policies (Rajab, 2013). Nevertheless, the traditional methods continued to be an obstacle to achieving quality education (Armnzai & Alakrash, 2021), despite many decisions that have been adopted to support the educational process.

The educational process in Syria has been severely affected since 2011. It has witnessed a major drop since the launch of the Syrian revolution. Many schools were demolished or turned into shelters for those who had been internally displaced (IDPs). Several students were compelled to stop their studies and were subsequently unable to finish them for a variety of reasons, the most significant of which is becoming internally displaced people or refugees. Syrians who lack access to public education have depended on international assistance both in Syria and in neighbouring countries (Adelman, 2019; Maadad &Matthews, 2020). Some of the students have withdrawn from their colleges and universities because of the war and have been forced to emigrate to other countries where they lived in refugee camps in the host countries like Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey before they were settled in the UK and other host countries.

Appendix 2: The Guide Themes of Follow-Up Interviews with Entry 2 Students and Teacher

1- Assessment Practices in ESOL Classroom.

    The Role of Assessment

    The aim of the assessment

2- Assessment Impact in the Classroom

    Teaching practices

    Learning practices

3- ESOL Exam Effect within the Classroom

    Effect on teacher's teaching approaches and roles

    Effect on students' learning approaches and motivation

    Effect on students' perceptions (Syrian experience and current experience.)

4- ESOL Curriculum Effect

    Assessment practices

    Teaching objectives

Appendix 3: Classroom Observation

Linda, the observed teacher, used various classroom assessment activities and practices during the lesson. The lesson was delivered to twenty students: eight male and twelve female. The students were from different backgrounds, two out of eight male students and three out of twelve female students were from Syria. The lesson topic was about 'hobbies', which was considered by the teacher as a relevant topic to the students' interest. Febrina (2017) suggested that the way a language is used by native speakers should be reflected in classroom teaching to motivate them to communicate (Littlewood, 1981). The lesson was designed to achieve the teaching objectives. The speaking activities were designed to encourage the students to speak and express their ideas (Suban, 2021). Students were asked to talk about their hobbies individually after the teacher showed them photos of people practising their hobbies. The images were used as learning resources to help language learners acquire speaking skills, grammar, and vocabulary as suggested by (Karya et al., 2022). There were photos of a lady who was drawing, an athlete who was skiing, and so on. The use of some photos aimed to motivate the students to participate. Then, the teacher asked them to work in pairs, they had to start their sentences with "I like….". In the beginning, the Syrian female students hesitated to participate as they found it hard to talk about what they like to do with their classmates. Karya et al., (2022) believe that the majority of English language learners find it difficult to practise speaking since they are scared to initiate conversations or express themselves in English. Constructive feedback was directly given by the teacher after each activity. The teacher used the feedback to correct the mistakes indirectly by asking extra questions. One of the students, for example, said "I like fish". The teacher asked "What do you do with fish?" The student replied "catching". Then the teacher asked the student to put the word "catching" in a full sentence, and he said "I like catching fish." This direct constructive feedback helped the student to learn from his mistake without feeling embarrassed. Finally, the teacher said "I like fishing!", asking the student to repeat the sentence. After this communicative activity, the teacher asked the students to look at the board on which she presented some pictures. After that, she asked them to work in groups to describe the pictures. In one of the groups, a Syrian lady student kept silent because her group included a Syrian male student who was talking about a football match that he had watched the day before. It was clear that she was uncomfortable being in the same group. The ladies in other groups were more active and comfortable than her. The teacher started to move around the tables listening to the students and checking their answers individually. Some of the students felt shy when the teacher sat next to them at the same table and asked them about their hobbies. It was clear that the students were scared to commit mistakes in front of the teacher. The teacher was listening with much attention to the students' answers in each group and interfered where the students needed any scaffolding. After finishing this activity, the teacher used another activity in which the students needed to come up to the board and match the pictures with the correct answers. Although this activity was interesting, the Syrian ladies kept their hands down and started complaining in Arabic. A student from another background (not from a Syrian background) went out and chose the correct answer, the students started to applaud. Later the teacher asked them to work in pairs and to ask each other the following question "What do you

like/ do not like to do?". One of the students said "I like cooking but I do not like washing dishes." The students agreed with her, but a student said "Me too". The teacher said "Neither me is the correct answer since the sentence meant to be negative." The teacher wrote the sentences on the board and explained the rule.

As the whole activity was designed to provoke speaking, the teacher tried to focus on achieving the main goal of the lesson by appointing more speaking activities. She asked the students to work again in groups. "On your table, please ask the following questions: What is your hobby? What do you do in your free time?". The teacher insisted on answering the questions verbally. Meanwhile, the teacher continued to walk around the tables and listen to their answers. Eman, a Syrian student, said "I like listening to the radio, but my friend likes/es drawing." The teacher corrected the pronunciation of the student, explaining the use of syllables, "The verb likes has one syllable, do not divide it into two syllables." I have noticed during the observation that the participating students used Arabic when they did not understand the meaning of 'syllable'. The first language, which is Arabic for Syrian students, interfered in their learning process, especially when they did not understand the activity or the meanings. It is believed that translation from English to Arabic helps in understanding the subject (Khan, Kumar, Supriyatno, & Nukapangu, 2021). As an observer, I could hear the students commenting, complaining, or explaining the activities in Arabic. It was obvious that Linda, the teacher, tried her best to include many activities to encourage students to participate. The students moved smoothly from one activity to the other, some Syrian students faced some issues in carrying out the activities which could be related to many reasons. These reasons can be summarised into the following; students' feelings and attitudes towards some activities or practices and difficulties in comprehending the teacher's explanation in English.

In the second hour of the lesson, the teacher asked the students to listen to a conversation about the same topic, and before they started, she distributed a worksheet. This activity was mainly directed to practice listening skills. She asked them not to take notes while they were listening "Listen and then write down the correct answers." She then reassured the students by saying "Do not worry about the mistakes, it is a listening activity." She repeated the audio text three times with a short pause between each one. After that, the students started to fill in the blanks with the correct answers. She went around the tables to check the students' answers. Before moving to the next activity, the teacher asked the students to raise their hands to answer. Most of the students participated, but it was obvious that the Syrian male students were more self-confident than female Syrian students. Laila and Hala, two of the Syrian participants were discussing the answers together, while Eman was complaining in Arabic since she couldn't hear most of the words. According to Eman, in the interview, she claimed that she could not hear well either because of the noise or because she did not understand what had been said. Consequently, she preferred not to participate to avoid embarrassment. The teacher asked her to try but she refused "I do not know," she said, but the teacher encouraged her to try and not to worry if the answer was wrong. The teacher gave the students a hint for passing these activities in the exam "In the exam, try to read the question paper before you start listening." Then the teacher distributed another worksheet and asked the students to take ten minutes to read the paragraph and then try individually to answer questions. A student asked, "What should we do?". The teacher replied "The first thing

that you need to do is to read the instructions, read the paragraph quickly, and finally answer the questions." Then she asked them to check their answers together while she was walking around. A student asked her about the meaning of 'hiking', and she told him to use the dictionary to find the meaning. After the ten minutes had finished, she asked the students to read the paragraph loudly "Who wants to read?". Again, the Syrian ladies' attempts were considered timid compared to other students as they did not try to read. When Eman was asked about this situation, she justified that by referring to her cultural background that prevents her from speaking in front of other men, in addition to her fair of making mistakes. The impact of the cultural background of the Syrian female students was noticed in this activity. This situation emphasized the importance of understanding and respecting students' cultural and social backgrounds (Matulionienė & Pundziuvienė, 2014) as they might affect the educational process.

The teacher then started explaining the meanings of the new words (hiking, pond, lake, and chess). The teacher used many techniques to give the meanings of the new words either by putting them in meaningful sentences, giving the direct meaning or explaining the difference between the words as in (lake/pond). The teacher served in the ESOL classroom as a "co-communicator", counsellor, and facilitator (Alam, 2013, p.29). She used to explain, to give examples, to engage students in the learning process, and to provide feedback. Then, she wrote the correct answers on the board. The students asked about the material for the exam. They kept repeating the same question after each activity, which showed how worried they were about the exam. At the end of the class, the teacher asked the students to tell her about the things they like to do as a quick revision. Before the class finished, she gave them a homework sheet to do at home.

Appendix 4: A Letter of Information to Participating Students

Dear Entry 2 Students,

I am Ghadeer Mashni and currently studying for a Doctorate of Education, in the School of Education and Professional Development, at the University of Huddersfield. As a part of my study, I am writing a thesis that focuses on ESOL students' perceptions of assessment in colleges. I will be working under the supervision of Dr. Susan Sheehan at the School of Education and Professional Development, Huddersfield University.

The aim of the project is to find out the current perceptions of students towards assessment. I will conduct a focus group interview with you in the college to investigate how you feel about the ESOL exam. These interviews may last for around one hour. The discussion will be about your perceptions of the ESOL exam; your views concerning the pre-exam revision activities, and about your learning practices. I would like to spend some time with you before the interview and have an initial discussion so that I can explain everything to you and respond to your questions.

The interview will be audio-taped. After completing the written copies of your answers, I will send them to you so that you can check them and return them. Your name will not be used in the interview rather you will be given a different name, and your responses will be stored in a secure place and destroyed later. Participation in the project is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided.

If you have any queries, please contact me by email: Ghadeer.Mashni@hud.ac.uk.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contribution.

Thank you

Ghadeer Mashni

Entry 2عزيزي طلاب

أنا غدير مشني وأدرس حاليًا للحصول على الدكتوراه في التربية في كلية التربية والتطوير المهني بجامعة هيدرسفيلد. كجزء حول التقييم في الكليات. **(ESOL)**من دراستي، أكتب أطروحة تركز على تصورات طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية سأعمل تحت إشراف الدكتورة سوزان شيهان في كلية التعليم والتطوير المهني بجامعة هيدرسفيلد.

الهدف من المشروع هو معرفة التصورات الحالية للطلاب تجاه التقييم. سأجري معك مقابلة جماعية مركّزة في الكلية لمعرفة قد تستمر هذه المقابلات لمدة ساعة واحدة تقريبًا. ستكون المناقشة حول تصوراتك **ESOL.** ما تشعر به تجاه اختبار آرائكم فيما يتعلق بأنشطة المراجعة قبل الامتحان، وحول ممارسات التعلم **(ESOL)**لامتحان اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية ؛ الخاصة بك. أود قضاء بعض الوقت معك قبل المقابلة وإجراء مناقشة أولية حتى أتمكن من شرح كل شيء لك والرد على أسئلتك.

المقابلة ستكون مسجلة صوتيا. بعد الانتهاء من النسخ المكتوبة من إجاباتك، سأرسلها إليك حتى تتمكن من التحقق منها وإعادتها مرة أخرى. لن يتم استخدام اسمك في المقابلة، بل سيتم إعطاؤك اسمًا مختلفًا، وسيتم تخزين إجاباتك في مكان آمن وتدميرها لاحقًا. المشاركة في المشروع طوعية ويمكنك الانسحاب في أي وقت.

إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، يرجى إكمال نموذج الموافقة المرفق والعودة

لي في الظرف المقدمة.

إذا كان لديك أي استفسار، يرجى الاتصال بي عبر البريد الإلكتروني **Ghadeer.Mashni@hud.ac.uk**:

وإنني أتطلع إلى العمل معك وأشكرك مقدمًا على مساهمتك.

شكرًا لتعاونكم

غدير مشني

Appendix 6: Participant Consent Form

University of Huddersfield

School of Education and Professional Development

Title: "ESOL Adult Student's Perceptions of Assessment in a Further Education College in the UK".

Dear students,

I am Ghadeer Mashni an EdD student at the School of Education and Professional Development at the University of Huddersfield. My research aims to identify the students' perceptions of assessment including ESOL examinations and its effect on their learning in the ESOL context. I will be grateful for your participation in this study. Please read the consent form carefully before you choose a suitable answer. Then sign the form at the end. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at my email: Ghadeer.Mashni@hud.ac.uk.

Participant Level ………

The researcher has fully informed me of the aim and nature of this research.

 Yes   No

I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

Yes   No

I agree to have my responses quoted once they have been anonymized.

Yes   No

I accept that the information given will be accessible only to members of the study team and facilitators.

Yes   No

I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym in the report and that no written information that could lead to me being identified will be included in any report

Yes   No

I accept to participate in the above study.

Yes   No

If you understand the form and agree to participate in this project, please choose YES/NO, and sign your name below.

Name…………………………. Signature ……………………….

استمارة موافقة اشتراك في البحث Appendix 7

جامعة هدرسفيلد

عنوان الدراسة: اراء الطلاب البالغين في اساليب التقييم المستخدمة في الكلية

انا الباحثة غدير مشني في كلية التربية وجامعة هدرسفيلدو بحثي يهدف الى التعرف على اراء الطلاب نحو التقييم يهدف وتأثيرها على تعلمهم (ESOL) بحثي إلى تحديد تصورات الطلاب للتقييم بما في ذلك اختبارات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية سأكون ممتنا لمشاركتك في هذه الدراسة. يرجى قراءة نموذج الموافقة (.ESOL) في سياق اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية بعناية قبل اختيار الإجابة المناسبة. ثم قم بالتوقيع على النموذج في النهاية. إذا كان لديك أي سؤال، فلا تتردد في الاتصال بي على بريدي الإلكتروني: Ghadeer.Mashni@hud.ac.uk

مستوى المشاركين

لقد أطلعني الباحث بشكل كامل على هدف هذا البحث وطبيعته.

نعم / لا

أدرك أن مشاركتي طوعية وأنه يجوز لي الانسحاب في أي وقت.

نعم / لا

أوافق على أن يتم اقتباس إجاباتي بمجرد أن يتم إخفاء هويتها.

نعم / لا

أوافق على أن المعلومات المقدمة ستكون متاحة فقط لأعضاء فريق الدراسة والميسرين.

نعم / لا

أدرك أن هويتي ستتم حمايتها من خلال استخدام اسم مستعار في التقرير وأنه لن يتم تضمين أي معلومات مكتوبة قد تؤدي إلى تحديد هويتي في أي تقرير

نعم / لا

أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة المذكورة أعلاه.

نعم / لا

إذا فهمت النموذج ووافقت على المشاركة في هذا المشروع، فيرجى اختيار نعم/لا وتوقيع اسمك أدناه.

اسم

إمضاء

Appendix 8: Information Letter to the ESOL Manager

Dear Sir/Madam

I am Ghadeer Mashni and currently studying for a Doctorate of Education, in the School of Education and Professional Development, at the University of Huddersfield. As a part of my study, I am writing a thesis that focuses on Syrian refugee ESOL students' perceptions of assessment in the colleges. I will be working under the supervision of Dr. Susan Sheehan at the School of Education and Professional Development, Huddersfield University.

The project aims to investigate the perceptions of ESOL students of assessment. It also focuses on how students understand assessment and how it affects their learning.

I would like to interview students from all levels to collect the needed data in the college. I also would like to observe an ESOL to identify the assessment practices that are used by the teacher during the lesson. I also aim to observe how the students interact with the employed assessment practices in the classroom. Therefore, I am seeking your approval to attend college and to carry out my project.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. Pseudonyms of the college and names of all the participants will be used. The data will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed later.

If you have any queries, please contact me by email: Ghadeer.Mashni@hud.ac.uk.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contribution.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 9: Consent Form for Entry 2 Teacher

I consent/agree to participate in the research project "ESOL Adult Student's Perceptions of Assessment in a Further Education College in the UK". I permit Ghadeer Mashni, a doctorate student, to attend the Entry 2 classroom for observation purposes.

I have clearly understood the aims and objectives of the research project and my role in the research if I participate.

I understand that my name will not be used, and the information will be confidential.

I understand that my participation in the project is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this project.

Name_____

Date_____

Signature_____

Appendix 10: Entry 2 observation list

Date: .... **Level:** ……………………………

Time: .... **lesson:** …………………………...

Teacher: ....

Classroom Assessment Activity

<u>Teacher's practices</u>

<u>Students Practices</u>

Classroom assessment practices

Exam-related information.

Exam-preparation practices

ESOL-related themes in teaching

Exam-related information

Test-taking approaches

Exam preparation material

ESOL-related themes in learning

Students' Questions related to the exam

Appendix 11: Consent Form for Entry 2 ESOL Students

Semi- structure Interviews

I have been given a full explanation of the project and had an opportunity to ask questions about it. I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in the project and I also know that my participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw at any stage.

I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher in a way that I will not be identified in any report of the research. Data collected for this study will be stored in a secure and destroyed.

I understand that I will be sent a report on the findings of the study report.

If I require further information, I can contact the researcher Ghadeer Mashni by email: Ghadeer.Mashni@hud.ac.uk.

By signing below, I agree to take part in the semi-structured interviews of the research project.

Name: …………………………

Date: ………………………….

Signature: …………………….

Please return this completed consent form to me in the envelope provided.

Thank you

Ghadeer Mashni

لقد حصلت على شرح كامل للمشروع وأتيحت لي الفرصة لطرح أسئلة حوله. أفهم ما سيكون مطلوبًا مني إذا وافقت على المشاركة في المشروع وأعلم أيضًا أن مشاركتي طوعية، ويمكنني الانسحاب في أي مرحلة.

أدرك أن أي معلومات أو آراء أقدمها ستظل سرية بالنسبة للباحث بحيث لن يتم التعرف علي في أي تقرير عن البحث. سيتم تخزين البيانات التي تم جمعها لهذه الدراسة في مكان آمن وتدميرها.

أدرك أنه سيتم إرسال تقرير إليّ حول نتائج تقرير الدراسة.

إذا كنت بحاجة إلى مزيد من المعلومات، يمكنني الاتصال بالباحثة غدير مشني عبر البريد الإلكتروني:
Ghadeer.Mashni@hud.ac.uk

بالتوقيع أدناه، أوافق على المشاركة في المقابلات شبه الهيكلية للمشروع البحثي.

اسم

إمضاء

يرجى إعادة نموذج الموافقة المكتمل هذا لي في الظرف المقدم.

شكرًا لك

غدير مشني

Appendix 13: Semi-Structured Interview Question

<u>Introductory questions</u>

- Can you please introduce yourself (level, age, educational background? professional background)

- How long have you been in the UK?

- When did you join the ESOL course in the college? What was your aim?

- How long have you been learning English? How many times do you attend the ESOL classes?

- How can you describe your experience when you joined the college?

<u>Students' Assessment Knowledge and Perception</u>

- Can you tell me in simple words, what the word 'assessment' means for you?

- What do you know about assessment?

- Can you please describe your feelings when you had your diagnostic exam before you started college?

- How did you feel during and after the exam?

- Can you tell me about your experience of assessment in Syria?

- How does your learning experience in the college differ from your previous one?

- What is the aim of the exams in the ESOL classes based on your experience?

- How can classroom assessment practices and activities help you to improve your learning?

- Can you describe some of the assessment practices or activities?

- How do you feel towards all these different activities?

<u>The impact of assessment practices on students' learning and motivation.</u>

- How do the assessment practices affect your learning?

- What do you think about the final exam?

- How do you study for the exam?

- How do you feel about the results of the exam? Why?

Appendix 14: Sample of Student Interview Transcript

1- **Can you please introduce yourself (level, age, educational background, professional background).**

My name is <u>Mohammad</u>. I am a <u>22-year-old</u> Syrian refugee in <u>Entry 2</u>. I used to be <u>a student in secondary school</u> before I left the country, unfortunately, I couldn't finish my studies because of the situation. I did not have the chance in Lebanon to join the school again, so I hope that I can pursue my studies here in the UK.

2- **How long have you been in the UK?**

I fled Syria to Lebanon after the crisis in 2013. Then, I arrived in the UK with my family in 2017. I have been here <u>for 2 years</u> now.

3- **When did you join the ESOL course in the college? What was your aim?**

I joined the college <u>six months after arriving in the UK</u>. I wanted to learn English to <u>continue my studies at the university</u> (Aim to join the college). I want to be a science teacher. I learnt some English in Syria when I was a student at the school, but I do not think that I am good enough to join the university. I also want to find a suitable job to work while I am studying.

4- **How long have you been learning English here? How many times do you attend the ESOL classes?**

I have been in this college for nearly <u>a year and a half</u>. I attend the ESOL classes <u>twice a week for 5 hours</u>.

5- **Can you tell me in simple words, what the word 'assessment' means for you?**

To know the level of something or somebody. In college, <u>assessment means knowing the level of a student before moving to the next level.</u>

6- **What do you know about assessment from your own experience?**

I have been a student for more than 9 years before I left my country in which I have experienced all types of exams, quizzes, and tests (previous experience). We normally used to have short quizzes during the week while exams and tests were at the end of the term or the year. We rarely had speaking or listening exams as the teachers used to ignore these two skills (WE). The main aim of the exams was to check our understanding and if we were able to move to the next grade.

7- **Can you please describe your feelings when you had your diagnostic exam before you started college?**

I do not deny that I was a little bit nervous before the exam (NW). Everything was new; the college, the setting, the language, and the teachers. It was my first time to have an

exam after I left the school. I think everything went well. The teachers/assessors were so kind and the exam was easy. *(WE)* It was a short exam to decide our level.

8- How did you feel during and after the exam?

I was so relaxed during the exam because I knew most of the answers since I had learned the basics and some English at school in Syria. However, after the exam, I had mixed feelings, I was satisfied with the results and worried at the same time *(NW).* After that, I directly joined Entry 1 because of my previous knowledge.

9- Can you tell me about your experience of assessment in Syria?

As I have told you before, in Syria, tests were the main assessment method to decide our levels. We started having English in grade five, and that was the reason for not knowing too much English. Teachers used to evaluate us during the year using *(AP)* / *(SA)* exams and tests. Teachers were assessing us to decide whether a student passed or failed the year. The evaluation process was mainly a kind of pass-or-fail one. The assessment was not used to help us improve *(NW)* our skills in learning as most of our work was based on memorisation *(NW)* / *(LP)* For example, I cannot remember that I ever had a speaking or listening test. *(AP)* / *(SA)*

10- How is your learning experience in the college different from your previous experience in Syria?

I was very excited to join the college and learn a new language in a more organised way, but everything was new and different. In the beginning, I found it hard to participate because my language was not good enough (language level) *(WE)* / *(NP)* to speak. But, the teacher kept encouraging us to participate and to work in groups, or pairs. *(AP)*Learning English in ESOL classes is different from what I had experienced in Syria. The teacher here keeps us motivated. *(WE)* / *(PE)*

She gives us the chance to talk most of the time, unlike our teachers in Syria. The teachers there used to speak most of the time *(NP)* without giving us the chance to use the language. We also had to focus on learning grammar and vocabulary more than speaking or listening, and because of that, the teacher used to skip these exercises. I believe that this way of teaching and learning English is more helpful to improve my language skills. *(PP)*

11- What is the aim of the exams in the ESOL classes based on your experience?

Assessment is an important *(PP)* step during the learning process because it puts people in the right place. For example, when I had the first assessment test (diagnostic), I knew that my knowledge of English was very basic. After the test, I was placed at the right level which suited my abilities and knowledge, which made my learning easier*(PP).* Thus, I believe that tests are the only way to achieve this aim. I also believe there are some similarities between the testing system here and in Syria. The main difference is in their objectives. In Syria, the final exam aims to assess students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary *(RNP),* but here the exam aims to assess students' skills in general so they can improve the ones that need more improvement.

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12-How can classroom assessment practices and activities help you to improve your learning?

Assessment activities inside the classroom (AP) /(FA) helped me to improve my skills; especially in speaking. I became more confident in using the language and less anxious (PE). Learning in a place that is full of collaboration and communication encourages me to be involved and be part of this big group. Additionally, the teacher keeps encouraging us to participate and providing us with the needed feedback(RPE), which motivates us to work in a stress-free setting. We also practice listening and writing during the class, which improves our skills (PE) altogether. I believe that I can understand more and learn quicker when things are explained in a simple, interesting way. (RPE)

13-Can you describe some of the assessment practices or activities?

During the classroom, the teacher asks us to carry out different types of activities. She may ask us to work in a group for discussion and sharing ideas. Sometimes she asks us to work in pairs to check each other's work (peer work), (AP) /(FA) or to work individually for the same purpose. We also have classroom discussions and presentations. In addition to the homework at the end of the lesson. I believe that all these activities helped me too much to learn and to acquire the language easily.

14-How do you feel towards all these different activities?

I do not have any problem. I noticed that some students were not satisfied with some types of activities. (RNP) For example, Syrian female students tend to stay together to prevent communicating with other female students.

15-How do the classroom assessment practices affect your learning?

I became more aware of my learning problems (PE) which helped me to develop my language skills and learning abilities. I also became more motivated to become an active learner. (PE)

16-What do you think about the final exam?

I think that the final exam is necessary for assessing my learning competence. (RPP)It is also important as it provides the students at the end of the course with the ESOL qualification which can be used to continue studying or finding a job.

17-How does the exam affect your learning motivation and practice?

Most of the students do not like the examinations as they put much stress and demotivate them. (NW) (LM) I think this differs from one student to another, for example, I believe that exams motivate me to study as I have a specific aim to achieve. Before the exam I focus on studying the exam-related material as our exam (NW) / (LP) at this level is mostly similar to what we learn in the classroom according to our teacher.

18-How do you study for the exam?

I told you before that there is a similarity between the exams here and Syria. One of the similarities is the way I learn for the exam. I depend on memorisation (NW) / (LP) as the main learning practice to pass the exam.

18- How do you feel about the results of the exam? Why?

I care too much about passing the exam and moving to the next level. Therefore, I try to make sure that I will pass the exam as I want to finish the course continue my studies and find a job that suits my goals.

NEGATIVE WASHBACK	**(NW)**
LEARNING MOTIVATION	**(LM)**
WASHBACK EFFECT	**(WE)**
LANGUAGE PRACTICES	**(LP)**
REASON FOR POSITIVE PERCEPTION	**(RPP)**
ASSESSMENT PRACTICES	**(AP)**
SUMMATIVE PRACTICES	**(SP)**
POSITIVE EFFECT	**(PE)**
REASONS FOR NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS	**(RNP)**
SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT	**(SA)**
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	**(FA)**
POSITIVE PERCEPTION	**(PP)**
REASONS FOR POSITIVE EFFECT	**(RPE)**

Appendix 15: A sample of semi-structured coding

Semi-structured interview questions	Ahmad's Answers	Themes	Codes
1- When did you join the ESOL course in the college? What was your aim?	I joined the college eight months after arriving in the UK. My main aim as a father who is responsible for a family, that is trying to start a new life in the UK, is to learn English and find a suitable job. Therefore, I joined this course hoping that I would learn how to speak English quickly.	Reasons for joining the college in the ESOL context	-The student's main aim of learning English: ➢ Integrating into the new society ➢ Employment ➢ Developing the English language competence ➢ Speaking English quickly
How long have you been learning English? How many times do you attend the ESOL classes?	I have been in the college for nearly a year. I attend the ESOL classes twice a week for 5 hours.	-The duration of the new educational experience	➢ Acquiring new expertise • Teaching and learning • Evaluation
Can you tell me in simple words, what the word 'assessment' means for you?	To have exams so the teacher can know students' level.	-Student's previous educational experience	➢ Summative assessment • Examinations ➢ Exams' purpose

What do you know about assessment?	When I was a student in Syria, I used to have short quizzes during the week, but the exams and tests were at the end of the term or the year.	-Student's previous evaluation experience	• Evaluating language proficiency • Classification purposes

			➢ Examinations/quizzes
			
			    • throughout the year
			
			    • At the end of the term or the year

	My exams were mainly reading and grammar. I had to memorise new vocabulary too. There were no speaking or listening exams. The exams aimed to check our information and the marks were very important to decide our future as students regarding moving to the next grade or graduation.	-Focus of the examinations in the Syrian context.	➢ Reading, grammar, and vocabulary ➢ eliminating speaking and listening skills. ➢ Influencing students' future
		-The importance of exams' marks	• Moving to the next grade • Graduation

Can you please describe your feelings when you had your diagnostic exam before you started college?	I was a little bit worried before the exam because my English was not good. Although we used to learn English, we did not have the opportunity to improve our language competence and skills.	-Student's perceptions of the new evaluating process -Reasons for the negative effect	➤ Diagnostic exam • Negative effect ▪ Anxiety ➤ Lack of language knowledge ➤ The effect of the previous educational experience. • Not developing language skills.
How did you feel during and after the exam?	I felt much better as the exam went easy. I knew most of the answers, and because of that, I joined Entry 3.	-Student's perceptions -The consequences of the exam results	➤ Easy and suitable • Good feeling • Pleased with the result ➤ Classifying the students into suitable levels based on their results
Can you tell me about your experience of assessment in Syria?	When I was a student at secondary school, the main goal of the teacher was to finish teaching the textbooks and	-Student's previous educational experience (Syrian context)	➤ Teachers' main aim in teaching English • Finish the curriculum on time • Help the students to pass the final exam

	pass the public examination. To achieve this goal, teachers used to skip teaching some activities that were not included in the exam such as listening and speaking exercises. Our speaking and listening skills were affected badly by focusing on the results of the exam, thus, we still face problems in speaking in the UK.	-Teacher's plan to achieve their goals	➢ Teaching to the test
			• Cramming
			• Reducing the curriculum
			• Focusing on reading and vocabulary, ignoring speaking and listening skills
			• Focusing on the score of the test
		-Results of focusing on teaching to the test	➢ Speaking difficulties
			• Unable to communicate and integrate
How does your learning experience in the college differ from your previous one?	I used to be so nervous at the beginning of the course, I preferred to keep silent and not participate, but when the teacher asked us to work in pairs or	-Initial learning experience in the ESOL context	➢ Negative feelings
			• Anxiety
			• Inactive/passive student
			➢ The employment of various activities
			• Group work

	groups, I started to gain more confidence, and gradually I started to participate in the classroom, which affected my language positively.	-Classroom practices
		
		- The results of using various activities
			• Work in pairs
			➢ Positive washback:
			    • Engaging in the educational process
			        o Confident
			        o Active participation

What is the aim of the exams in the ESOL classes based on your experience?	- Exams are used to put students at the right level. The diagnostic test, for example, put me in the right level which suited my abilities and knowledge.	- The main purpose of summative assessment	➢ Classification purposes
			    • putting the students at the right level that suits
			        o students' ability
			        o students' knowledge

How can classroom assessment practices and activities help you to improve your learning?	It improves my self-confidence and motivates me to participate more in the class. In addition to that, it improves my language skills and puts less stress on me,	-The effect of formative assessment practices on students' learning	➢ Positive washback effect
			    • Motivating students to learn
			    • Improving self-confidence
			    • Improving language skills
			    • Less stressful unlike exams

	unlike the exams.		
Can you describe some of the assessment practices or activities?	The teacher asks us to carry out different types of activities. She may ask us to work in a group or to work in pairs to check each other's work. We also have to check our work to make sure that we understand the lesson.	-Examples of employed assessment activities in the classroom	➢ Formative assessment practices • Peer assessment • Self -assessment • Group work
How do you feel towards all these different activities?	I feel good as they encourage me to achieve my own goals and motivate me to learn and speak more.	-Students' perceptions of assessment	➢ Positive washback • Motivates students to learn • Encourages students to achieve their goals • Develops speaking skills
How did the assessment practices affect your learning?	I became more confident in speaking and participating during the lesson. This motivated me to practice my language even during real-life situations.	-The impact of assessment practices on students' learning and motivation.	➢ Positive washback • Increased students' confidence • Encouraged participation • Motivated to speak in real-life situations

What do you think about the final exam?	I do not think that the final exam is needed to evaluate my learning skills. I do not care too much about the marks, I just want to learn how to speak.	-Student's perception of summative assessment	➢ Negative perception • Exams are not required for evaluation ➢ Focusing on the aim, not the marks

How do you study for the exam?	I nearly follow the same way that I used to do in Syria. I just study the important topics and memorise the new learning material.	-The effect of exams on students' learning practices	➢ Adopting exam-taking practices
			    • Memorisation
			    • Reducing the curriculum
			➢ Negative washback effect
			    • Study to the test

How do you feel about the results of the exam? Why?	As I told you previously, I do not care about the marks, but I know that I need to pass the exam to move on to the next level course in hopes of finding a job that suits my goals.	-The effect of summative assessment on students' future	➢ Passing the exam helps the student to
			    • Move to the next level
			    • Find a suitable job

Appendix 16 : A sample of initial themes and codes

Research Question	Theme		Code	Sub-code	Code	Sub-code
What are the impacts of assessment practices on language learning?	**Summative Assessments** **(positive)** -Give more reliable and objective results on students' achievements throughout the course	**Formative Assessments** **(positive)** -Enhancing language skills and knowledge and accomplishing aims **-** Followed by Constructive Feedback -Different formative assessment practices were applied - Learning in a Cooperative Environment	**Summative Assessments** -Not affected by teacher's presumption - The outcomes Reflect the real knowledge of the students	**Summative Assessments** -Unbiased -Authentic results	**Formative Assessments** - Improve speaking skills - Master the language and achieve learning objectives - Self-assessment and peer assessment -Group work	**Formative Assessments** - Increase self-confidence -Motivate learning - More active learners - Improve performance - More aware of their learning goals -Developed critical thinking - Authentic material and culturally appropriate - Improve their four skills
	(Negative)	**(Negative)**				

What are the impacts of assessment practices on language learning?	-Increasing students' stress and anxiety -Adopting learning strategies before the exam focused on passing the exam - Have test-preparation activities	- The intervention of the first language - Lack of alignment between students' learning objectives and assessment practices - Adopting unfavourable practices -Ignoring Individual differences	-Depend on rote learning to pass the exam -Insufficient for assessing their actual skills or for improving their proficiency - significant decisions are made based on the results regarding students' future (educational -Preparation practices - Exam questions were similar to classroom activities - studying for the ESOL exam is similar to studying for the final exams in Syria	-Become anxious before the exam -Memorise exam-related material -High-stakes features - Outcomes were used for classification purposes -Negative effect on learning motivation - Cheating - Two-week review period -Mock exams - Exam - related content - Cramming -Stressful	-Not clear activities because of weak English -Different aims for learning English - Relying on others to accomplish the assessment tasks -unfamiliar with the new practices -Completely different testing background	- Arabic was used during the activity -Not Motivated -Copying other's answers - Unreliable outcomes for assessment -Unclear objectives -Unfair for low levels -Lack of the required knowledge of how to employ them -Waste of classroom time

Appendix

The Themes of Semi-Structure Interview

- **To understand and explain adult ESOL refugee Syrian students' perceptions towards assessment in a Further Education College.**
    1- *Learners' perceptions* about the assessment impact on learning English language (LP)
        ➤ Positive perception (PP)
        ➤ Reasons for positive perceptions (RPP)

(self- confidence, stress- free setting, motivation for learning, the alignment between objectives of assessment and students aims)

        ➤ Negative perception (NP)
        ➤ Reasons for negative perception (RNP)

 (Difficult due to culture differences in teaching, learning, and testing, Interference with Arabic, Waste of time, unfairness, anxiety, previous experience, assessment policy, cultural background)

- **To identify *assessment methods* employed by ESOL teachers and to determine in what   way these methods affect students' perceptions, motivations, and attitudes.(AM)**
    - Assessment practices on language learning influence (AP)
        ➤ Formative assessment (FA)
        ➤ Summative assessment (SA)
- **To investigate the washback effect of assessment on students' learning English in the ESOL context.**
    - The impact of assessment practices on learning
        ➤ Washback Effect (WE)
            ▪ Negative effect (NE)
            ▪ Positive effect (PE)
                ❖ Students' perception (SP)
                ❖ Learning practices (LP)
                ❖ Learning motivation (LM))

    - Factors affecting the impact of washback (FW)

    (Anxiety , different testing background, Negative attitudes towards testing strategies)

- **Causes for the washback effects.**

        (Assessment policy,   Previous experiences, language level, cultural differences)