Washback Effects of The TOEIC Examination: A Study of Adult Learner’s Attitudes Toward English Exams, Learning and Teaching in A TOEIC Preparation Class

Liu, Tzu-Ying
Department of English, Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages

Abstract

“Washback” is the influence of testing on language teaching and learning. Researchers have paid most of their attention to the washback of tests on teaching. Little has been discussed about the influence of testing on learning. The purpose of this paper was to explore the washback effects of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) on adult learners in a TOEIC preparation class. Fifteen adult learners participated in the study, and the mix-method approach was used for the research design. Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed mixed reactions of washback effects on learning, both positive and negative. The results of the study
also suggested that teachers and learners factors had greater impact on types of washback effects. On the basis of current understanding of washback, suggestions for reinforcing positive washback on learning are offered.

Keywords: Washback Effects, TOEIC, Adult Learners
多益考試之回沖效應：
多益準備班之成人學習者對於考試、學習、教學面態度之探討

劉子瑛
文藻外語大學英文系

摘要

回沖效應指考試對於老師語言教學與學生學習之影響。研究人員對於回沖效應在教學面有深入研究，但在於學生學習面卻缺乏相關討論。本研究旨在探究多益考試在多益準備班成人學習者所產生的回沖效應。共有 15 位成人學習者參與本研究，而研究設計是採量化與質化的混和研究方法。研究結果顯示回沖效應在學習面是混和型的，也就是回沖效應對於學習面可以是正面與負面的影響。研究結果也發現教師與學生本身的因素對於產生的回沖效應類型有更大的影響。基於本研究結果對於回沖效應的了解，如何強化正面的學習回沖效應在結論中也提出建議。

關鍵字：回沖效應、多益、成人學習者
Ⅰ. Introduction

As Taiwan becomes well-known by its products, advanced technology, and beautiful scenery in the world, there are more chances for people in Taiwan to interact with foreigners. Businessmen need English ability to communicate with more customers from all over the world. Also, in service industries, service providers might face foreigner customers or English documents at work times, so having a good command of English becomes very important for them. In brief, English learning is not only for young students, but also for people who are in work. Thus, how to prove one’s English ability from standardized tests becomes crucial for employees or job seekers.

Today, Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is the world’s leading test of English proficiency in a business context. The results of a statistic survey conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) (2011) indicated that more than 10,000 companies and language schools worldwide use TOEIC and more than 6 million people took the test in more than 120 countries. This test is designed to measure one’s English language proficiency in international business settings or industry environment around the world. Most importantly, this test is used as an indicator in business settings when making personnel decisions, such as hiring, placement and career promotion in the workplace. According to ETS statistic report (2012), more than 264,000 people took the TOEIC test in Taiwan, and twenty-two percent of these test takers had full-time jobs. In response to the trend of globalization, it is not difficult to see that by having a good score on the TOEIC can help one open up more opportunities and give job seekers a competitive edge in this global workplace.

Because the trend has reflected the strong demand of English in business setting, many language institutions offered classes to help adult learners raise their TOEIC scores. For these institutions, the TOEIC is not just a possible indicator of English proficiency; instead, it is the core part of the English curriculum. Even though this test was not designed for that purpose, Hilke and Wadden (1997) have stated that it is common for high-stakes tests to connect with the curriculum closely and become a
facet of the curriculum.

There is no denying that all assessments have consequences, some of which are intended, others unintended. This is usually referred as washback. Washback, a term popular in British applied linguistics, may be understood as the influence that a test has on teaching and learning. Washback (Alderson & Wall, 1993), together with a similar related terms such as backwash (Biggs, 1995), both refer to the same phenomenon. Biggs (1995) uses the term ‘backwash’ to refer to the fact that testing drives not only the curriculum but teaching methods and students’ approaches to learning. Washback has been defined as a part of the impact a test may have on learners and teachers, on educational systems in general, and on society at large (Hughes, 2003). Even though washback has long been mentioned in the literature in language testing, the phenomenon has only started to attract researchers’ attention in recent years.

To date, researchers have paid most of their attention to the washback of tests on teaching. Several studies have examined washback effects on adult learners in Taiwanese contexts (Pan & Newfields, 2012; Shih, 2007; Tasi & Tsou, 2009), little has mainly focused on the influence of TOEIC test on adult learners learning. As a result, there is a strong need for empirical studies on different tests to enrich the scope of washabck research.

Therefore, the purpose of the study paid special attention to learning in view of the fact that most washback studies have targeted on teaching and ignored the learning. It then was designed to explore how the TOEIC test may impact adult learners.

By gathering questionnaire data from a group of adult learners in a TOEIC class, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the washback of the TOEIC test on adult learners?
2. How do adult learners perceive the TOEIC test?

II. Literature Review
2.1 Washback on Teaching and Learning

Washback refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Bailey, 1996). Robb (1999) said that the concept of washback presupposes a belief in a notion that tests are prominent determiners of classroom practices and events.

Numerous studies began to appear that reported washback findings in diverse teaching and learning contexts. In terms of washback on teaching, two teachers who have different teaching styles are being observed in both the TOEFL preparation and the non-TOEFL preparation courses (Alderson & Hamp-Lyon, 1996). Alderson and Hamp-Lyon (1996) stated that TOEFL alone does not cause washback; instead, it is the individual teacher’s styles and personalities that cause the washback they observed. Also, according to Shih’s (2007) review of washback studies, empirical studies over the last decade on domains of teaching practice affected by washback have covered the following: (a) content of teaching, (b) assessment methods, (c) teaching method, and also (d) overall teaching styles, classroom atmosphere and teachers’ feelings.

The majority of the previous washback researches have been looking into washback effects on teaching. This situation echoed the description by Watanabe (2004) in an article discussing methodology in washback studies. Watanabe (2004) concluded that the area of washback on teaching has been well explored; while washback to the learner has received less attention in the literature. Despite the limited washback effects studies on learning, the following studies have discussed the impact of testing on learners.

In Shohamy’s (1993) study on the Arabic Test, she proposed that test can both have positive and negative washback on students’ behaviors. Beneficial washback on learning includes students’ learning attitude, motivation, and learning outcomes. For example, she found that some students claimed that because of the test, they took Arabic studies more seriously and their motivation toward learning was enhanced. On the other hand, the test caused negative washback as well, such as the pressure, fear, and anxiety on the students and the tests frustrated the students.
In Cheng’s (1998) study, she explored washback effect of the revised Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in English (HKCEE) on Hong Kong Secondary School students’ perceptions and attitudes. She found that the impact on students' motivation and learning strategies remained minimal. She stated that wherever there is an examination change, there is likely to be a re-focus of students' attention to the examination, but any immediate and genuine changes in the students' learning process are rather unlikely to occur.

Ahmad and Rao (2012) examined the influence of current examination system on the students’ communicative competence in Pakistan. The result revealed that the present examination system exerts negative influence on the students’ learning. Because the teachers’ main consideration of teaching is the students’ preparation of examination, teachers lay least attention on creativity in the classroom. Consequently, the students’ communicative competence is negatively affected by the grammar-based examinations.

Another study focusing on the washback of the college English exam (CEEE) in China was conducted by Wang and Bao (2013). The study showed that the CEEE plays a crucial role in enabling the students to employ various strategies to learn English, especially reading and vocabulary learning strategies. Due to the nature of CEEE, lots of harmful washback effects were found, such as hindering the interests of learners and narrowing the learning materials.

As for the washback effects of students’ learning activities, Jou (2010) investigated how students in one Taiwan university prepared for the TOEIC, an exam that they could choose to meet their school graduation requirements for English. Three-fourths of them reported that they adopted traditional test-preparation methods such as practicing test-related questions in test preparation materials, and taking test preparation lessons either in or outside of school. Merely 6.3% utilized authentic materials such as watching CNN or listening to the ICRT to prepare for the TOEIC.

The findings on above-mentioned aspects of teaching and learning were affected by the washback effects; however, somewhat explained that washback was a complex phenomenon with different intervening
factors from test to test and from context to context.

2.2 Attitude

According to Myriam Webster Dictionary, an attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for something. Attitude is a feeling or way of thinking that affects a person's behavior. Wenden (1991) indicated that attitudes refer to an emotional reaction comprising three components: cognition, affection, and behavior. Cognition is a cognitive evaluation of the entity that constitutes an individual's beliefs about the object. The affective response is an emotional response that expresses an individual's degree of preference for an entity. The behavior is then the outward result of the former two factors.

Baker (1992), a specialist in bilingualism and bilingual education, also defines attitude as “a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and the persistence of human behavior.” In his model, the construct of attitude includes three components: cognitive, affective and conative (readiness for action). The cognitive component refers to the beliefs, thoughts, and values. The affective component concerns feelings toward the object. As for the third component, conative or readiness for action, suggests a behavioral intention of the plan of action. These three components interact with each other. In other words, what we believe will have an effect on how we feel, what we do and what we say in the world.

Gardner (1972) stated that learning attitude and learning motivation determined the extent of which individuals would actively devote themselves in learning a second language. Chihara and Oller (1978) also examined the relationship between learning attitude and students’ learning. They found out that different attitudinal variables had a significant effect on the subjects’ attained proficiency. Krashen (1982) pointed out that learning attitude are important factors in the process of acquiring a second language in his Affective Filter hypothesis. Negative emotions can prevent efficient processing of the language input. Dulay and Bult (1997) claimed that affective factors, such as learning attitude,
learning anxiety and learning motivation strongly influence the result of the language learning.

Stoneman (2006) indicated that learners’ attitude toward the status or the stakes of the test influenced the strength of the test effects. Students tended to spend more time on context that was covered on the high-stakes test than they did on lower-status tests. Moreover, students had negative perception toward standardized tests preparation classes. Standardized tests usually lowered students’ motivation in English learning because their classes were test-oriented, only enhancing their test-taking skills instead of their communicative competence (Tasi & Tsou, 2009).

Building from these lines of research, gaining an understanding of adult learners’ attitude is an area of research that is needed. The researcher defines that attitude is a key construct that influences individual’s decision in educational settings, and it consists of affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. The affective component is the emotion or feeling which includes statements of likes or dislikes toward objects. The cognitive constituent refers to statements of beliefs. The behavioral component is what an individual actually does or intends to do. Therefore, the study was formulated within this framework.

2.3 The Characteristic of Adult Learners

In this study, the participants are adult learners, so it is necessary to know the characteristic of adult learners. Adult learners are different from traditional young students. Unlike traditional young students, many adult learners have challenges and responsibilities, such as multiple roles in life, family obligation and job duties. In other words, adult learners’ life is complex due to career, family, and other personal choices. Even though adult learners enter educational programs voluntarily, these factors can interfere with their learning process.

To better understand how adults learn, a number of theories and models attempt to explain adult learning today. One of the most well-known theories is Malcolm S. Knowles’ learning theory of andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn. Andragogy is
designed to address adults’ particular needs, and it is based on the idea that there are significant differences in learning characteristics between children and adults (Knowles, 1970). Adult learners bring life experiences to learning and that as maturation occurs, the individual’s orientation to learning is much different from the traditional pedagogical model. In other words, adult educators should use teaching methods that are distinguished from other areas of education. According to Houle (1996), andragogy has alerted adult educators that they should involve learners in as many aspects of their education as possible and in the creation of an environment in which they can fruitfully learn.

Anragogy has presented the adult learners’ learning characteristics to adult educators. Adult learners have rich life experiences, are self-directed and self-motivated, tend to have a life-centered and problem-centered orientation to learning (Knowles, 1970; Kolb, 1984). According to Cercone (2008), adult learners are autonomous, independent, and self-reliant, and they are self-directed toward goals.

Since each individual is a unique being, the instructors need to be open to each student and respect each person as an individual who has experience that may be valuable to the classroom. Therefore, the challenge for adult educators is to understand adult learners’ characteristics and their attitudes toward learning, and be able to adopt specific teaching techniques to cater their special learning needs.

Most adult learners are highly motivated and task-oriented (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Therefore, many adult learners returned to school as a way to regain control or advance their professional or personal lives. Besides their duties from work and family, some of them started to take part in an English proficiency test to testify their English level and this might bring some positive or negative effects to these adult learners. Under these circumstances, it is important for adult educators to understand the washback effects of the TOEIC on adult learners’ learning.
III. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Since the washback phenomenon in the educational context is complex and obscure, the research study was designed to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods. The subjects’ answers to the five-point Likert scale items were analyzed quantitatively. In order to assess the students’ attitudes toward TOEIC exam, learning and teaching, the researcher designed one instrument. The scale was formulated within the framework for assessing attitudes set out by Wenden (1991), and Baker (1992). These researchers both identified three distinct constructs on which to base assessment of attitudes: affection, cognition and behavior. All of the items from the scale were undertaken in English and the translation of items in Chinese was completed by researcher. An expert review panel was assembled to ensure that the questions were clear enough to measure what they intended. Grounding the survey within this framework at attitude constructs ensures a comprehensive measure of students’ attitudes toward TOEIC exam, learning and teaching.

Moreover, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the washback effect, a qualitative perspective was necessary. The interviews thus aimed to gain insight into phenomena of washback effects and enhance the depth of the research. The purpose of adopting a mixed methods approach was not only for gathering and reconciling data, but also for incorporating the strengths of both the quantitative and qualitative methods with respect to the underlying washback effects.

3.2 Research Methods

The participants involved in this study included 15 adult learners who took Intermediate TOEIC preparation class in an extension education center in Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages. Adult learners who finished the Introductory TOEIC class can take the Intermediate TOEIC class, so their prior experience may pay a role in
washback and attitudes. It is an eleven-week TOEIC preparation course. Students take three hours classes on Saturday morning per week.

The material they use is Longman Preparation Series for NEW TOEIC-Intermediate Course, 4th Edition. In this book, there are more than 1,000 practice items that reflect the format and content of the TOEIC test. This book also provides some strategies for students on each section of the test.

As for the instructor’s background, this instructor has a Master’s Degree in TESOL and has been teaching English for twenty years. This instructor has experience in teaching TOEIC classes for two years. As for teaching style, this teacher lectures most of the time and uses power point slides as a visual aid in the classroom.

VI. Results and Discussions

4.1 Adult Learners’ Attitudes toward Language Learning

This category was designed to explore how the adult learners perceived their English learning in a TOEIC preparation class. There were five items in this category. They were designed on a 5-point Likert scale, where 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree.

Question 1 to question 4 concerned about whether attending TOEIC preparation class can enhance the overall English abilities of the students. In terms of listening and reading abilities, the statistic numbers showed that respondents who agreed with the statements were 80% (N=12) and 86% (N=13) respectively. As for speaking and writing, only 13% of the respondents (N=2) agreed that learning in TOEIC class benefited their speaking ability and simply 7% of the respondents (N=1) agreed that TOEIC class can advance their writing ability. It showed that students’ English learning in TOEIC class was involved with the strengthening their receptive skills, which were listening, and reading, rather than speaking and writing. Even though the purpose of the TOEIC preparation class is to improve students’ receptive language skills, students expressed the need for improving
their productive language skills.

Qualitative data not only pointed out the inadequate English learning in speaking and writing, but also further suggested the learning need from students.

*I think that taking this class can only improve my listening and reading. I also learned some strategies for test taking. But, I hope I will have some chances to practice speaking or writing.*

Question 5 explored whether the TOEIC test can push students harder in learning English in their free time. 87% (N=13) believed that TOEIC test generated a degree of influence on students’ self-learning after class. In the qualitative interviews, all of the interviewees pointed out that they did not have time for their entertainment, leisure activities, family, etc. Two respondents reflected how they studied harder in their own time.

*When I am at work, I will try to take a peep at the textbook.*

*I need to study TOEIC test when I am free, so I have to sacrifice the time I spend with my family. One time, I even had an argument with my wife about this.*

Because of preparing the test, adult learners found that the test has created negative washback effect in their life, and this effect could be harmful for them if they do not take immediate and proper procedure.

Hence, in light of these static result and comments, it can conclude that teacher’s mainly emphasizing on listening and reading caused the imbalanced type of learning for students. Because of this, it let students perceive their inadequacy in English learning and express their strong urge. Furthermore, TOEIC test has pushed adult learners harder in learning. Nevertheless, due to having multiple roles in life, adult learners needed to sacrifice the time for work and family in order to study, and this situation caused some conflicts in several circumstances. Under these circumstances, adult learners were not well-prepared for such changes in their life because they have not recognized the importance of organizing, scheduling and prioritizing their daily activities. In other words, besides focusing on English learning, learning
how to have a better time management is another lesson that adult students must learn.

4.2 Adult Learners’ Attitudes toward Teaching

This section was designed to explore adult learners’ attitudes toward teaching activities carried out inside the classroom by their teacher. Participants were asked to grade the frequency with which their teachers engaged in a list of four activities in class. There are four items in this category. They were designed on a 5-point Liker Scale.

Question 6 examined how teacher taught in TOEIC class. From the result, we can see that explaining the textbook and asking students to do mock exam questions are the focuses of the classroom. 60% of the respondents (N=9) either strongly or somewhat agreed that teacher followed the textbook and taught mock exam questions. Even though sometimes the teacher would use power point as an aid to present the content, the teacher mainly trusted material writer and did little thinking about how best to teach TOEIC. In other words, students’ learning was generally restricted by the textbook and the material writer.

From qualitative data, two of the participants had the representative account:

In class, we follow the order of the textbook to learn and do practice questions. We don’t have an overall picture of grammar. The teacher never gives us any handout. We just use the textbook and follow the order of each unit.

Question 7 and question 8 mainly concerned about the frequency of using group work or providing discussion opportunities for students in TOEIC preparation class. In question 7, when students were asked about whether the teacher used learning activities such as group work in class, 73% of the respondents (N=11) either strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement. 27 % of the respondents (N=4) held neutral positions to the question. However, no one either strongly or somewhat agreed with the question.

In question 8, the finding was similar as the one in question 7.
About 67% of the respondents (N=10) either strongly or somewhat disagreed with the use of pair work and discussion in class. No one either strongly or somewhat agreed with the question. Therefore, this result from question 7 and question 8 suggested that the use of group work and discussions from teacher in the preparation class were limited.

What was interesting was that adult learners revealed the need of having more group work or discussion in TOEIC class in the qualitative response. One interviewee reflected the learning process and had the following statement:

> For example, one time, we listen to a conversation about custom and immigration in the airport. It is an interesting topic and real life situation, but I do not have any chances to discuss this with my classmates.

Question 9 addressed the issue on exploring adult learners’ perception of their teacher in using integrated tasks in their English lessons. Participants were asked to grade the frequency with which their teacher engaged in integrated activities in class. From the data, 20% of the respondents (N=2) either somewhat or strongly disagreed with the use of integrated task by the teacher in class. 27% of the respondents (N=4) agreed that integrated activities were parts of the lesson and 53% (N=9) had no opinions.

As for the qualitative result, one interviewee had the following response to the integrated activities in class.

> Sometimes the teacher asks us to listen and write down what we hear. It’s a good practice, but we do not do that often.

The statement echoed the result of the quantitative and showed that even though the teacher taught in the TOEIC preparation class with focusing on improving students’ reading and listening skills, the teacher did create the integrated activities to supplement an existing curriculum. However, the frequency of having these types of activities was low and students expressed the urge of having similar integrated activities in their English learning.

From above discussion, it showed that usually students, learning in
a TOEIC preparation course, did not have much control on what was going on in the classroom. What students actually did in the class was the practice questions on the textbook their teachers assigned to them. Thus, adult learners indicated the need of having more opportunities in having more integrated activities in class. In the study, teacher’s attitude towards an exam played a pivotal role in determining the choice of methods used to teach exam classes. Accordingly, the results showed that in a TOEIC preparation class, teacher factors caused direct washback effect on classroom activities and students’ language learning.

4.3 Adult Learners’ Attitudes toward the Influence of the TOEIC Exam in Their Lives

This category was designed to explore further aspects of the adult learners’ lives that were affected by the TOEIC exam. There were five questions included in this category.

Question 10 and 12 concerned whether or not taking the TOEIC test has changed students’ behaviors in learning English. In Question 10, 80% of the respondents (N=12) responded positively to the question and only 7% of the respondent (N=1) responded negatively. Question 12 had the similar result as Question 10.

During the qualitative interview, one respondent reflected the learning process.

_Taking TOEIC test can improve my self-belief. After class, if I am unclear about some grammatical points, I would try to find the correct answers by asking people or through reference books._

As for Question 11, it addressed the issue of fear, pressure and anxiety from taking the TOEIC test. 53% of the interviewees (N=8) either strongly or somewhat disagreed that TOEIC test brought negative washback, such as fear, pressure and anxiety on them. Only 13 % (N=2) of the interviewees either strongly or somewhat agreed that the TOEIC did cause negative washback.

Examining the data from these three questions, one can see that instead of bringing much negative washback such as fear, pressure or anxiety to adult students, the TOEIC test functioned as a stimulant in students’
English learning. In other words, because of the TOEIC test, adult learners had strong motivation in learning English and this led to the change of their learning behaviors. Adult learners were self-regulated in their learning process. For them, English learning not only happened in classroom, but also after class.

Question 13 aimed to discover the degree of external pressure from work has made adult learners take the TOEIC test. 40% of the interviewees (N=6) either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement. 33 % of the interviewees (N=5) did not perceive the pressure from work to take the test. Even though there was no significant difference between these two opinions, a certain degree of pressure from work existed and has become a stimulus for some adult learners to take the TOEIC test.

Question 14 explored whether respondents thought the TOEIC test has raising their self-image in public. 60% of the respondents (N=9) felt that TOEIC test was either somewhat or strongly boosting their image. Interestingly, two respondents mentioned the positive washback of the TOEIC test in their self-image, as shown in the following interview data.

If I get the TOEIC certificate, it will give me extra points in the workplace.

I want to prove my self-assurance, so I have taken the TOEIC test for more than 10 times. This time, my goal is to get above 800 points.

Question 15 concerned whether or not respondents felt the score report of TOEIC test could be used as a valid proof of one’s English proficiency for future job hunting. 93% of the respondents (N=14) either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement. The qualitative interview shed more light in this area. One of the adult learners had the following response.

TOEIC is a publicly-recognized test. If I get good score on TOEIC test, my boss will know that I have good English ability.

As a result, most adult learners perceived TOEIC test was a highly
reliable measurement and the score reports could be used as a valid proof of English Language proficiency in current workplace or future job hunting.

It can be seen that taking the TOEIC test more or less might produce some pressure for students, but on the other hand, test can be a motivation for continuous learning for adult learners as well. Moreover, besides receiving pressure from work to take the test, adult learners even more agreed on the positive effect of TOEIC test on their self-image. Lastly, for adult learners, TOEIC test was a reliable English proficiency test and the score reports were useful in the workplace. Therefore, the above results, to some extent, reflected that TOEIC test did have influence on students’ attitudes and somewhat implied that test takers’ devotion in learning decided the intensity of washback effect as well.

V . Conclusion and Suggestion

In conclusion, the study set out to explore the attitudes of adult learners toward the TOEIC test and the impact of TOEIC on adult students’ learning. The researcher expected that this study can shed light on the present washback literature. Furthermore, the findings of this present study may offer some references to teachers and adult learners and provide them with an insight into TOEIC preparation programs. The findings are as follows.

First, for adult learners, learning in a TOEIC preparation has strengthened their listening and reading abilities. Also, instead of bringing much pressure or anxiety to adult learners, the TOEIC test has motivated students to learn English harder inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, besides receiving pressure from work to take the test, adult learners even more agreed on the positive effect of TOEIC test on their self-image.

The finding echoed Pan’ (2014) research results, that is, tests have a
variety of effects on students, varying according to their different viewpoints of the tests.

Unexpectedly, this result was very different from Shohamy’s (1993) study on the Arabic Test. In her research, she found that test not only caused negative washback such as anxiety and pressure, but also frustrated the students. Recognizing the contradictory between these two research results, it was worth finding out that rather than generating much negative washback on learners, the TOEIC test has become an indicator of one’s English-language proficiency and it was transformed into external impetus to motivate adult learners to advance their English skills and boost their self-image. According to Cheng (1998), washback effect of HKCEE on secondary school students’ motivation was minimal. Test difference and participants’ age difference might be the causes of the disparity of these two findings.

Adult learners showed mixed feeling towards the exam itself, recognizing on the one hand that the exam made them study harder but at the same time expressing their learning needs and thinking that TOEIC exam was not an accurate reflection of all aspects of their study, especially in the area of speaking and writing.

As for the washback on learning, adult learners pointed out the TOEIC test has pushed them study harder in learning English in their free time, but it caused some conflicts and influenced their current life in a harmful way. Therefore, how to balance their personal life and study became a concern for those test takers.

Furthermore, regarding adult learners’ attitudes toward English teaching, explaining textbook exercises and mock exam questions from the teacher were the focuses of the TOEIC preparation class, so chances for group work, discussion and integrated language tasks were limited in class. For this reason, adult learners expressed the need of having integrated activities in their English learning. Hence, if adult learners could become more aware of how to use time more effectively and the instruction from teachers in each TOEIC class were carefully planned to match adult students’ needs, then not only strong washback, but also positive washback could be achieved at the same time. Test effects on learning would be strong and positive, if a language test could match
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learners’language needs (Saif, 2006). Table 1 highlights a summary of TOEIC washback effects from adult learners.

Table 1 A summary of TOEIC washback effects from adult learners

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Motivate students to learn English inside and outside the classroom</td>
<td>1. Very few chances for group work and discussion in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improve students’ listening and reading</td>
<td>2. Limited Integrated language tasks in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Increase one’s competitiveness in the workplace</td>
<td>3. Disregard speaking and writing practices in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Enhance one’s self-image in public</td>
<td>4. Having less time for family, leisure, work, and entertainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Provide a reliable measurement to prove one’s English proficiency in future job hunting, or advancement</td>
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According to the findings, some suggestions are proposed as follows.

First, for adult educators, they should understand adult learners’ characteristics and their attitudes toward learning, and adapt specific teaching techniques to cater adult learners’ special learning needs. Even though it was a TOEIC preparation class, how adult educators conducted the class was still the focus of the class. Thus, teachers still needed to respect adult students’ needs. Andragogy and pedagogy are not the same. Adult learners had more life or learning experiences than children, so adult learners had clear goals about their learning.
Therefore, through in class interaction and discussion, teachers should try to understand the needs of adult learners in language learning. For example, if adult learners’ concern is about not having a clear picture of certain grammatical points, teacher should modify the lesson content and emphasize unclear parts instead of following the content and order of the book.

Secondly, teachers should incorporate certain elements of speaking and writing in TOEIC preparation classes to make English language learning become more meaningful. Teachers are the final arbiters of policy implementation and it is therefore highly likely that a teacher’s teaching approach to tests determine students’ motivation and impact students’ learning behavior (Lane, Parke, & Stone, 1998). Instead of solely focusing on listening and reading, teachers can use a variety of activities to incorporate some writing or speaking elements to the class. For example, dictation was a valid method for integrating listening and writing skills. Also, from the research result, adult learners expressed the urge of speaking English and having more chances to have group work or discussion in class. In this case, teachers can let students listen to the conversation and have role playing with prompts such as “Pretend that you are a tourist and immigration officer is asking you questions in the airport.” If teachers allow the class to do either pair works or group work with integrated activities, then teachers create an environment that makes English learning become more authentic and interesting.

Third, for adult learners, they should utilize lots of learning resources to enhance their overall English competence outside the classroom. From research results, adult learners had strong motivation in learning English because of the test, but they could not find enough resources to extend their learning after class. Therefore, not only can adult learners learn to explore more resources by themselves, but also can teachers give positive reinforcement to adult learners by providing them useful free learning resources. Learning is not only confined in class; instead, it can be everywhere. After class, adult learners can have autonomous English development as well such as listening to English radio, speaking to classmates in English, reading English newspaper and doing practice questions on the website, etc. These suggestions were
aimed to help adult learners better their English skills in an English immersion atmosphere.

Fourth, it is important for adult learners learning to reorganize their time in order not to affect the quality of their current life. Research results indicated that taking TOEIC test affected adult learners’ current life. Adult learners might need to sacrifice their time with their family, work or entertainment. To minimize negative effects, useful techniques included finding the best time that worked for learners and used that time to study, communicating with family, and prioritizing one’s work. Explicitly, for test takers, having a better time management can diminish some negative washback from preparing the test.

Finally, for people who had ambition in career, taking the TOEIC test was a good way to enhance one’s self-belief. From adult learners’ perspective, the status of the TOEIC test was high. It can improve one’s self-image and become a drive for learning. Also, it was worth noticing that self-assurance can be a powerful motivator to push up learning. Therefore, as long as adult learners had clear goals to their future, having TOEIC certificate can help them open some windows of opportunities and give job seekers a competitive edge in workplace.

To sum up, the washback effects of a TOEIC test for adult learners could be positive and negative. Moreover, it was flexible. This conclusion put the test takers and teachers in the driving seat in some important ways as far as washback was concerned. Specifically, how test takers perceived the importance of test determined the intensity of washback. If the test takers value more on the test and consider the success on the test as significant, the more intensive washback the test will generate on test takers. Additionally, how the teacher controlled the factors also determined washback. In other words, washback itself can be also in the teacher’s control and it was the teacher who could determine to a greater or lesser extent whether to allow washback to operate, what areas it should operate in and how. Therefore, this suggested that degrees and kinds of washback occured through the agency of various bodies and were shaped by them.
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1. Attending TOEIC preparation class can improve my listening comprehension. □ □ □ □ □
2. Attending TOEIC preparation class can improve my speaking comprehension. □ □ □ □ □
3. Attending TOEIC preparation class can improve my reading comprehension. □ □ □ □ □
4. Attending TOEIC preparation class can improve my writing comprehension. □ □ □ □ □
5. The TOEIC test has pushed me harder in learning English. □ □ □ □ □
6. The teacher explains textbook exercises and mock exam questions. □ □ □ □ □
7. The teacher designs group work activities in TOEIC preparation class. □ □ □ □ □
8. There are lots of pair work and discussions in TOEIC preparation class. □ □ □ □ □
9. The teacher organizes integrated language learning tasks in TOEIC preparation class. □ □ □ □ □
10. The TOEIC exam has motivated me to learn English. □ □ □ □ □
11. The TOEIC exam has caused fear, pressure and anxiety for me. □ □ □ □ □
12. I think the TOEIC exam has made me listen more attentively in class. □ □ □ □ □
13. I take the TOEIC exam because I receive external pressure from work. □ □ □ □ □
14. The TOEIC exam has an important effect on my self-image. □ □ □ □ □
15. I think the score reports of TOEIC test could be used as a certificate of my English proficiency for future job hunting □ □ □ □ □
Appendix A

Student Survey

Dear students,

The following survey contains information pertaining to washback effects of the TOEIC examination. After reading each statement, check the number (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) that applies to you using the scale provided. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to the statements in this survey.

Appendix B

Interview Questions
1. Do you think TOEIC exam can reflect your real learning of English?
2. How can teacher do in class to help your learning in the areas that you want to improve?
3. Do you think TOEIC exam brings about immediate consequences to you?
4. Do you perceive any attention from external forces in taking TOEIC exam?
5. What difficulty with preparing TOEIC exam do you perceive?
6. Does TOEIC exam influence your learning?
7. Do you think TOEIC exam influences your current lifestyle?