

# Does Performance- Based Language Assessment Really Work?

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## A Case Study in Hokkaido, Japan

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# Acknowledgement

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# Outline

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Introduction

Background

Research methodology

Findings

- Teachers
- Students

Discussion, Implications & Conclusion

# Introduction

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## Rationale

**communicative language teaching**



**language testing and assessment**



**the performances of students**



**improve students' learning**

# Introduction

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## **Rationale**

assessments come in all shapes and sizes

assessments each have their **purposes** and their **consequences**

(Stobart, 2003)

## **Language education**

**consequences = washback**

# Performance-based Assessment

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<i>Traditional (paper-and-pencil) testing</i>	<i>Alternative Assessment (performance-based assessment)</i>
the rank ordering of students	developmental sequences in student learning
quantifiable data for isolated	a sampling of genuine performances (revealing underlying thinking process)
individual test performances	opportunity for further learning
the idea of neutral, scientific measurement	

(Lynch 2001)

# Performance-based Assessment

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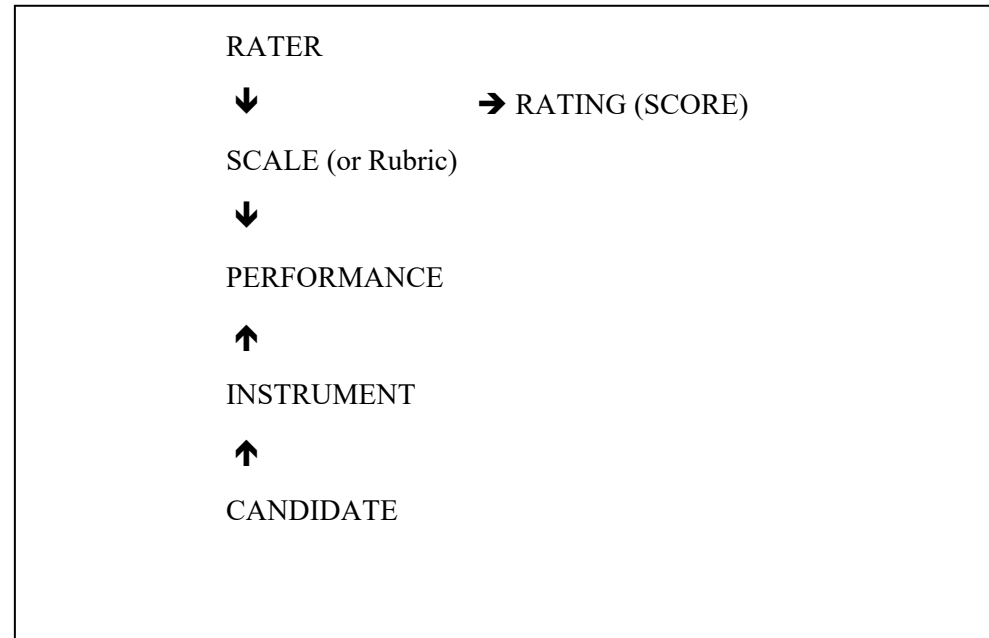
## **Alternative Assessment**

- assessment procedures which are less formal than traditional testing
- gathered over a period of time rather than being taken at one point in time
- usually formative rather than summative in function
- often low-stakes in terms of consequences
- claimed to have beneficial washback effect

Alderson and Banerjee (2001)

# Performance-based Assessment

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(McNamara, 1996)



# Performance-based Assessment

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**Performance-based Assessment** (as opposed to traditional testing)

- there is a performance by the candidate
- the performance is judged using an agreed set of criteria
- there is a degree of authenticity of the assessment tasks

Wigglesworth (2008)

\*\*\* Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=B1XCc78-JwQ>

# Performance-based Assessment

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# Washback

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## **Assessment**

- have an impact on society and educational systems and upon the individuals within those systems”
- a powerful tool
- used by “authorities” to create change

(Shohamy, 2007; McNamara, 2008; Bachman and Palmer, 1996)

# Washback

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- **“measurement-driven instruction”** - testing should drive teaching and learning
- **“curricular alignment”** - the relationship between test content and curriculum and teachers’ training practices
- **“consequences”** - the intended or unintended and positive or negative aspects of high-stakes testing on instruction, students, teacher and the school

# Washback

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## Language Education

“washback” is “more frequently used to refer to the effects of tests on teaching and learning”

(Wall, 1997)

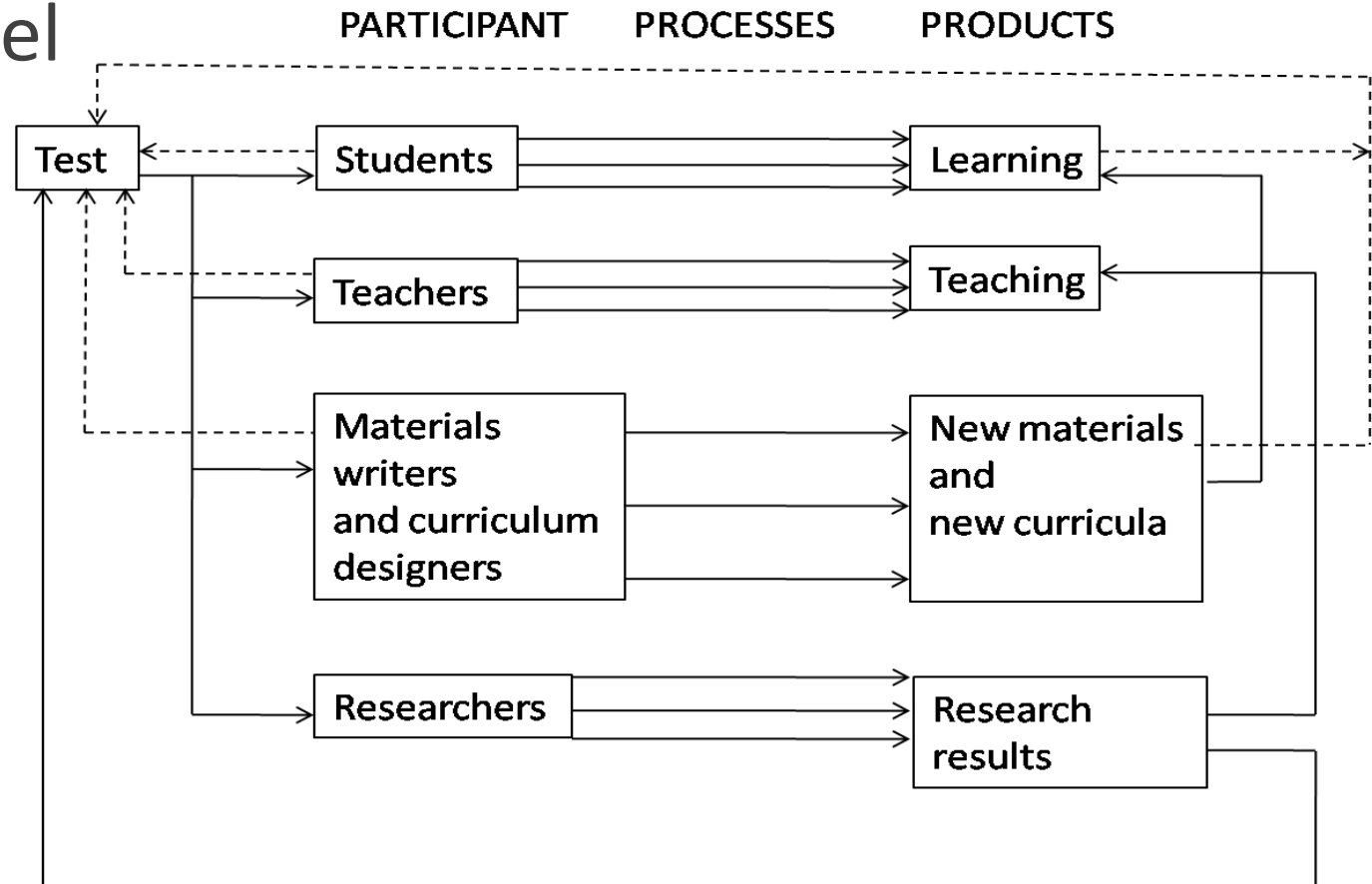
“tests are potentially also ‘levers for change’ in language education ... [i.e.] good tests should or could have positive washback”

(Alderson & Banerjee, 2001)

# Washback

## Basic Washback Model

(Bailey, 1996)



# Washback

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## **Factors Accounting for Test Impact**

- teacher ability
- teacher understanding of the test and approach it was based on classroom conditions
- lack of resources
- management practices within the school
- the status of the subject in the curriculum
- feedback mechanisms between the testing agency and the schools

# Washback

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## **Factors Accounting for Test Impact**

- teacher style
- commitment and willingness to innovate
- teacher background, the general social and political context
- the amount of time that has passed since the introduction of the exam
- the role of publishers in materials design and teacher training

(Wall, 2000)



# The Present Study

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## **Main Objective**

investigate the washback of performance-based language assessment



# Research Methodology

# Research Questions

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**Main research question:** how has performance-based language assessment had the impact on teachers, teaching, and students?

**Sub research questions:**

1. What are the performance-based language assessments the teachers have used in their classrooms?
2. What are the teachers' reactions towards these assessments?
3. How does each teacher prepare the students for the assessment tasks (teaching)?
4. What are the students' reactions towards the teachers' ways of preparation for the assessments?
5. What are the students' reactions towards the assessments?

# Research Philosophy

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## **Contextual Inquiry, not Experimental Research**

- Ecologies/Relationships, not isolated variables

## **Qualitative tools, not Quantitative tools**

- Interviews, observations and reflective journals

## **Post-modernist inquiry—no pretense of non-bias**

- Avoiding scientific reductionism, positivism
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# Research Methodology

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## **Data collection methods**

- Qualitative methods
  - Teachers' reflections
    - 3 EFL (native speakers of English teaching in Japan)
  - Students' interviews
    - 5 students from each teacher's class
    - Interviewed in Japanese, by near-peer senior student
    - No pressure or expectation on interviewees
    - Interviewer paid for work, students received gift

# Research Methodology

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## Reflections' guidelines (for teachers)

1. The course under investigation:
  - a. title
  - b. main objectives
  - c. number of students in the class
  - d. the status of the course (e.g. compulsory?, how popular it is among students,
  - e. what do other teachers think about it?, etc.)
  - f. your impression about the course (e.g. do you like it? why/ why not?)

# Research Methodology

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## Reflections' guidelines

2. How you generally conducted the class (i.e. what happened in the class which may or may not related to the assessment)
3. How you would have conducted the class differently (now that the class is over)
4. All performance-based language assessment you used in your class this semester, especially the final project
5. How you will do the assessment for the course again (next semester or next year)
6. How you prepared the students for the final project (processes both inside and outside classroom)
7. How you would prepare the students differently (now that the class is over)

# Research Methodology

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## Interview questions (for students)

1. Can you describe or explain your normal class with the teacher (what usually happened in class)?
2. Do you like this class? Why? Why not?
3. How many times did your teacher test you last semester?
  - 3.1. Which one did you like the best and why?
  - 3.2. What one did you like the least (or hated) and why?
4. Can you describe the most recent performance test (for example speaking and writing tests) your teacher used?
  - 4.1. How did you prepare for it?
  - 4.2. Did you ever feel anxious about it? Please explain.
  - 4.3. Are you satisfied with your performance?
  - 4.4. What did you like the most about it? Why? Anything you didn't like? Why?



# Research Methodology

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## **Interview questions**

- 5 How did your teacher prepare you for the test?
- 6 What did you learn from taking that test? Please explain.
- 7 Do you think the assessment could reflect what you learned?
- 8 How well did you prepare for the assessment?
- 9 Do you have any suggestions for your teacher about the test and how he/she prepared you for it?

# Research Methodology

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## **Covid19 Effect**

- Online classes (Zoom & Moodle BigBlueButton)
  - November 2020-January 2021: Second wave of infections
  - Assessment tasks recorded, trained students to record
- Online data collection
  - Interviews arranged by email, conducted on Zoom
  - Participant researcher meetings on Zoom

# Research Methodology

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## **Research process**

- zoom interviews with students
  - trained RA
  - transcribed & translated
- zoom self-reflections by teachers
  - transcribed

# Research Methodology

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## **Analysis**

- teachers' reflections
  - initial analysis by a teacher (not research participant)
  - draft analysis checked by the teachers
- students' interviews
  - initial analysis by the teacher participants (not his students)
  - draft analysis checked by the teacher

# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Teacher 1 Profile and Courses Taught*

- been teaching English in Japan for 20 years
- English communication, Public Speaking, and Oral Interpretation courses

# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Students of Teacher 1*

- first and second-year English major students

### *Assessment by Teacher 1*

- compulsory English communication course for English majors
- presentations on various subjects

# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Assessment by Teacher 1*

- both singly and in groups
- worked in pairs to prepare and present a skit
- grading based on specific grammar structures and vocabulary

# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Teacher 2 Profile & Courses Taught*

- been teaching university EFL in Japan for 35 years
- Oral Communication, Academic Presentation Skills, Academic Writing Skills, Intercultural Communication Skills, Hospitality English, and Intercultural Communication Seminar



# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Students of Teacher 2*

- second-year Economics major students aged 19-20

### *Assessment by Teacher 2*

- compulsory English for Academic presentations course
- a 5-minute 10-slide-PowerPoint presentation

# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Assessment by Teacher 2*

- Rubric scoring based on:
  - range of mechanics of delivery
  - content containing
    - explanations of informative tables and graphs
    - introduction and conclusion

# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Teacher 3 Profile and Courses Taught*

- been teaching EFL in Japan for 30 years
- English Communication courses, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) style content courses, Intercultural Communication courses

# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Students of Teacher 3*

- second-year junior-college English major students

### *Assessment by Teacher 3*

- elective course about international cultures
- presentation on one of the topics learned in the course

# Research Methodology

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## **Research participants and context**

### *Assessment by Teacher 3*

- active participation in class, participation in an international virtual exchange, online flipped and revision quizzes, and a group presentation
- a PowerPoint presentation in small groups using the zoom

# Research Methodology

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## **Increasing Trustworthiness**

- Multiple positionality (Herr & Anderson, 2012)
  - Insider reflection with outsider analysis, outside interviewer
- Triangulation of data sources
  - Students reflections, teacher reflections, focus group reflections
- Minimizing research blind spots (Hinkelman, 2012)
  - Avoiding reductionism, objectivism, determinism, detachment
  - Whole vs pieces of data, belief in subjectivism, multiple causality, no presumption of detachment.

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# Teachers' Reactions

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 1**

- used textbook to guide students toward the desired outcome for the final performance task
- not satisfied with “breakout” room because could not monitor the students
- believed students used English as much as possible



# Teachers' Reactions

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"I think they do a lot of speaking in groups, though I think they do keep it in English because they want to improve their skills. "

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 1**

- encouraged students to do a lot of pair and group work
- members they chose themselves

# Teachers' Reactions

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"I normally could tell if each group or partners were continuing to speak in English as soon as I let them go, but I think they do much speaking in groups, ... I think they do keep it in English because they want to improve their skills."

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 1**

- focused on writing and presenting an original dialogue
- emphasized grammar points and key vocabulary (as specified in the rubric)
- used a comprehensive rubric

# Rubric for the final performance assessment (Teacher 1)

Grammar / Vocabulary	Pronunciation / Speaking Volume	Content	Cooperation with Partners
(5)– Shows a good understanding of grammar studied, Uses a variety of vocabulary words	(5) - Is clear and easy to understand, Speaks loudly enough to be easily heard	(5) – Uses material and/or topics studied in the textbook - Adds own ideas to the topic chosen	(5) – Works well with partner(s) to plan and prepare the final project
(4) – Has aspects of both (5) and (3)			
(3) - Shows an acceptable understanding of grammar studied, Uses some vocabulary words studied	(3) - Is usually understandable, usually speaks loudly enough to be heard	(3) - Uses only material studied in the textbook -Does not add own ideas	(3) - Partner(s) do most of the preparation and planning of the final project
(2) - Has aspects of both (3) and (1)			
(1) – Shows only a limited understanding of the grammar studied, Uses very few new vocabulary words studied	(1) – Is difficult to understand, Does not speak loudly enough	(1) - Does not use any material studied in the textbook	(1) - Does not participate in preparation and planning of the final project

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 2**

- started class using an online text chat following a question-and-answer format
- felt it was well worth it

"I knew this was the only time students would have to interact with me, the teacher, and with a native speaker."

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 2**

- encouraged more significant interaction from the students

"One simple way to do that is to give a six-minute pair interview test in which they will have to ask and answer a minimum 12 questions, including follow-up questions to their partner."

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 2**

- not satisfied with Zoom breakout rooms
- used a textbook, he was not happy with the text because it was not very interactive
- focused more on communication (did not pay much attention to grammar and vocabulary)



# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 2**

- emphasized the mechanics of presenting
- taught students how to make their presentations more interactive

"They had to smile. That was a major requirement, so their readiness to smile at the camera was also assessed."

# Prosody Driven Rubric (Teacher 2)

Rubric

X ↓ ☒	<b>Face &amp; Eye Contact</b> 顔の表情とアイコンタクト	Looking down, no smile <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>2 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	Usually looking at camera, smiling <i>6 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	Smiling & looking a camera all the time <i>10 points</i> X
↑ X ↓ ☒	<b>Gestures - Hi, I, you, that's all, thank you.</b> シンプルなジェスチャー	No simple gestures <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>2 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	3 simple gestures <i>6 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	Many simple gestures <i>10 points</i> X
↑ X ↓ ☒	<b>Gestures - Counting</b> 数えるジェスチャー	No counting gestures <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>2 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	3 counting gestures <i>6 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	Many counting gestures (8+) <i>10 points</i> X
↑ X ↓ ☒	<b>Gestures - Action</b> ジェスチャーで表す	No action gestures <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>2 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	3 action gestures <i>6 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	Many action gestures (5+) <i>10 points</i> X
↑ X ↓ ☒	<b>Voice Volume</b>	Too quiet <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>2 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	Normal voice 100% <i>6 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	Big voice 150% <i>10 points</i> X
↑ X ↓ ☒	<b>Voice Change - stress</b>	No stress, monotone <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>2 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	5-10 words stressed <i>6 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	10-20 words stressed <i>10 points</i> X
↑ X ↓ ☒	<b>Voice Change - stretch</b>	Many pauses <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>2 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	1-2 words stretched <i>6 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	2-5 stretched words <i>10 points</i> X
↑ X ↓ ☒	<b>Voice Change - pause</b> 間を空けて強調する	No pauses <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>2 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	3+ pauses <i>6 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	Many dramatic pauses <i>10 points</i> X
↑ X ↓ ☒	<b>Interesting Words</b>	Difficult to understand <i>0 points</i> X	- <i>4 points</i> X	- <i>8 points</i> X	Can understand <i>12 points</i> X	- <i>16 points</i> X	Easy to understand, enjoyable <i>20 points</i> X

# Teachers' Reactions

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## Teacher 2

- believed that students' self-assessment could improve their learning

"I would have them make their own grading sheet on paper and take a photograph of that and send it to me because I think the teacher does too much of the assessment and they need to do more self-assessment and self-grading ..."

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 3**

- did Zoom sessions for each week's topic using PowerPoint, with Zoom breakout rooms
- homework tasks were issued on Moodle
- collected student essays on Moodle and spoke of a possible discussion forum for issues related to the final presentation

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 3**

- had no textbook
- had the students work and present in groups, with partners they chose
- accurate grammar and keywords were not a priority

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 3**

- used a rubric for the presentation
- rubrics was not rubric used to guide and grade students on the essays and blogs

# Rubric for final presentation performance assessment (Teacher 3)

Grade:



<b>Preparation (Plan)</b>	Didn't write Plan into Moodle before deadline  <b>0 points</b>	Wrote Plan into Moodle before deadline  <b>20 points</b>					
<b>Preparation (Script)</b>	Didn't write Script into Moodle before deadline  <b>0 points</b>	Wrote Script into Moodle before deadline  <b>20 points</b>					
<b>Content (Researched / Informative / Opinion / Examples)</b>	-  <b>0 points</b>	-  <b>10 points</b>	-  <b>15 points</b>	-  <b>20 points</b>	-  <b>25 points</b>	-  <b>30 points</b>	
<b>ZOOM</b>	Didn't present on ZOOM  <b>0 points</b>	Presented on ZOOM - didn't use Visuals  <b>15 points</b>		Presented on ZOOM and used Visuals  <b>30 points</b>			

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 3**

- required his students to participate in the International Virtual Exchange and submit written essay would optimize students' screen time attention (fatigue from sustained screen time)

"I would try to keep Zoom sessions under an hour, because there is a lot of fatigue for the students, and also for me."



# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 3**

- believed that feedback could contribute to students' learning
- lamented that the amount of feedback for the students' essay writing was inadequate

# Teachers' Reactions

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## **Teacher 3**

"I would try to give more feedback, but there is so much to do feedback-wise on assessments that, even with only the mini-essays, just reading them is hard enough. It takes a lot of time if feedback is being given to each student. Giving them more comments would be ideal."

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# Students' Reactions

# Students' Reactions

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## **Teachers' Roles**

*- inextricably linked to their learning*

# Students' Reactions

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## Teachers' Roles

*Effort in creating a safe, comfortable but challenging learning atmosphere before, during and after the assessment process*

- less stress
- accessibility and support
- comfort
- fun and lively

## Teacher 1's student comments

- "He makes sure we understand each other one by one, so it is very easy to understand."
- "I don't get nervous so much anymore."
- "easy to understand" when explaining things"
- "made himself available for questions and explained in a way that helped the students."
- "kind and cheerful "

## Teacher 2' student comments

- "nervous about my English ability but my English teacher's commitment was a comfort to me"
- "was not doing teaching roles such as giving lectures and tests," rather "being more of a coach and a manager."

## Teacher 3's students' comments

- "I like him because he is energetic in class and he is very responsive."
- "he is a very kind person, so I tried to create a good atmosphere in the class by mixing in my own jokes."
- "energetic and responsive"
- "I have gotten a sense that he is trying to keep it fun and upbeat."



# Students' Reactions   **Teachers' Roles**

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*Challenging problems and tasks can be overcome by teachers' efforts to bring comfort to students*

# Students' Reactions

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## **Learning Environment**

*comfortable and challenging learning space*

- inspired student effort
  - created motivation
- 

# Students' Reactions

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## **Learning Environment**

*real-life speaking assessment tasks  
leading to an interest in using English*

## Teacher 1's students

- developed an interest in using English outside of the classroom.
- valued the exercise: "we had to present what we had learned rather than take a test. But I like it because I think that if you make your own slides, you can retain the content."

## Teacher 2's students

- "felt comfortable speaking in English,"

# Students' Reactions

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## **Learning Environment**

*Improving skills and enjoyment from  
peer and group work*

## Teacher 1's students

- "It was really fun to make the slides and think about what we were going to say (with my friend in the class)."

## Teacher 2 's students

- "I wanted to talk to other people and decide what I wanted to do."

## Teacher 3's students

- "I learned the skills of presenting and discussing in a group using English."

# Students' Reactions

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## **Learning Environment**

*feeling of accomplishment*

## Teacher 1's students

"I was able to get more than what I learned in the class, which was a great feeling of accomplishment."

"It gave me a chance to reflect on what I had learned through the assignment."

## Teacher 2's students

"Self-chosen topic was fun."

"I had freedom to create a performance."

"It was good to create a test from scratch."



Teacher 2's students (continued)

"I like that I could my test topic and skit theme."

"I enjoyed the challenge of performance and felt a sense of accomplishment that is different from receiving a passing score on a test."

Teacher 3's students satisfied with

"continuing to talk without having to stop too much"

"being told my presentation was the best in the class."

# Students' Reactions

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## **Online Teaching**

### *Challenging*

- disappointment
- insecurity
- frustration

# Students' Reactions

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## **Online Teaching**

### *disappointment*

"We were in the same space, but he was in his own building, and we were in the computer room. I felt a little disappointed that we could not see the teacher even though they were at school."

# Students' Reactions

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## **Online Teaching**

### *insecurity*

"We can talk online like this, but even with this, there is quite a lag, like a time difference. And if you have a bad computer environment, it is hard to proceed, so I was a little worried about that."

# Students' Reactions

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## **Online Teaching**

### *frustration*

"It was like the teacher was the only one talking and I was just listening to him. Some of the other students turned off the video when they should have turned it on. There was a difference in motivation".

# Students' Reactions

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## **Assessment Tasks**

### *Anxiety* (Teacher 1 and Teacher 2)

- grammar
- ability to express
- length

"The presentation time was so long that it was challenging."

# Students' Reactions

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## **Assessment Tasks**

### *Anxiety* (Teacher 3)

- Reduced anxiety

"It is not a test (traditional paper-pencil test), it is just writing down what you have learned, so I did not prepare anything for that."

# Students' Reactions

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## **Feedback**

*feeling invested*

" The teacher often picked one student out of many and explained that student's work, so there were many students that he did not touch. So I think that one of the students who was picked up at that time understood what was wrong with him and how to fix it. I do not think the rest of them really understood what was wrong with their presentations."



# Students' Reactions

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## **Feedback**

### *aspects of feedback*

- timing
- specificity
- ability to understand
- opportunity to redo and improve the task after feedback
- role in grading

# Students' Reactions

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## **Conclusion**

the positive impact vastly outweighed the negative impact

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Discussion  
Implications  
Conclusion

# Discussion

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Assessment in Japan

Education and assessment reform by the MEXT

# Discussion

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## **Teachers' Use of Rubrics**

### *Rubrics*

- performance-based assessment
- complicated judgement

# Discussion

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## **Teachers' Use of Rubrics**

### *Formative assessment*

- teachers' workload
- feedback

# Discussion

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## **Students' Improvement**

### *Rubrics' construction*

- task objectives
- better output

# Discussion

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## **Students' improvement**

*Shared learning goal*

- applied shared criteria
- leading to proficiency building



# Discussion

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## **Students' improvement**

### *Use of rubrics in oral assessment*

- characteristics of rubrics
- better output
- self & peer assessment

# Implications (based on Washback Model)

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## **For Students**

- motivated to learn more and try to use language in a genuine way
- tried to be more a more creative, self-directed use of language
- created anxiety

# Implications

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## For Teachers

*the role of speaking skills in the curriculum and the syllabus of the class they are teaching (e.g.)*

- How can speaking skills be enhanced?
- What types of assessment do learners respond to most positively?
- What conditions help students enjoy the challenge of the assessment?
- Where do they feel confidence because the challenge was appropriate to their level of knowledge?

# Implications

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## **For Materials Designers**

- track the frequency and type of assessments
- track the assessment burden on teachers
- redesign tasks in the EFL learning process to include more assessment and more feedback

# Implications

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## **For Researchers**

*Classroom teachers* - the precise effects of the assessments can be traced in greater detail

*Washback researchers* - a new general definition of assessment that puts the central purpose onto the learner, but acknowledges other purposes

# Limitations

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- 3 different classes
- 3 different teachers
- translation issues

# Future Research

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*Large scale* studies on impact of spoken performance assessments on the teaching and learning of English

- institutional level
- nation-wide level

*Small scale classroom* studies to increase ways to teach self and peer assessment to students

# Conclusion

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## **Teacher's Reactions**

*types of performance-based language assessments (what)*

- short semi-formal academic type presentations
- skits or roleplay types of performance
- group and individual
- online



# Conclusion

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## **Teacher's Reactions**

*preparation for the assessment (how)*

- modelling for their students' presentations through their class lecture formats
- proving examples from the textbook to guide their students

# Conclusion

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## **Teacher's Reactions**

*preparation for the assessment (how)*

- employing rubrics
- giving feedback
- having students do self-assessment

# Conclusion

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## **Students' Reactions**

*negative*

- challenges with technology
- anxiety

# Conclusion

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## **Students' Reactions**

*positive*

- a comfortable but challenging learning environment created by teachers
- learning and improving of language skills
- peer work leading to self-developed English skills
- a feeling of accomplishment

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# Comments

## Q & A