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INVESTIGATING WASHBACK EFFECT IN THE CONTEXT OF PLANNING READING COMPREHENSION TASKS

Defining washback

The influence of testing on language learning and teaching is generally described as the washback or backwash effect. Although these two terms are used interchangeably it is worth stressing that 'washback' is frequently used in the applied linguistics context and rarely used in everyday language and backwash seems to be a more common term that is possible to be found in dictionaries (Cheng and Curtis 2004).

There are many various definitions of washback, for example Messik (1996: 141) describes it in a rather neutral and general manner as "the extent to which tests influence language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning" and Buck (1988: 17) provides a more detailed description as the author puts emphasis on students' future affected by tests results, teachers' pressure to make their students obtain the best possible results from examinations and washback's consequences, positive or negative, for the process of learning and teaching:

> There is a natural tendency for both teachers and students to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test, especially when the test is very important to the future of the students, and pass rates are used as a measure of teacher success. This influence of the test on the classroom (referred to as washback by language testers) is, of course, very important; this washback effect can be either beneficial or harmful.

Negative washback

Although washback is a highly complex phenomenon, it is very difficult to talk precisely about its negative repercussions. First, Cheng and Curtis (2004) claim that teachers may ignore the skills and the techniques which are not covered by a format of an examination. This observation confirms the results of Wall and Anderson's (1993) study, according to which some teachers skipped or neglected listening activities as they were not tested during examination. As a result the curriculum was significantly distorted.

Moreover, testing techniques may become teaching techniques. Davies (1968) pointed to the phenomenon in which language education was based mainly on the

analysis of examination papers from the past. Overusing testing techniques, noticed by Davies (1968), may have also different consequences. It can be assumed that teachers may try to develop language skills with a very limited number of techniques, only these which fit to a test format. As a result the quality of teaching is violated and students may feel bored and not challenged enough by the same set of techniques.

It can be also assumed that in the reading development context there are some testing techniques which seem to have a very limited teaching value. In many cases multiple choice questions and true/false statements can be solved in a rather mechanical way, their results depend to a large extent on familiarity with strategies of test solving, not so much with reading comprehension as such. Finally, relevantly high scores may be a matter of luck.

Messik's definition quoted at the beginning of this article included one more element which may be interpreted in the context of negative washback, namely that "tests may influence language teachers [...] to do things they would not otherwise do." There is a danger that teachers may resort to the techniques which they do not believe to be efficient in language teaching but which may be components of a test. This situation was described in Wall and Anderson's article (1993) in which they described the possibility that both teachers and learners apply testing techniques none of them believe are efficient or useful.

This aspect of negative washback is directly connected with pressure teachers may feel in the context of preparing students for the examinations which decide about their future. It can be observed that in Poland teachers are very often assessed (mostly in an informal way) by students, parents, school authorities and other teachers according to their students' performance during final examinations.

Wall and Anderson (1993) also observed that teachers may implement the teaching policy they do not understand and as a result do not acquire any desired results, planned for by the designers of a test, or obtain them only in a superficial way. This phenomenon was also noticed by Cheng (1999), who observed that teachers started to use the techniques promoted by exams which main aim was to introduce more real-life communication into the foreign language classroom (that is why the format of examination was changed in Hong Kong), however, they did not change the interaction pattern and the activities were still based on teacher-dominated talk. Qi (2007) observed as well that teachers did not pay attention to the communicative aspect of students' compositions although writing tasks promoted by a reformed National Matriculation English Test in China were to make students and teachers develop writing for communicative purposes.

Positive washback

Positive washback can be observed in a situation when tests influence curriculum development and classroom procedures in a positive way, for example a test was designed to promote communicative skills development and as a result they start to be practiced and valued both by teachers and students.

Pearson (1998) presented a mechanism of positive washback simultaneously admitting that it is improbable to occur. He claimed that positive washback takes place when good tests are possible to use as teaching and learning techniques, and efficient teaching and learning techniques can be used as testing techniques. This

statement seems impossible in the context of developing reading skills as reading comprehension tests taken by thousands of students are to be practical, which means possible to assess in a quick and objective manner. On the other hand, the nature of reading comprehension teaching and learning necessitates more creative and open techniques, for example a summary writing or taking down the main ideas of the text, which are difficult to assess in an objective and key-based way.

The trichotomy of washback model

In 1993 Hughes (in Bailey 1999) proposed the framework of washback based on three main components: participants, process and product. Participants are all those whose behaviour may be affected by a test. These may be students, teachers, administrators, course book authors and publishers. Bailey (1999) also adds to the list researchers interested in the topic. The process has been specified as behaviour and decisions participants take which are to benefit teaching and learning. Within the process syllabuses are planned and prepared, course books and other teaching aids are written and designed. Students can be also instructed in all sorts of testing strategies and testing techniques. Bailey (1999) also suggests that these processes may include analysis of the tests from the past or even organising additional classes which would prepare students for a test. The last element to describe is product. Hughes specifies it as what is learnt and the learning and teaching quality. All the discussed components of the washback are co-dependent and interact in the following way (Hughes 1993: 2, cited by Bailey 1999: 10):

> The trichotomy into participants, process and product allows us to construct a basic model of backwash. The nature of a test may first affect the perceptions and attitudes of the participants towards their teaching and learning tasks. These perceptions and attitudes in turn may affect what the participants do in carrying out their work (process), including practicing the kind of items that are to be found in the test, which will affect the learning outcomes, the product of that work.

Developing reading comprehension in a foreign language

In order to discuss reading skills, efficient development of lower and higher levels of reading comprehension (Grabe and Stoller 2002, Grabe 2009) should be described. Comprehension at lower levels focuses mainly on understanding a text at a word and at a sentence level, higher levels of reading, on the other hand, allow readers to create a mental summary of the text based on a network of prepositions which organise information from a text in a hierarchical way. The most important ideas are supported by details and arranged around a thesis of a text. Grabe (2009) stresses that comprehension at higher levels is the essence of a reading process.

The concept of mental summary, which is also discussed by Koda (2004), can be interpreted in the context of Kintsch and van Dijk's text comprehension model (1978, Van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). The authors claim that text comprehension, which aim is to create a mental summary of a text, or in other words: its gist, is possible as a result of three operations: deletion (which allows readers to eliminate not relevant information and be left with the most important ideas in a text),

generalisation (which allows readers to retrieve the essence of information by its generalisation: the date 1978 may be generalised into the 70') and construction (which makes readers draw conclusions from what they have read; as a result they may create a concept representing the essence of an excerpt; in practice it may mean construction of a topic sentence which summarises a whole paragraph).

In order to develop reading comprehension in an efficient way teachers should promote higher levels of text comprehension and engage students into a conscious and active construction of a mental summary of a text. It seems logical to conclude that this may be achieved with the techniques involving the following elements: creating a mind map, a plan of a text, asking students "What is this paragraph about?" (which is to motivate students to identify a topic sentence in a text or to invent titles to paragraphs) and summarising. All these techniques make readers create a network of propositions, organised in a hierarchical way, which reflects a structure of a text and allows students to say correctly what a text is about and to identify the main ideas from a discourse.

Three levels of reading comprehension

Teaching reading skills should also develop comprehension at different levels. Dakowska (2005) discusses three dimensions of discourse understanding: semantic, interpretative and evaluative. The first level is practiced with all kind of WH questions, for example: "What does… (a word) mean in this text?," "Where did he go?," "Who helped the boy?" as its aim is to develop understanding at a sentence level. The interpetation level is activated by the following questions: What is the text about? What is the main idea of this paragraph? Is the title relevant to the text? Its goal is "reconstructing the writer's intention by linking the ideas expressed in the text into a coherent whole" (Dakowska 2005: 196). The third dimension is developed when students are motivated to think about the following issues: Do you like the text? Have you ever felt in the same way? Do you agree with the author? It focuses at critical evaluation of a discourse.

As it can be observed, the semantic level is close to lower levels of text processing, the interpetation leads to a mental summary construction and activates higher levels of discourse comprehension. Evaluation also promotes higher levels of text comprehension and additionally develops critical thinking and subjective responses to a text.

If the quality of reading comprehension teaching is to be assessed it should be taken into consideration whether all the levels of text comprehension are promoted. Discussing a text only from a semantic dimension or at the lower levels of text processing is an excellent introduction to successful reading, however, it is just an introduction and it is far away from how comprehension teaching should look like. Promoting mainly these aspects of understanding should be assessed as poor quality teaching. As higher levels of text processing constitute the essence of reading (Koda 2004) and they allow students to develop reading skills efficiently and successfully, teachers who focus on them during their classes can believe that they offer students a high quality reading development programme.

Lower secondary school and upper secondary school final English examinations in Poland

This article is to analyse washback in the context of English examinations in Poland, therefore it seems necessary to briefly describe the techniques used to test reading comprehension typical for these exams. In Poland education of lower secondary (*gimnazjum*) and upper secondary (*szkoła średnia*) students ends with final formal examinations prepared by the Central Examination Board. As far as the lower secondary school examination in English is concerned it has a written form and all students in Poland write the same test. Reading comprehension, that consists of five texts, is tested with the following techniques:

1. true/false statements,
2. matching (descriptions of paragraphs with paragraphs),
3. matching (headlines with paragraphs),
4. multiple choice questions,
5. a gapped text (sentences are removed from a text and mixed, one distractor is added).

The upper secondary school final examination has got two versions: the standard one and the extended one (more difficult and demanding). As students get points after passing the exams which are decisive in their acceptance to the chosen university, taking an extended form allows them to obtain more points. A reading comprehension part of a standard examination in English consists of three texts accompanied by the following techniques:

1. matching,
2. true/false statements,
3. multiple choice questions.

The extended version is also based on three texts accompanied by the following techniques:

1. multiple choice questions,
2. a gapped text (pieces of a text are missing),
3. a cloze (some words or phrases are missing from a text and students choose the right one from a multiple choice test under a text).

The research description

The research of washback effect in the context of developing reading comprehension during foreign language classes was based on Hughes' concept of trichotomy of the washback framework. The main issues to investigate were the participants, teachers of English, the process, the way teachers plan their reading tasks with the emphasis on the techniques they apply to develop their students' reading skills and the product, which in this case is the attempt to asses quality of developing text comprehension during English classes.

Research questions

The research project was developed and carried out in order to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. Can washback be traced in the choice of techniques used by teachers to develop reading comprehension?
2. Are there any differences between lower secondary and upper secondary school teachers in the choice of the techniques and as a consequence in washback effect?
3. Can washback be traced in the factors teachers take into consideration while choosing techniques for development of reading comprehension?
4. Can washback be traced in teachers' creativity while constructing reading activities?
5. Can washback be traced in the choice of authentic and modified texts?
6. What is the 'washback product' in the context of developing reading comprehension?

Formulating the answers to all these questions is allowing to discuss the notion of washback effect in the context of planning reading comprehension tasks.

Subjects of the research

There were 54 teachers who took part in the research. Twenty eight of them work in lower secondary schools and 26 teach English to upper secondary school students. The author of the research took care that both groups of teachers are included in the project as linguistic education in lower secondary school and upper secondary school ends with final achievement examination which may have an impact on the way teachers plan their reading tasks and as a result may give some ground for investigating washback effect. There was also an attempt to analyse two groups of teachers separately in order to search for possible differences in planning reading tasks in lower and upper secondary schools environment. Extra care was also taken to make sure that the questionnaires are not filled by the teachers who work both in lower secondary and upper secondary school.

Research tools

In order to formulate the answers to the research questions a short questionnaire was prepared (see the appendix) and distributed among the research subjects.

Research results

Washback and reading comprehension development techniques used by the teachers

In order to specify the most often used techniques of developing reading skills the subjects were asked to choose four activities that are most frequently used by them out of an array of following options:

1. Open questions
2. Closed questions
3. Multiple choice questions
4. Inventing titles to paragraphs
5. Matching titles with paragraphs
6. True/false statements

7. Underlining the most important information
8. Underlining topic sentence in a paragraph
9. Matching excerpts with the text
10. Making a plan of a text
11. A written summary
12. An oral summary
13. Other ....

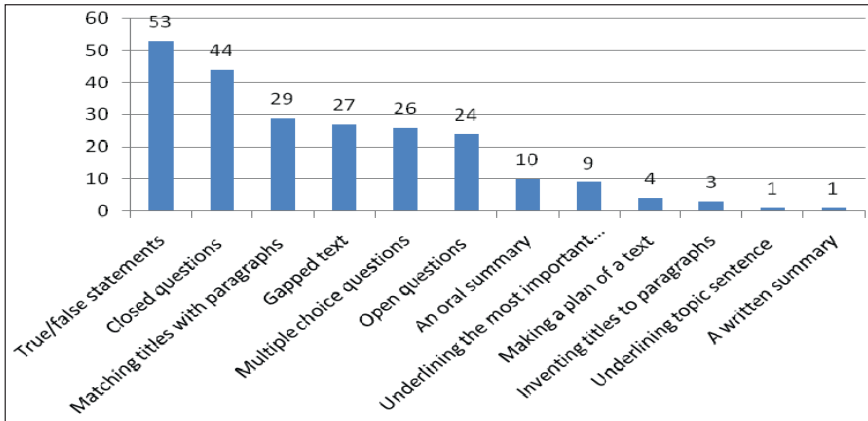The detailed results are presented in the figure below:

Figure 1. The most often used techniques developing reading

As it can be observed the techniques can be divided into three groups. True/false statements and closed questions belong to the most often used activities. They were chosen 53 and 44 times respectively. Matching titles with paragraphs, gapped text, multiple choice questions and open questions belong to the second group as they were picked 29–24 times. The third group of activities are the ones which are barely used as the elements of reading tasks. They are: oral summary, underlining the most important information in a text, making a plan of a text, inventing titles to paragraphs, underlining topic sentences in a text and a written summary of a text.

It should be stressed, however, that making the respondents select only four techniques might distort the picture of the most often used techniques as some teachers might apply a wider variety of reading activities. Hence, the next question in the questionnaire asked the teachers to assess the frequency of the application of each technique that was enumerated in the previous question. The teachers were to specify how often they apply a particular item according to a zero-to-three point scale in which 0 meant never, 1 – rarely, 2 – often and 3 – very often. The average frequency was calculated for each technique and the results are presented below. The techniques have been arranged from the most often used to the least often applied, in brackets the frequency mean is presented.

1. True/false statements (2,61)
2. Closed questions (2,4)
3. Multiple choice questions (2,4)
4. Open questions (2,05)

5. Matching titles with paragraphs (1,95)
6. Gapped text (1,79)
7. An oral summary (1,65)
8. Underlining the most important information (1,28)
9. Underlining topic sentence in a paragraph (0,82)
10. Making a plan of a text (0,7)
11. Inventing titles to paragraphs (0,58)
12. A written summary (0,56)

The quantitative data presented above allows to draw conclusions on whether washback can be observed in the choice of techniques and their frequency of use. As the most often applied activities to develop reading skills in a foreign language turned out to be the techniques which test reading comprehension during lower and secondary schools final examinations in English, namely true/false statements, a gapped text, matching titles with paragraphs and multiple choice questions, it can be concluded that to a great extent washback effect can be observed in this context. On the other hand, it should also be added that in addition to these tasks teachers frequently apply closed and open questions, which do not appear during the examinations.

Moreover, a kind of negative washback can be observed in the choice of techniques while planning reading tasks. The ones which are not promoted by examinations, for example an oral summary of a text, underlining the most important information, underlining topic sentence in a paragraph, making a plan of a text, inventing titles to paragraphs and writing a summary of a text, are neglected and barely applied in the context of reading skills development, which may have detrimental effects on the quality of reading development.

Differences between lower secondary and upper secondary school teachers in the choice of the techniques and as a consequence of washback effect

Since the research analysed the responses of two different groups of teachers, namely these teaching lower secondary school students and these working in upper secondary schools, the attempt was made to check whether there are any differences between these two groups in preferences of the techniques used to develop reading comprehension. The results are presented in the chart below, the figures represent the number of times a given option was identified as one of the four most often used techniques:

The techniques preferred by upper secondary school teachers		The techniques preferred by lower secondary school students	
True/false statements	26	True/false statements	27
Closed questions	20	Closed questions	24
Gapped text	16	Matching titles with paragraphs	15
Matching titles with paragraphs	14	Multiple choice questions	12
Multiple choice questions	14	Open questions	12
Open questions	12	Gapped text	11
A written summary	6	Underlining the most important information	5
Underlining the most important information	4	A written summary	4

Making a plan of a text	2	Making a plan of a text	2
Inventing titles to paragraphs	2	Inventing titles to paragraphs	1
Underlining topic sentence	0	Underlining topic sentence	1
An oral summary	0	An oral summary	1

Figure 2. Comparison of the most frequent techniques used by lower and upper secondary school teachers to develop reading comprehension

If we were to compare the responses of lower secondary school and upper secondary school teachers it can be concluded that no major differences can be observed. The hierarchy of the activities is almost the same, with true/false statements, closed questions as the most popular activities. Next a gapped text, matching titles with paragraphs, multiple choice questions and open questions are qualified as the most often used techniques to develop reading comprehension by both groups of teachers. The only difference is that upper secondary school teachers more frequently apply a gapped text (the third technique on their frequency list) than lower secondary school teachers (number six on the list). There has also been a small difference observed in case of written summary and underlining the most important information as the former is the seventh on upper secondary school teachers' preference list and the latter the eighth. As far as lower secondary school teachers are concerned the order is reversed (written summary – the seventh position and underlining the most important information – the eighth position on a list). To sum up, with these minor differences it is not possible to state that washback effects are different for the two groups of teachers as they tend to prefer the same set of activities.

Washback and the factors the teachers take into consideration while choosing techniques for development of reading comprehension

The second aim of the research was an attempt to analyse the factors the teachers take into consideration while choosing techniques for development of reading comprehension in a foreign language and to find out the extent to which the final examination form determines the decisions in planning reading tasks. The teachers were given some options they could circle if they found them true. They were also asked to add any other reasons they thought would be relevant in this context.

The research showed that there are three most decisive factors in planning reading tasks. The most common answer was "I choose the techniques typical for lower secondary school/upper secondary school examination" as it was chosen by 45 respondents (83%). The second almost as common response as the first one was "I choose the techniques which are liked by my students;" 43 teachers (80%) circled this option. The third factor influencing planning for reading tasks was simply following the suggestions from a course book. Forty teachers (74%) admitted that they rely on the activities suggested by the course book, which could be even qualified as a kind of 'lack of any decisive processes.' There were also other responses, for example 16 teachers (30%) claimed to use only the texts from the course book but to prepare text related activities on their own. Two respondents (4%) also try to apply other techniques which are typical for TOEFL or other exams.

Interpreting these results in the context of washback effect allows to state that the format of an examination is a highly decisive factor which influences the way teachers organise reading tasks during their lessons. Eighty three percent of respondents directly admitted that they choose the techniques typical for final reading comprehension tests. What is more, 74% claim that they absolutely rely on the course book. If we take into consideration the answer to the first research question which aim was to specify the most common techniques applied by the respondents, it may be concluded that course books also contain mainly the activities typical for examinations. As a result it might be suggested that even if the teachers do not consciously search for examination techniques they are somehow directed by course book creators and publishers into washback.

Washback and teachers' creativity while constructing reading activities

The research was also to analyse teachers' invention in preparing comprehension activities. The author assumed that there may be some negative correlation between washback effect and teachers invention and independence in planning reading tasks: if teachers consciously decide to practice only these techniques which prepare students for examinations they may limit the variety of reading developing tasks, they may become too reliant on the course book which promotes mainly these types of activities and they may display some unwillingness in preparing their own reading exercises and as a consequence resign from the search for authentic texts which require from teachers invention and construction of self-made text-related activities.

To begin with, it should be stressed that the subjects were asked directly whether, and 'if yes' how often, they prepare their own activities to the texts their students read during classes. Four of them (7%) claimed that they never do it, 43 teachers (80%) prepare them rarely, only 7 (13%) frequently try to construct their own activities and 3 (6%) do it very frequently. As it can be observed the teachers do not show a significant degree of invention in designing their reading tasks.

In the previous subchapter it was shown that 74% of teachers follow reading activities suggested by creators of course books. The reason behind this is that the majority of respondents believe that they are efficient. To be more precise: 39 respondents (72%) strongly believe course book tasks to be efficient, 4 (7%) of them think they are highly efficient. Only 14 (26%) have some doubts about their efficiency as they chose the answer "rather inefficient" and no one thinks that what course books offer is "not efficient at all."

In order to trace back washback in the procedure which teachers apply while planning reading tasks it seemed vital to obtain additional answers from the respondents who display some degree of initiative in preparing activities. This group chose the answer "I use only the texts from our course book but I prepare techniques on my own" and it consisted of 16 (30%) respondents. The reasons they justified their answers with are as follows: 5 of them claimed that course book reading activities are too easy, 4 believed they are not engaging enough, 2 simply stated that they are not interesting and 2 said that they are not varied enough. The closer analysis of their questionnaires showed that this is the group which chose the less popular reading development techniques (question I and II in the questionnaire) as underlining the most important information, underlining topic

sentence in a paragraph, making a plan of a text, inventing titles to paragraphs and writing a summary of a text.

It is a positive phenomenon as some level of dissatisfaction with what course book offers allows teachers to constrain the negative washback effect as they try to invent their own activities. It automatically makes them move to less common techniques of reading comprehension development which do not build final examinations but which may be qualified as more efficient in teaching reading comprehension and which are surely better tailored to students' linguistic level and needs.

Washback and the choice of authentic and modified texts

As it was hypothesised earlier there may be some correlation between washback effect and teachers' willingness to use authentic texts during reading comprehension teaching. However, it should be stressed that using authentic materials necessitates from teachers inventing some activities which could be used while or after reading a piece of a text. This assumption was the ground to ask the respondents what sources of reading texts do they use while constructing reading tasks. The research results show that the teachers are far from trying to base their reading tasks on authentic materials supplemented with self-made activities: 4 of them (7%) admitted using texts from newspapers/magazines (authentic materials not supplemented by any activities), 2 (4%) respondents use all sorts of texts from the Internet (authentic materials not supplemented by any activities), only 1 person claimed to bring pieces of literature to the classroom.

The most common sources and types of texts the teachers apply during their lessons are as follows: 47 (87%) use the Internet and look there for modified texts with ready-made activities, 46 (86%) take the texts from the main course book and other course books at the similar level, 35 (65%) work with the texts offered by the books preparing students for lower secondary school/matura examination and finally 8 (6 of them are lower secondary school teachers) (15%) use the main course book and never supplement it with texts coming from other sources.

To conclude, it may be said that teachers are highly unwilling to use authentic materials as they require some extra work and invention in construction of text related activities. Teachers do not limit themselves to one course book or to one source of texts, however, all the sources they choose give them the opportunity to look for modified text with ready-made activities. If these results were to be interpreted in the context of washback it may be hypothesised that teachers do not apply authentic materials as they are not a part of examinations and they are not supplemented by typical examination techniques, which are difficult to design on one's own.

Assessing 'washback product' – quality of teaching reading in English

As it has been discussed in subchapter 5 developing reading comprehension necessitates activating both lower and higher levels of text comprehension. To be more precise, we can start talking about reading comprehension in its full sense in the context of developing higher levels of understanding as lower levels are the necessary base of reading processes but are far from the essence of reading. The research showed that the activities which motivate students to develop the habit of

constructing a mental summary of a text while reading are simply not used by the respondents during their classes. Frequency of their use measured with the scale from 0 (never) to 3 (very often) does not display any positive tendencies: an oral summary (1,65), underlining the most important information (1,28), underlining topic sentence in a paragraph (0,82), making a plan of a text (0,7), inventing titles to paragraphs (0,58) and preparing a written summary (0,56). As it was discussed previously, the most prevailing techniques are testing techniques which may in some degree develop global reading comprehension but do not engage students directly into intensive construction of a hierarchical network of information from the text and do not make them search actively for the most important ideas in the text and distinguish between relevant and irrelevant pieces of information as it is done by mind map or summary-based tasks.

As far as developing reading at multiple levels of discourse comprehension is concerned, the most often used techniques undoubtedly develop reading at the semantic level as closed questions, true/false statements, multiple choice questions seem to develop surface level of sentence comprehension. Since open questions are also a very common technique applied in foreign language classes it may be concluded that they develop the semantic level of comprehension and the evaluation level. Unfortunately the questionnaire was constructed in such a way that it is impossible to state what kind of open questions teachers apply and whether they actually engage students into text assessment and a kind of personal evaluative reaction to the text. The last level to discuss is interpretation, which is supposed to make students discover the intention of the author and find out the main idea of the text, state whether the title is relevant or discuss rhetoric elements used by the author. Some of these aims may be achieved with open questions, however, due to limitations of the questionnaire it is not possible to state it. On the other hand, as far as identification of the main idea or ideas of the text is concerned it is undoubtedly achieved by the activities proposed earlier. As the research showed they are not applied by the teachers and consequently it may be concluded that this level is rather not developed and is neglected by reading activities respondents claim to use during their lessons.

Conclusions and research results interpretation

The research shows that washback can be observed in the selection of techniques the teachers prefer to use during classes aiming at developing reading comprehension skills. Out of six the most often applied activities in this context, four of them (namely true/false statements, multiple choice questions, gapped texts and matching titles with paragraphs) are the techniques which are typical for final lower secondary school and upper secondary school examinations in English. It should be stressed that, on the one hand, washback effect is positive as students practice test strategies typical for examinations. On the other hand, an immense discrepancy between frequency of use of these techniques and other activities developing reading comprehension, e.g. summarising or inventing titles to paragraphs, shows that teachers limit the scope of techniques and familiarise students mainly with these types of techniques which make reading development less efficient and successful. What is more, a constant use of the same techniques makes reading

tasks monotonous, predictable and not challenging. There is also a danger that high results in these typical testing formats like multiple choice questions or true/false statements do not mean that students understand the text and can tell the teacher what the text is about. As Alderson (2000: 211) claims: "Some researchers argue that the ability to answer multiple choice questions is a separate ability, different from the reading ability."

The research also analysed the decisive factors which influence planning reading tasks and tried to find out the occurrence of washback in this context. Washback does happen here as the teachers openly admitted that they choose the techniques which are typical for final examinations, which are liked by students and which are suggested by a course book. As it was observed in the previous paragraph, these techniques are mainly testing techniques and it can be concluded that the mechanism of washback described by McEwen (1995) takes place in this situation: the techniques used for testing become perceived as valuable both by students and teachers; as a consequence teachers believe they use the right techniques for reading comprehension development and students expect the teachers to use the testing techniques during classes. What is more, course book creators and publishers fit into this tendency and construct books in such a way that they intensely engage students into practicing reading mainly with testing techniques.

The research also aimed to specify the sources of texts teachers use while searching for texts for reading development. It was shown that teachers prefer ready-made activities based on modified texts. As a consequence all sources which offer such reading tasks were the most popular among respondents. The search for authentic texts and preparing some activities on their basis is a rare behaviour. It is difficult to connect this phenomenon directly with washback as there may be other numerous reasons why teachers are so unwilling to use authentic texts during classes, starting with the most basic one, which may be simply the lack of time. On the other hand, McEwen's washback mechanism can be once again relevant in this case. Teachers do not bring authentic materials to the classroom, as they do not appear during final examinations and as a consequence teachers may believe that authentic texts not accompanied by multiple choice questions or true/false statements are not efficient and needed.

The issues discussed in the previous paragraph are also connected with the next notion the research was to analyse: teachers' inventiveness and initiative in preparing reading tasks. This issue may be very difficult to interpret in the context of washback as being creative and innovative may be simply an inborn personality feature. On the other hand, there may be some additional reasons behind what the research showed, as the respondents practically do not show any creativity and resourcefulness in planning the reading tasks. Eighty seven percent of respondents rarely and never prepare text based activities on their own, 74% choose the techniques offered by course books. This observation is highly alarming as using ready--made materials and following the course book does not allow for individualisation of the reading process. It also does not promote meeting students needs in an efficient way, as course books are universal and each group of students is unique and should have the activities tailored to their linguistic level and demands. It is also difficult to imagine that what a course book offers always satisfies the teachers and

allows them to believe that they develop reading skills efficiently. On the other hand, the research showed that most of teachers actually believe that course book teaches comprehension in an efficient way. This impression may be justified by washback effect: if course book contains reading testing techniques teachers may believe that it develops reading in the most efficient and successful way.

The last issue that should be discussed is the 'washback product,' which is the quality of teaching reading comprehension in a foreign language. On the basis of the answers the respondents gave, it may be concluded that the quality of developing reading skills is quite low as all the techniques directly promoting construction of a mental summary are barely applied during English classes. However, it should be added that there is a minority of teachers who are disappointed with what course books offer and they apply these techniques.

As far as developing different levels of reading comprehension is concerned it should be stressed that the interpretation level seems to be neglected both by the teachers and by course books designers. Once again, it is possible to contribute this phenomenon to washback effect: elements absent during examinations are ignored during practice. However, there may be many other reasons behind this, for example teachers may be simply not aware that they should develop this level of reading comprehension, they may believe it is not important as it is not intensely promoted by course books. Moreover, making students write a plan of a text or prepare a written summary all the time may turn out to be monotonous or too difficult for students and teachers may not know how to instruct students into a plan or a summary writing. There is an option that a teacher may invent some funny and challenging group activities based on summarising or a text plan reconstruction but one has to be very creative and inventive and as the research showed there are some problems with the respondents' inventiveness and independence in reading tasks' construction.

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Badanie efektu washback w kontekście planowania zadań sprawdzających umiejętność czytania

Streszczenie

Washback to wpływ, jaki wywierają testy pisane przez uczniów na kształt kursu językowego. Literatura przedmiotu przedstawia głównie jego negatywny wpływ na nauczanie oraz uczenie się języków obcych, ponieważ uczniowie oraz nauczyciele często ograniczają się do nauki z mało zróżnicowanym zasobem technik, preferując te, z których składa się egzamin. Badanie przedstawione w artykule miało na celu analizę trychotomicznego modelu zjawiska washback Hughasa w kontekście kształcenia sprawności czytania. Sprawdzono, jaki wpływ ma washback na uczestników (czyli w tym przypadku nauczycieli języka angielskiego pracujących w gimnazjach oraz w szkołach ponadgimnazjalnych), proces (czyli decyzje podejmowane przez nich podczas planowania zajęć) oraz produkt (czyli jakość nauczania czytania). Badanie wykazało, że techniki najczęściej wybierane przez nauczycieli to te, z których składa się egzamin maturalny oraz gimnazjalny. Dzieje się tak, jak wskazali nauczyciele, ponieważ występują one na egzaminach, są preferowane przez uczniów oraz sugerowane przez podręczniki. Zaobserwowano także, że nauczyciele wykazują małą kreatywność w planowaniu zadań oraz niechęć do pracy z tekstami autentycznymi, preferując te z podręcznika, do których dołączono ćwiczenia, które z kolei są częścią składową egzaminów. Próba oceny jakości nauczania czytania pokazała, że techniki, które w wysokim stopniu rozwijają wyższe poziomy przetwarzania tekstu bardzo rzadko pojawiają się na lekcji języka obcego, co może stworzyć podstawę do zakwestionowania jakości kształcenia tej sprawności. Nie wykazano znaczącej różnicy w planowaniu zajęć między nauczycielami pracującymi w gimnazjach i szkołach ponadgimnazjalnych.

Appendix: The questionnaire for teachers of English

a) How long have you been teaching English as a foreign language? (at a public or private school)

☐ less than a year ☐ 1–2 years ☐ 3–4 years ☐ 5 and more years

b) Where do you teach English? (more than one answer can be ticked)

☐ primary school (grades 1–3)
☐ primary school (grades 4–6)
☐ lower secondary school
☐ upper secondary school

☐ English course for children

☐ English course for teenagers

☐ English course for adults

I Tick four techniques developing reading comprehension that you use most frequently during classes with your students

☐ Open questions
☐ Closed questions
☐ Multiple choice questions
☐ Inventing titles to paragraphs
☐ Matching titles with paragraphs
☐ True/false statements
☐ Underlining the most important information
☐ Underlining topic sentence in a paragraph
☐ Matching excerpts with the text
☐ Making a plan of a text
☐ A written summary
☐ An oral summary
☐ Other …..................

II How often do you use the following reading comprehension tasks? Please analyze every technique according to 0–3 frequency scale and put X in an appropriate column.

The technique	Very often (3)	Often (2)	Rarely (1)	Never (0)
Open questions				
Closed questions				
Multiple choice questions				
Inventing titles to paragraphs				
Matching titles with paragraphs				
True/false statements				
Underlining the most important information in a text				
Underlining topic sentence in a paragraph				
Matching excerpts with the text				
Making a plan of a text				
A written summary of a text				
An oral summary of a text				

III What are the sources of the texts that you read during classes? (you may tick as many options as you want)

☐ The main course book + other course books

☐ The main course book exclusively

☐ Books preparing students for lower secondary school/matura examination

☐ The Internet (modified texts with activities)

☐ The Internet (authentic materials not supplemented by any activities)

☐ Newspapers/magazines (authentic materials not supplemented by any activities)

☐ Other ....

IV Do you happen to prepare your own activities to the texts you are going to cover during classes?

☐ very frequently   ☐ often   ☐ rarely   ☐ never

V How do you assess the reading activities from your course book in terms of their efficiency in developing reading skills?

☐ Highly efficient

☐ Efficient

☐ Rather inefficient

☐ Not efficient at all

VI What do you take into consideration while choosing the techniques for reading comprehension practice? (you may tick as many options as you want)

☐ I choose the techniques typical for matura/gimnazjum exam

☐ I choose the techniques which are liked by my students

☐ I choose the techniques from our course book

☐ I use only the texts from our course book but I prepare techniques on my own

☐ I choose the techniques typical for TOEFL or other exams

☐ Other ....

VII If you chose the option 'I use only the texts from our course book but I prepare techniques on my own' in the previous question, could you briefly justify why do you decide to prepare activities on your own?

....