The washback effect of EOP speaking tests on students' self-regulated learning

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ABSTRACT

In English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) contexts, speaking assessments play a crucial role in shaping not only language proficiency but also learner behavior. While test washback has been extensively studied in academic exams like IELTS or TOEFL, little attention has been given to its impact on self-regulated learning (SRL) within EOP programs. This study investigates the washback effects of EOP speaking tests on students' SRL at a public university in Vietnam. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected 265 valid questionnaires from 700 second-year students and conducted semi-structured interviews with 45 of them. The findings revealed that EOP speaking tests exerted significant washback effects on SRL across three core areas: learning attitude, approach, and habit. While many students reported increased motivation, greater metacognitive awareness, and improved study behaviors, others experienced test anxiety, relied on rote memorization, and narrowly focused on predicted test content. These findings support prior research on the dual nature of washback and extend it to the underexplored context of EOP speaking. They also highlight the importance of learner perceptions and contextual factors in mediating assessment impact. The study contributes new insights into how speaking tests can both enhance and limit learner autonomy in EOP programs.

Keywords: washback effect, self-regulated learning, EOP speaking tests, assessments

Introduction

Language testing has a significant impact on both teaching and learning practices, particularly in English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), where the primary focus is on real-world communication. At Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI), EOP speaking tests simulate workplace interactions and serve as key components of the curriculum. Beyond measuring proficiency, these tests may exert washback effects—both positive and negative—on how students regulate their own learning. Self-regulated learning (SRL), which involves goal-setting, planning, monitoring, and strategy adjustment, is critical for academic and lifelong success and is especially vital in EOP because learners must independently develop adaptable

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communication strategies for unpredictable workplace situations. Yet, how EOP speaking tests at HaUI influence SRL remains underexplored. Existing washback research largely centers on high-stakes exams like IELTS or TOEFL, with limited attention to occupational English tests and their impact on SRL. While some studies report beneficial washback, such as enhanced speaking skills or increased motivation, others reveal drawbacks like anxiety and surface learning. Moreover, previous studies show that washback is shaped not only by test design but also by contextual and stakeholder factors (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Spratt, 2005), suggesting that its effects on SRL may vary across institutional settings. Research has also noted that assessments can either promote autonomy through meaningful feedback (Bailey, 1996) or constrain learners through test-driven practices (Shohamy et al., 1996), yet little is known about how these dynamics unfold in EOP environments. This lack of empirical attention to learner-focused outcomes highlights a gap in understanding the mechanisms through which speaking tests influence SRL in EOP contexts. Given HaUI's diverse student population and the professional demands of EOP, understanding these effects is essential for aligning assessment with authentic workplace communication needs. This study, therefore, investigates the washback effects of EOP speaking tests on students' SRL at HaUI. It aims to (1) assess the impact of these tests on SRL, and (2) identify key factors contributing to either positive or negative effects. By clarifying these relationships, the findings will guide assessment design that more effectively fosters learner autonomy and transferable workplace communication skills in EOP contexts.

Literature Review

Washback Effects

Definitions of Washback

Washback, or backwash, refers to the influence of testing on teaching, learning, and curriculum design (Wen & Chano, 2024; Beikmahdavi, 2016). Thu (2020) conceptualizes washback specifically as the classroom impact of tests on teachers' perceptions and practices, highlighting its mediating role between assessment and learning. Initially framed negatively in high-stakes contexts, washback is now recognized as having both positive and negative pedagogical effects (Rathnayake, 2025). Positive washback aligns instruction with curriculum goals, while negative washback risks narrowing learning to test preparation (Wen & Chano, 2024). Foundational studies (Hughes, 1989; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996) highlight behavioral changes induced by assessments, yet their influence on actual learning outcomes remains underexplored (Qi, 2011). Debates persist over its scope: some view washback as a micro-level classroom phenomenon (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996), whereas others distinguish it from broader institutional or societal impacts (Weir, 2005). Empirical evidence suggests that external assessments influence both teaching practices and curriculum design (Shohamy, 1992; Shohamy et al., 1996), but the mechanisms and conditions determining positive versus negative washback require further scrutiny. Current research emphasizes aligning assessments with instructional objectives and enhancing teacher assessment literacy to optimize washback effects (Rathnayake, 2025).

Factors Affecting Washback

Washback emerges from the interaction between test design, stakeholder beliefs, and institutional context. The content, structure, and cognitive demands of the test are often cited as primary drivers: Wall and Alderson (1993) note that tasks requiring higher-order thinking foster deeper learning, whereas tests focused on recall encourage superficial instruction. Alignment

with curriculum goals similarly shapes the extent and direction of washback (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Yet test features alone do not determine outcomes. Spratt (2005) argues that teachers who perceive tests as instruments for supporting learning are more likely to embed them into purposeful instructional activities, whereas those who view tests as punitive constraints often resort to mechanical, test-driven teaching. Similarly, Shohamy et al. (1996) note that the stakes attached to an assessment can amplify its washback effects; however, this amplification is not inherently positive, as high-stakes contexts may increase pressure and lead to narrower instructional practices. Specific test factors such as difficulty, stakes, and utility strongly affect washback. Nguyen (2025) reports that test utility is most influential, followed by stakes and difficulty, shaping student engagement and preparation. In Vietnamese universities, high-stakes tests like IELTS are highly valued but often not formally recorded, suggesting that perceived utility and stakes may drive washback more than official recognition. Contextual and institutional conditions mediate these effects. Cheng (2005) highlights that autonomy, resources, and professional development affect teacher responses, with restrictive settings more likely to generate negative washback. Student perceptions also matter; Alderson and Wall (1993) suggest that meaningful tests promote engagement. Policy emphasis on standardized testing can narrow curricula and heighten pressure (Shohamy et al., 1996). Collectively, these findings show that washback is neither predetermined by test design nor purely a product of external mandates. While Wall and Alderson (1993) foreground test features, others, such as Cheng (2005) and Spratt (2005), stress the agency of teachers and learners within specific contexts. This interplay offers a theoretical basis for examining how different stakeholders interpret and respond to test-based instruction, and whether the resulting washback supports or undermines educational aims.

Positive washback effects

Positive washback arises when assessments actively reinforce effective teaching and meaningful learning. Shohamy (1992) observes that tests can foster improvement when they provide actionable insights for refining pedagogy and tracking student progress. Bailey (1996) extends this, noting that preparation activities promoting language development, learner autonomy, and self-assessment transform assessment into a tool for reflective and independent learning. Messick (1996) emphasizes that such benefits are more likely when test preparation aligns closely with classroom learning and reflects authentic language use. Similarly, Davies (1999) links positive washback to assessments that encourage sound teaching practices, while Yi-Ching (2009) shows that comprehensive test planning motivates teachers to cover full course content, generating positive student attitudes and stronger results.

The influence of positive washback can extend beyond individual classrooms. Shohamy (1992) and Cheng (2005) highlight that high-stakes tests can drive the adoption of new textbooks and teaching materials, catalyzing pedagogical innovation and policy reform. Pan and Newfields (2012) further argue that well-designed assessments strengthen instruction, support educational growth, and enhance accountability. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that positive washback is not an automatic outcome of testing but depends on thoughtful design, curricular alignment, and the purposeful integration of assessment into broader educational goals.

Negative washback effects

Negative washback emerges when tests misalign with intended learning objectives, shifting attention from broader educational aims to narrow test content. Davies (1999) argues that such misalignment undermines communicative language teaching by forcing teachers to prioritize test preparation over language development. Pan and Newfields (2012) note that this occurs at both micro and macro levels, often leading to mechanical drilling, curriculum narrowing, and

reduced focus on critical thinking.

Critiques also target systemic practices. Shohamy (1992) warns that standardized tests imposed without teacher involvement and focused on scores rather than learning can erode authentic educational practices. Without meaningful feedback or diagnostic value, such assessments restrict student learning and teacher professional growth. Shohamy (1992) and Shohamy et al. (1996) further contend that these conditions produce superficial learning and diminish teacher agency, reducing instruction to rote delivery of test-oriented material.

At the classroom level, Yi-Ching (2009) shows how "teaching to the test" narrows curricula, encourages rote memorization, and limits creative and reflective learning opportunities. Shohamy et al. (1996) add that high-stakes environments heighten anxiety among teachers and students, promoting short-term cramming over sustained learning. From a learner perspective, Vernon (2014) finds that overemphasis on test preparation decreases motivation and fosters negative attitudes toward assessment, which can undermine long-term engagement. Institutional perspectives from Yi-Ching (2009) and Fish (1988) reveal that tests used for political purposes intensify pressure on stakeholders, diverting focus from holistic educational goals. Collectively, these studies depict negative washback as a multifaceted threat—affecting pedagogy, learner experience, and policy, when assessment becomes an end in itself rather than a means to support genuine learning.

Self-regulated learning

Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to learners' active control over their cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes to achieve academic goals. Zimmerman (1986, 2002) conceptualizes SRL as a cyclical process involving self-observation, strategic planning, purposeful action, and reflective adjustment, while Schunk (2013) frames it as deliberate regulation of thoughts, emotions, and actions. Winne (1995) supports this view, emphasizing SRL as a framework for self-directed learning in which strategies adapt to feedback and contextual demands. SRL integrates cognitive and metacognitive regulation with motivational and behavioral dimensions (Pintrich, 2000; Koo et al., 2019). Goal-setting, self-monitoring, and strategic planning form its cognitive–metacognitive core (Garcia & Pintrich, 2023; Paris & Winograd, 2003), while behavioral regulation includes time management, peer assistance, and self-control (Chang, 2005; Koo et al., 2019). Motivation underpins these processes, sustaining effort and managing emotional responses (Boekaerts, 1999; Schunk, 2013). Students lacking SRL skills often show reduced motivation and poor performance, whereas those applying SRL strategies tend to achieve higher outcomes and engagement (Newman, 1994; Schunk, 2023). Social and contextual factors also shape SRL. Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Hadwin and Oshige (2011) argue that external scaffolding from teachers, peers, and learning environments fosters internal regulation. SRL aligns closely with self-directed learning, which combines autonomy, self-motivation, metacognitive regulation, and supportive contexts (Ghyasi et al., 2013). Tran (2021) further highlights that SRL enhances students' confidence, awareness of learning strengths and limitations, goal-setting, and sense of belonging, while enabling teachers to provide varied academic tasks. Despite differences in theoretical models, researchers agree that SRL is critical for academic success (Zimmerman, 1989; Chang, 2005). It does not emerge automatically but develops through explicit instruction and practice (Schunk, 2013). Pedagogical strategies such as active learning, cooperative tasks, guided reflection, and formative feedback can enhance SRL, promoting autonomy, strategic thinking, and resilience—key attributes for lifelong learning (Lindner & Harris, 1993; Zimmerman, 1990).

Formative and summative assessments

Understanding washback requires differentiating formative and summative assessments, as both can shape teaching, learning, and student self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies. Formative assessments, including classroom speaking activities or progress videos, provide ongoing feedback that supports skill development, encourages self-monitoring, and fosters SRL (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Adinda et al., 2021). Summative assessments, such as end-of-course speaking exams, measure final competency and often carry higher stakes, potentially intensifying both positive and negative washback (Harlen, 2010). In Vietnam, despite policy advocacy for formative and alternative assessment, summative testing remains dominant due to historical and ideological tensions (Ngo, 2022). Nevertheless, empirical studies demonstrate that formative approaches, including online assessments, can significantly improve learning outcomes, such as EFL students' writing achievement (Nhu & Tin, 2019). Integrating formative and summative strategies offers a balanced evaluation system that promotes both academic growth and professional readiness, though challenges persist, including the time-intensive nature of formative assessment and the stress associated with summative testing (Muhanguzi et al., 2025).

By situating EOP speaking tests within this continuum, the present study draws on theoretical perspectives that highlight how the timing, purpose, and stakes of an assessment can influence learner behavior and autonomy.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do EOP speaking tests affect students' self-regulated learning at HaUI?
2. What factors contribute to the positive and negative washback effects of EOP speaking tests on students' self-regulated learning?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study was conducted at HaUI, where EOP is a compulsory program for all non-English major students. The EOP program includes six 10-week courses delivered through a blended model via the official platform https://eop.edu.vn, combining 35 periods of online self-study with 40 periods of face-to-face instruction. Each course focuses on developing four language skills across eight workplace-themed units. Assessment is continuous and multi-dimensional, including Progress Test 1 (PT1: vocabulary and grammar), a Midterm Test (MT: listening, reading, and writing), Progress Test 2 (PT2: speaking), and a Final Test covering all four skills. A key component is the submission of eight speaking videos, one after each unit, which serve as formative assessments to enhance speaking skills, promote self-reflection, and support SRL. This study focuses on three speaking tasks: the eight formative videos, PT2, and the speaking section of the Final Test, which together represent both formative and summative assessments. Participants were 256 second-year students majoring in English for Mechanical Engineering, enrolled in the fourth EOP course during the 2024–2025 academic year. Their English proficiency ranged from A2 to B1, and they were already familiar with the EOP system and its learning format. With direct experience in both online and classroom learning, these students were well-suited to provide insights into the washback effects of EOP speaking tests on their SRL. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the HaUI, and all participants provided informed consent before data collection. The survey and interview instruments underwent

expert review by three EOP assessment specialists to establish content validity, and a pilot study with 32 students from a similar cohort confirmed the clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of the items.

Design of the Study

The study used a mixed-methods design to examine how EOP speaking tests affect students' SRL. Quantitative surveys provided general patterns, while qualitative interviews offered deeper insights into students' experiences.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from Su et al. (2024) and Nguyen (2023) and modified to suit the EOP context at HaUI. Items were revised to align with the course structure, including both formative (unit-based speaking videos) and summative assessments (PT2 and Final Test), thereby ensuring construct validity. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure students' perceptions. Reliability was high (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.910) with all item-total correlations > 0.3. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms and consisted of three sections: Section 1 (14 items) examined the washback effects on students' SRL, categorized into learning attitude, approach, and habit; Section 2 (17 items) explored factors influencing positive and negative washback, along with students' general perspectives; and Section 3 collected demographic data, including gender and the frequency of speaking practice outside the classroom.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted online via Zoom with students. For the student interviews, participants were selected from those who had agreed to be interviewed after completing the questionnaire. A total of 45 students were divided into 9 groups of five, with each session lasting 25–30 minutes. All interviews were recorded and supported by note-taking. The discussions focused on three core aspects of SRL: learning attitude, learning approach, and learning habit, as outlined in the questionnaire. Additionally, students were asked to reflect on the factors they believed contributed to the positive or negative washback effects of EOP speaking tests.

Data collection & analysis

The data collection began with a review of relevant theories and existing instruments related to washback and SRL in English language assessments. Based on this, a questionnaire was developed specifically for the EOP speaking test context at HaUI, focusing on students' attitudes toward learning, approaches, and habits. A pilot study with 32 second-year students was conducted to test clarity and reliability, followed by revisions based on feedback and Cronbach's alpha analysis. The final questionnaire was distributed online to 700 second-year students majoring in English for Mechanical Engineering, with 265 valid responses retained for analysis. To gain deeper insights, 45 students who agreed to be interviewed were divided into 9 groups for online semi-structured interviews via Zoom, each lasting 25–30 minutes. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations), and the results are presented in tables to address the two research questions. Qualitative data were coded according to students' learning attitudes, approaches, and habits, as well as perceived positive and negative washback effects. Triangulation of both data sources was used to enhance validity and provide a comprehensive understanding of how EOP speaking tests influence students' SRL.

Results/Findings

The washback effects of EOP speaking tests on students' self-regulated learning

The Washback Effect of the EOP Speaking Tests on Students' Learning Attitude

Table 1

The Washback Effects of the EOP Speaking Tests on Students' Learning Attitude

No	Items	Level of agreement (%)					Mean	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	The EOP speaking tests made me more motivated to improve my English speaking skills.	2.6	3.0	15.8	36.2	42.3	4.12	0.963
2	The EOP speaking tests increased my interest in practicing English speaking.	2.3	9.4	16.6	32.8	38.9	3.97	1.067
3	The EOP speaking tests encouraged me to pay more attention to my English speaking practice.	0.4	11.7	20.0	31.7	36.2	3.92	1.030
4	I would feel dissatisfied if speaking practice sessions related to the EOP test were not arranged by my teacher.	3.4	9.8	17.4	32.1	37.4	3.90	1.114

As shown in Table 1, most students reported positive learning attitudes resulting from the EOP speaking test. Specifically, 78.5% felt more motivated to improve their speaking skills (M = 4.12, SD = 0.96), and 71.7% said the test increased their interest in speaking practice (M = 3.97, SD = 1.07). Additionally, 67.9% agreed that it encouraged greater attention to speaking activities (M = 3.92, SD = 1.03), while 69.5% expressed dissatisfaction if speaking sessions were not arranged by their teacher (M = 3.90, SD = 1.11). These results indicate that the speaking test generally fostered motivation and attentiveness, though some variation existed.

In the interviews, students also shared that the EOP speaking tests played an important role in shaping their learning attitude. Student S2 commented, "Before the EOP test, I didn't focus much on speaking. But after knowing about it, I started practicing at home by preparing topic answers and speaking out loud to improve fluency." Student S5 added, "Knowing we would be tested pushed me to try harder in each session. I prepared my ideas in advance and practiced with friends to get used to speaking longer." Meanwhile, some students still expressed concern about limited practice opportunities. As student S4 shared, "*I got nervous before the test because we didn't practice enough in class. We mostly did grammar and vocabulary, so I wasn't confident speaking for more than a minute.*" While most students found the EOP speaking test to be a motivating factor, the interview data also point to a continued need for structured, teacher-guided speaking opportunities to help students feel fully prepared and confident.

The Washback Effect of the EOP Speaking Test on Students' Learning Approach

According to Table 2, most students reported positive shifts in their learning approach due to the EOP speaking test. Specifically, 71.2% agreed that the test encouraged them to evaluate their learning behavior (M = 3.89, SD = 1.08), and 70.6% said it helped them reflect on how to improve their speaking skills (M = 3.89, SD = 1.07). Additionally, 66.0% recognized the importance of using methods that support speaking development (M = 3.84, SD = 1.17), and 69.6% felt motivated to monitor their speaking practice consciously (M = 3.91, SD = 1.03). Notably, 70.5% reported taking greater initiative in organizing their speaking study plan, with the highest mean score of 3.97 (SD = 0.92). These findings suggest that the EOP speaking test

positively influenced students' metacognitive awareness and fostered more proactive, strategic learning behaviors.

Table 2

The Washback Effects of the EOP Speaking Test on Students' Learning Approach

No	Items	Level of agreement (%)					Mean	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	The EOP speaking tests prompted me to evaluate my English speaking learning behavior.	3.8	7.5	18.1	36.6	34.6	3.89	1.075
2	The EOP speaking tests made me value the use of learning methods that help me improve my speaking skills.	5.7	7.5	20.8	29.4	36.6	3.84	1.168
3	The EOP speaking tests prompted me to think about how I can improve my English speaking skills.	5.3	3.4	20.8	38.1	32.5	3.89	1.066
4	The EOP speaking tests motivated me to consciously monitor my English speaking practice.	4.5	2.6	22.3	38.5	32.1	3.91	1.026
5	The EOP speaking tests prompted me to take the initiative in organizing my English speaking study plan.	1.1	4.5	23.8	37.7	32.8	3.97	0.923

In the interviews, students also reflected on changes in their learning behavior. Student S1 shared, *"Before the test, I didn't really evaluate how I was learning to speak. After that, I began to review my recordings and reflect on my mistakes to track my progress."* Student S8 added, *"The test helped me see that I needed better strategies. Now I focus on practicing with specific goals, like using more complex structures or improving pronunciation."* However, a few students admitted that, while they became more aware of effective learning methods, they still could not consistently apply them. As student S20 noted, *"I know I should plan my learning better, but I'm still unsure what steps to take. I often feel lost when trying to organize my speaking practice on my own."* These findings suggested that the EOP speaking test positively influenced students' learning strategies and metacognitive awareness. Nonetheless, some learners appeared to need further support to turn reflection into effective, long-term habits.

The Washback Effect of the EOP Speaking Test on Students' Learning Habits

As shown in Table 3, the EOP speaking test had a positive impact on students' learning habits. A majority (74.7%) reported spending more time on speaking practice (M = 3.89, SD = 1.08), and 70.6% stated that the test significantly influenced their speaking studies overall (M = 3.84, SD = 1.17). Additionally, 70.5% said the test motivated them to practice speaking outside the classroom (M = 3.89, SD = 1.07), while 61.2% engaged in more focused, targeted speaking practice (M = 3.91, SD = 1.03). Notably, 62.3% were encouraged to develop appropriate test-taking strategies in advance, with this item receiving the highest mean score in the group (M = 3.97, SD = 0.92). These results highlight the test's effectiveness in promoting regular, self-directed, and strategic speaking habits among students.

Table 3

The Washback Effects of the EOP Speaking Test on Students' Learning Habits

No	Items	Level of agreement (%)					Mean	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	The EOP speaking tests prompted me to spend more time practicing my English speaking skills.	1.9	6.0	17.4	37.7	37	3.89	1.075
2	The EOP speaking tests had a big impact on my English speaking study.	1.9	8.7	18.9	29.1	41.5	3.84	1.168
3	The EOP speaking tests increased my English speaking practice frequency outside the classroom.	1.5	10.9	17.0	27.5	43.0	3.89	1.066
4	The EOP speaking tests prompted me to do targeted English speaking training.	4.9	13.2	20.8	27.2	34.0	3.91	1.026
5	The EOP speaking tests prompted me to learn appropriate test-taking skills before the test.	3.4	12.5	21.9	29.1	33.2	3.97	0.923

Interview data supported these findings. Several students mentioned that they had started spending more time preparing for the test and developing specific speaking habits. Student S9 shared, *"I used to only speak during class activities, but after the test was announced, I started practicing at home by doing role-plays with friends and recording myself to review."* Student S2 added, *"The test helped me realize that confidence wasn't enough—I began using topic lists and planning key vocabulary before I practiced speaking."* However, some students admitted that while they understood the importance of preparation, they still lacked consistency or structure in building these habits. These results indicated that the EOP speaking test had a strong washback effect on students' speaking-related habits, encouraging them to increase their preparation time, focus, and independence. Nonetheless, some students still needed guidance to translate motivation into effective, habitual action.

The Overall Perspective of Students and the Washback Effect of the EOP Speaking Tests

Table 4

The Overall Perspective of Students and the Washback Effects of the EOP Speaking Tests

No	Items	Level of agreement (%)					Mean	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	I am satisfied with the content of the EOP speaking tests.	1.1	15.5	21.9	29.4	32.1	3.76	1.098
2	I am satisfied with the question types for the EOP speaking tests.	1.9	9.4	24.2	34.3	30.2	3.82	1.030
3	The effect of the EOP speaking tests on my English speaking learning is more favorable than unfavorable.	2.3	4.9	17.0	34.0	41.9	4.08	0.993
4	The EOP speaking tests helped to improve my English speaking skills.	1.1	2.3	14.0	34.7	47.9	4.26	0.864

Table 4 summarizes students' overall perceptions of the EOP speaking tests, showing generally favorable attitudes. Specifically, 61.5% expressed satisfaction with the test content (M = 3.76, SD = 1.10), and 64.5% were satisfied with the question types (M = 3.82, SD = 1.03), indicating a positive reception of both structure and content, though with some variation. The most favorable response was related to the test's impact on speaking learning, with 75.1% agreeing

it had more positive than negative effects (M = 4.08, SD = 0.99). Notably, 82.3% believed the test helped improve their speaking skills—the highest-rated item in this group (M = 4.26, SD = 0.86). These results suggest that students view the EOP speaking tests not only as fair and relevant but also as beneficial tools for developing their English speaking competence.

Interview responses also aligned with these results. Many students expressed that the test was not only a challenge but also a helpful push toward improving their speaking. Student S11 noted, *"At first, the test made me nervous, but after regular practice and reviewing my mistakes, I noticed real improvement in how I speak."* Another student, S25, commented, *"I actually enjoy the test questions—they're practical and push me to think more clearly and organize my ideas better."* These reflections reinforced the idea that the EOP speaking tests were generally well-received and had a meaningful impact on students' speaking development.

In conclusion, the overall perspective of students was largely positive. Most learners were satisfied with the test design and recognized its role in improving their speaking skills. These perceptions supported the presence of a constructive washback effect and highlighted the importance of maintaining a balanced test design that promotes both motivation and learning outcomes.

Factors affecting the washback effects of EOP speaking tests on students' self-regulated learning

Factors affecting the positive washback effects of EOP speaking tests on students' self-regulated learning

Figure 1

Students' Responses on Learning Motivation (Positive Washback Effects of EOP Speaking Tests)

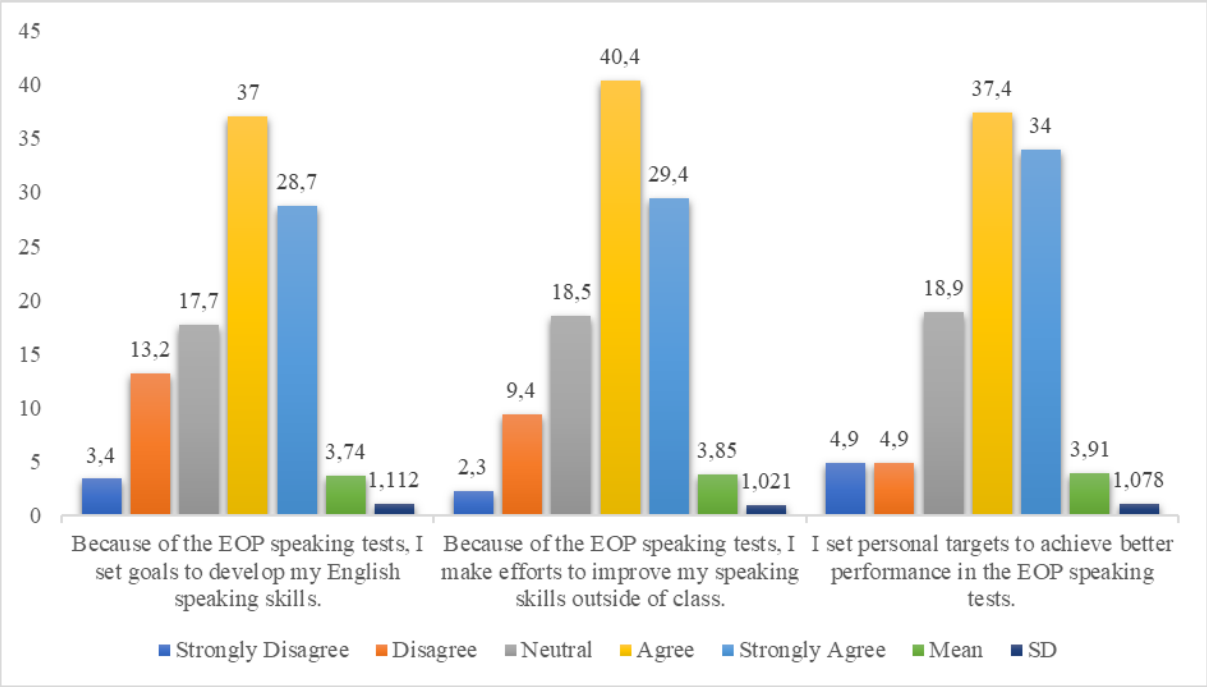


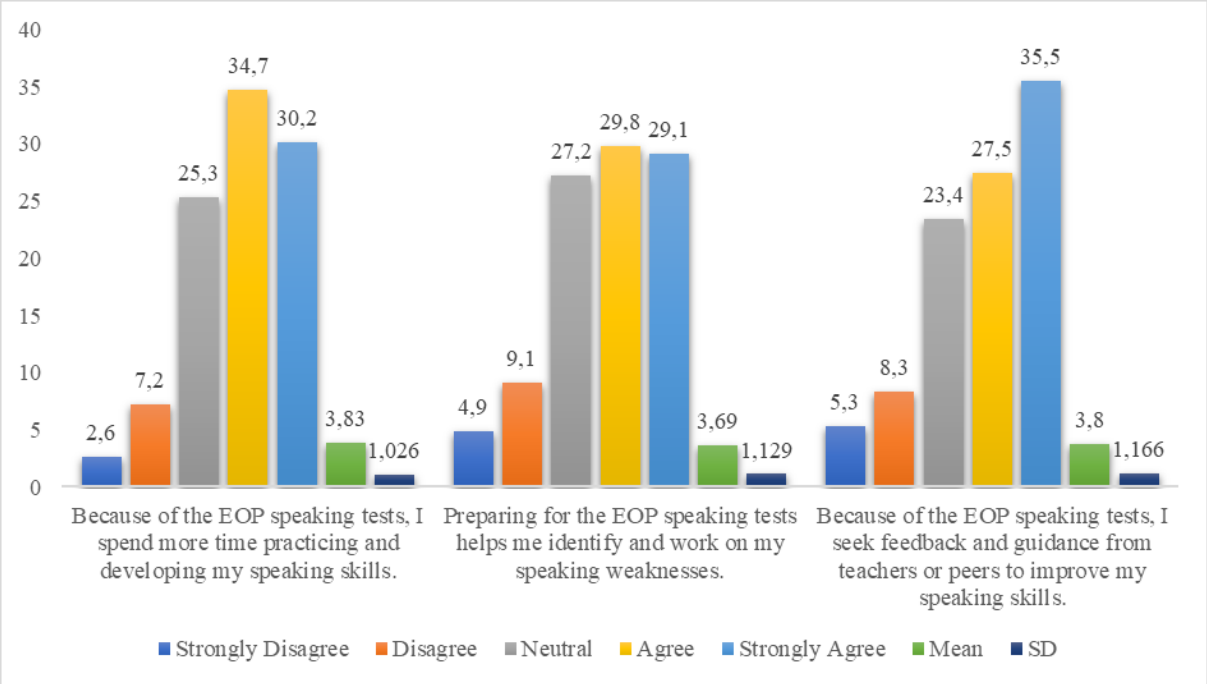
Figure 1 shows that the EOP speaking tests positively influenced students' motivation, a key driver of SRL. Specifically, 65.7% of students reported setting goals to improve their speaking skills (M = 3.74, SD = 1.11), while 69.8% said the tests motivated them to practice outside of class (M = 3.85, SD = 1.02). The strongest agreement was observed in goal-setting for test

performance, with 71.4% of students confirming they set personal targets (M = 3.91, SD = 1.08). These findings highlight the test's role in encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and engage in purposeful practice beyond the classroom.

Interview data further confirmed these results. Several students reported that they became more proactive in setting goals and monitoring their efforts due to the EOP speaking tests. Student S12 stated, *"The test gave me a reason to set clear goals. I created a weekly plan to practice speaking on different topics and checked my progress each week."* Student S4 added, *"Before the test, I didn't pay attention to improvement. But now I try to review feedback after each task and spend extra time practicing at home with my friends."* These responses suggested that the tests helped learners internalize motivational goals and translate them into more focused learning efforts. These findings indicated that learning motivation was a key factor contributing to the positive washback effects of the EOP speaking tests. By encouraging students to set goals, make efforts beyond class, and strive for better performance, the test promoted essential SRL. However, to maintain this momentum, continued support and encouragement from teachers may still be needed.

Figure 2

Students' Responses on Holistic Learning (Positive Washback Effects of EOP Speaking Tests)



As shown in Figure 2, 64.9% of students reported spending more time practicing speaking due to the EOP tests (M = 3.83, SD = 1.03), indicating a strong perceived impact. In terms of self-assessment, 59.7% agreed that preparing for the tests helped them recognize and address their weaknesses, though the lower mean score (M = 3.69, SD = 1.13) suggests some variation in this effect. Additionally, 63% sought feedback from teachers or peers to improve their performance (M = 3.80, SD = 1.17), reflecting the test's role in encouraging feedback-driven and collaborative learning. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the EOP speaking tests not only enhanced practice habits but also supported reflective and interactive learning processes.

Interview data provided further support for these findings. Some students acknowledged that the EOP speaking tests encouraged them to take practice more seriously and become more reflective learners. Student S17 shared, *"Before the test, I just spoke without thinking much.*

Now I focus on the parts I'm weak at—like linking sounds or organizing ideas—and practice them more carefully." Student S40 commented, *"When I knew the test was coming, I asked my teacher to give more detailed corrections after speaking tasks, and I tried to apply the feedback in later practice."* Additionally, student S25 also shared, *"I didn't really focus on improving my speaking before the test. Now, I make it a habit to go over the teacher's feedback after each activity and dedicate around 30 minutes every night to practicing speaking at home."* These comments suggest that the tests played a role in shaping students' efforts toward comprehensive and strategic learning. Overall, the results indicated that the EOP speaking tests contributed positively to holistic learning by promoting extended practice, self-assessment, and peer/teacher interaction. These are key aspects of SRL that go beyond basic task completion, focusing on deeper engagement and improvement. However, some students may still need support in effectively using feedback and identifying their learning needs.

Factors affecting the negative washback effects of EOP speaking tests on students' self-regulated learning

Figure 3

Students' Responses on Learning Anxiety (Negative Washback Effects of EOP Speaking Tests)

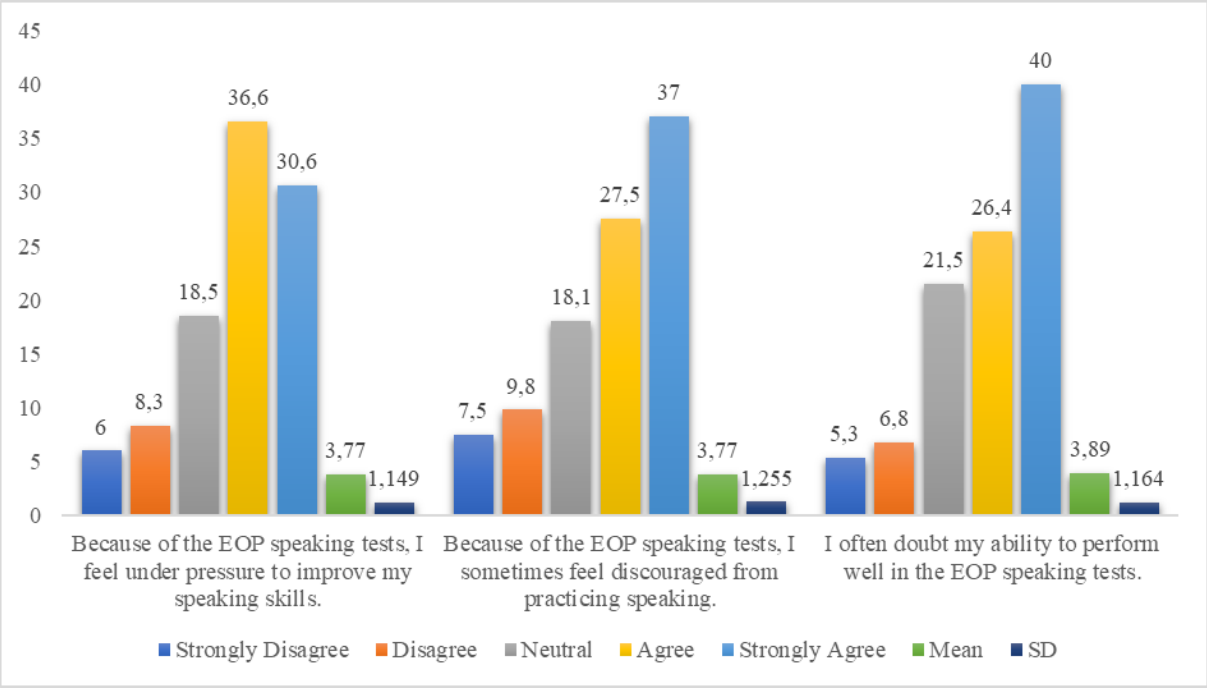


Figure 3 indicates that the EOP speaking tests generated a certain level of anxiety that negatively affected students' SRL. Specifically, 66.2% felt pressured to improve their speaking skills (M = 3.77, SD = 1.15), while 64.5% admitted to feeling discouraged from practicing at times (M = 3.77, SD = 1.26), reflecting emotional strain with varied intensity. Notably, 66.4% of students reported frequent self-doubt about their performance (M = 3.89, SD = 1.16), highlighting that test-related anxiety and confidence issues were significant concerns for many learners.

Comments from students during the interviews reflected these concerns. For example, Student S1 shared, *"Even though I practiced before the test, I kept imagining myself making mistakes in front of the teacher, so I hesitated to speak during practice."* Student S24 said, *"I sometimes felt so nervous that I avoided speaking altogether. The thought of being judged in the test made me question my ability to improve."* These quotes showed how anxiety could reduce students'

willingness to practice or believe in their progress. In short, learning anxiety expressed through pressure, discouragement, and self-doubt was one of the key factors limiting the positive washback effects of the EOP speaking tests. While testing can motivate learning, it can also create emotional stress that prevents students from developing confidence and taking control of their learning without proper support.

Figure 4

Students' Responses on Restricted Learning (Negative Washback Effects of EOP Speaking Tests)

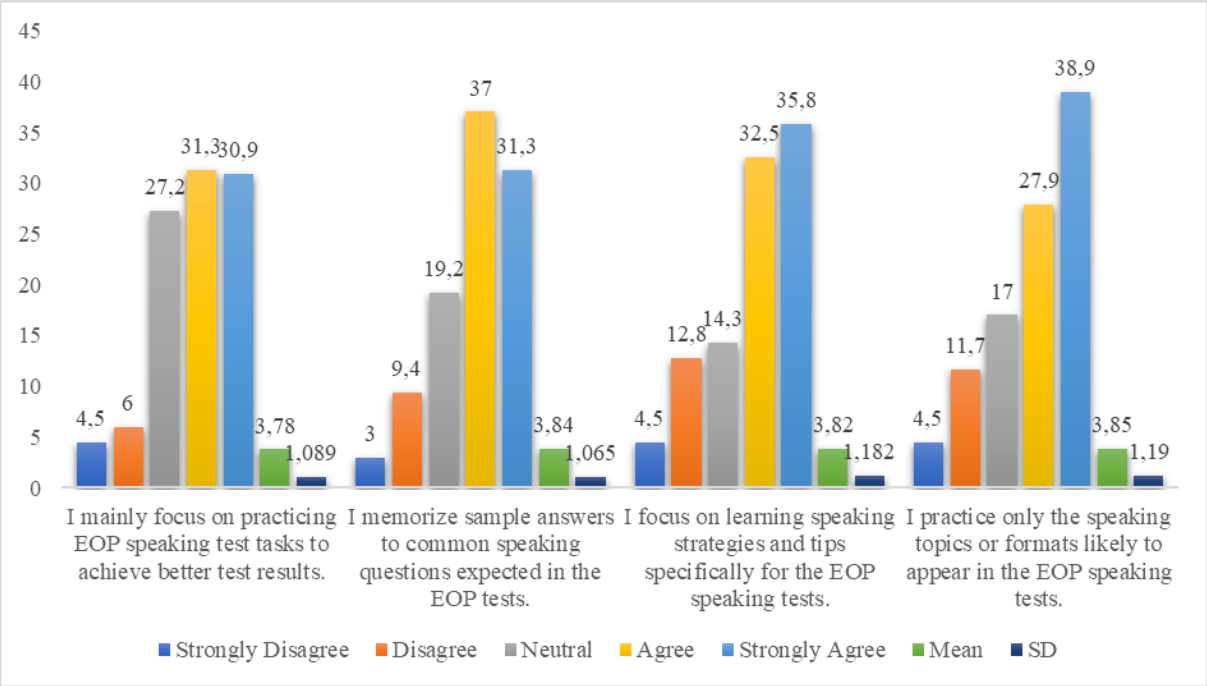


Figure 4 reveals that many students adopted a test-oriented learning approach in response to the EOP speaking tests, potentially limiting broader language development and authentic communication. Specifically, 62.2% focused mainly on practicing test-related tasks (M = 3.78, SD = 1.09), while 68.3% reported memorizing sample answers to expected questions (M = 3.84, SD = 1.07). An equal proportion (68.3%) concentrated on learning strategies and tips tailored to the test (M = 3.82, SD = 1.18), and 66.8% practiced only speaking topics likely to appear in the test (M = 3.85, SD = 1.19), the highest mean score in this group. These findings suggest that while the tests motivated preparation, they also encouraged a narrow focus that may have limited opportunities for more flexible and meaningful language use.

Students' responses in interviews reflected this pattern. Several learners admitted that they focused mostly on predicted topics and common test formats instead of exploring broader speaking skills. Student S26 stated, *"I mostly go over topics I think will appear in the test. If something seems unrelated, I skip it because I want to save time for test-specific practice."* Another student, S35, added, *"I memorized full answers to avoid getting stuck during the test. I didn't practice creating ideas on the spot because I was too worried I'd freeze."* These findings showed that the EOP speaking tests encouraged a restricted form of learning in many students. While targeted preparation could help improve test performance, this approach might limit students' language development and reduce their autonomy in managing learning goals. To support effective SRL, students may need guidance to move beyond test-driven strategies and engage in more meaningful speaking practice.

Figure 5

Students' Responses on Test Difficulty (Negative Washback Effects of EOP Speaking Tests)

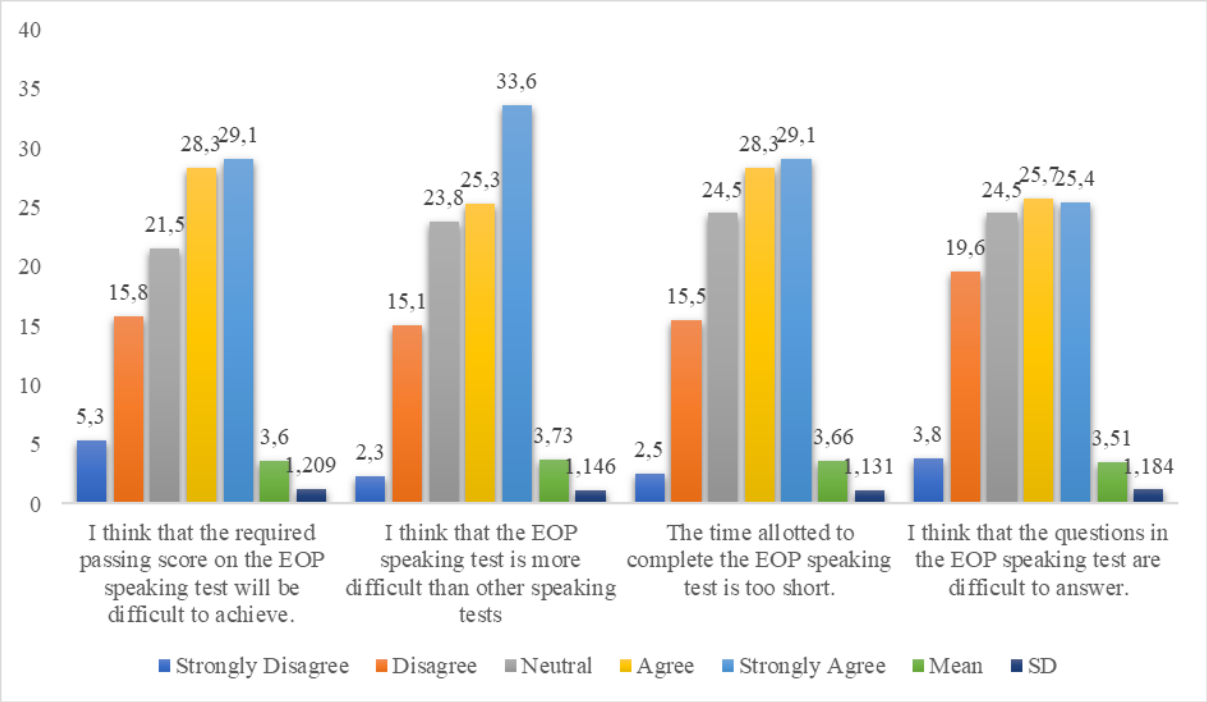


Figure 5 illustrates that many students perceived the EOP speaking test as challenging, which contributed to negative washback effects on SRL. Specifically, 57.4% believed that achieving the required passing score was difficult (M = 3.60, SD = 1.21), and 59.1% considered the EOP test harder than other speaking assessments they had taken (M = 3.73, SD = 1.15). Additionally, 57.4% felt that the time limit was too short (M = 3.66, SD = 1.13), potentially affecting their performance. Finally, 51.1% found the test questions difficult to answer (M = 3.51, SD = 1.18), marking this as the lowest-rated item in the group but still reflecting a considerable level of concern. Overall, perceptions of difficulty, time pressure, and demanding tasks likely influenced students' learning strategies and confidence.

Students' responses during interviews also reflected these concerns. Some admitted that the test made them feel overwhelmed due to unclear scoring or unpredictable topics. Student S17 shared, *"I studied a lot, but I wasn't sure how the test would be scored, so I felt nervous and doubted if I'd pass."* Another student, S39, commented, *"I had prepared several ideas, but the test time was too short—I couldn't express everything, which made me feel frustrated."* These results suggested that students' perceptions of the EOP speaking test as difficult, whether due to scoring criteria, time constraints, or task complexity, negatively influenced their motivation and confidence. When learners viewed the test as too hard, they were less likely to take initiative, persist in practice, or believe in their improvement. Such perceptions limited the positive washback potential of the assessment and called for clearer rubrics, more transparent expectations, and better-aligned practice opportunities.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the EOP speaking tests produced both positive and negative washback effects on students' SRL, consistent with previous research, while highlighting context-specific patterns. Positively, the tests enhanced students' motivation, engagement, and

metacognitive awareness. Most participants reported increased goal-setting, proactive practice, and reflection on their speaking strategies, aligning with positive washback described by Shohamy (1992), Bailey (1996), and Pan & Newfields (2012). These results confirm that assessments aligned with curriculum goals and authentic tasks can foster autonomous, strategic learning (Nguyen, 2025; Wen & Chano, 2024). Nevertheless, negative effects emerged. Some students experienced anxiety, self-doubt, and pressure, while others focused narrowly on predicted test content or memorized sample answers, limiting broader language development. These outcomes reflect concerns noted by Davies (1999) and Shohamy et al. (1996) regarding restricted, test-oriented learning. Perceptions of difficulty and time constraints further influenced students' confidence and study behaviors, showing that individual learner factors mediate washback effects. Importantly, this study emphasizes the learner's perspective as a key mediator. SRL skills such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and reflective practice determined whether the test fostered sustained improvement or merely short-term preparation, highlighting the centrality of learners' agency over teacher-centered factors (Spratt, 2005; Cheng, 2005). Overall, the findings suggest that well-designed EOP speaking assessments can positively shape learning attitudes, approaches, and habits, but support for SRL through structured guidance, explicit strategy training, and authentic speaking opportunities is essential to mitigate negative washback and ensure meaningful skill development (Rathnayake, 2025; Wen & Chano, 2024).

Conclusion/ Implications

The study based on questionnaire and interview data revealed both positive and negative washback effects of EOP speaking tests on students' SRL. The tests created positive attitudes toward speaking English while motivating students to set goals and develop strategic behaviors, including planning, self-assessment, and additional speaking practice outside the classroom. However, negative effects were also present. Test anxiety affected some students who also memorized information and limited their preparation to specific approaches. The combination of time constraints, challenging tasks, and ambiguous scoring methods limited students' autonomy. The majority of students felt content with the tests while recognizing their effectiveness in enhancing their speaking abilities and classroom participation. The research indicates EOP speaking tests can motivate SRL development, but individual and contextual elements determine their impact, thus requiring careful test development and supportive educational approaches.

The research results provide educational recommendations for language instructors, curriculum developers, and assessment creators who want to maximize the positive effects of speaking tests on students' SRL. Teachers should use the motivational power by implementing goal-setting and reflection, and feedback-seeking activities throughout their classroom teaching. The EOP tests enhanced students' strategic awareness, so instruction should build on these behaviors while developing learner autonomy. Educators need to provide structured guidance and emotional support to students who experience anxiety and develop test-focused strategies. The use of clear rubrics together with model answers and explicit test-taking strategies helps students move away from memorization and builds their confidence levels. A supportive environment with low-stakes activities serves as the foundation for students to develop their skills over time. Curriculum designers must create speaking assessments that mimic real-life communication by using diverse tasks at appropriate levels that match learner needs and interests. This method improves both the test's authenticity and its connection to practical language usage. The training of teachers through professional development programs should focus on using assessment data for formative purposes. By integrating theoretical insights into

these practices, educators can better understand the mechanisms through which assessment influences SRL and design interventions that sustain positive washback while reducing negative effects. Educators who understand student performance patterns can provide specific feedback while demonstrating learning strategies to help students develop independent study habits through reflection.

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