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Exploring the Washback effect of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) in relation to students' self-efficacy

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Washback refers to the influence that a test has on teaching or learning. It has been posited that the higher the stake of a test, the stronger the washback would be, subject to many variables and factors in mediating the impact. This study seeks to explore the washback effect of a high-stake language test in Malaysia, the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), and its relation to students' self-efficacy; one element that is often neglected in washback research. Self-efficacy in this study relates to the idea of how the students perceived their ability in relation to performing in a test. Hence, issues pertaining to students' perceptions of the MUET and their own self-efficacy in relation to the test was examined. Within a quantitative research approach, a questionnaire was employed to 137 pre-university students who were about to undertake the MUET to elicit data. In general, the findings revealed that the students' self-efficacy did play a significant role in mediating the washback effect of the MUET. Surprisingly, it was found that gender was a significant factor in students' self-efficacy, but not their level of proficiency. It appeared that self-efficacy is indeed one of the crucial mechanisms that need to be considered in trying to further understand the washback effect of a high-stake language test such as the MUET.

Keywords: washback, high-stake language test, language assessment, MUET