

**WASHBACK OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT  
IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN SAUDI ARABIA:  
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES**

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by

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## KESAN PENILAIAN BERTERUSAN DALAM BILIK DARJAH EFL DI SAUDI ARABIA: PERSEPSI DAN AMALAN GURU

### ABSTRAK

Dalam linguistik gunaan, fenomena di mana ujian mempengaruhi pengajaran dan pembelajaran dikenali sebagai *washback* atau *backwash* oleh banyak pendidik (Alderson, 1986; Morrow, 1986; Pearson, 1988; Hughes, 1989; Morris, 1990). Oleh kerana *washback* memainkan peranan yang penting dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran, pihak yang terlibat dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran perlu memahami konsep *washback* ini sebagai satu fenomena pendidikan yang umum, dan bagaimana konsep ini boleh dimanipulasikan secara positif. Penilaian secara berterusan (*Continuous assessment/CA*) telah diperkenalkan sebagai sebahagian daripada ujian dan inovasi penilaian dalam sistem pendidikan Saudi. *CA* bertujuan menggantikan penilaian tradisional (penilaian sumatif) untuk menilai prestasi dan pencapaian pelajar dengan lebih berkesan di samping menambahbaikkan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran secara keseluruhan. Kajian ini mengkaji persepsi guru terhadap faedah *washback* dalam *CA* dan kesannya terhadap pengajaran dan pembelajaran subjek Bahasa Inggeris. Secara khususnya, kajian ini juga mengkaji kesannya terhadap amalan guru di kolej *Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC)* di Saudi Arabia. Kajian ini juga mengkaji sebab faedah *washback* dalam *CA* tidak digunakan secara berkesan selepas pelaksanaan *CA* di kolej *TVTC*. Kajian ini melibatkan 124 guru Bahasa Inggeris di 9 kolej *TVTC* di Saudi Arabia. Kajian ini menggunakan kajian berbentuk *mixed methods* di mana data dikumpul melalui soal selidik, temuduga dan pemerhatian dalam kelas. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa para guru menerima prinsip yang terdapat dalam *CA* dan tahu tentang potensi faedah *washback*. Tahap persediaan dan persepsi guru didapati boleh

mempengaruhi aktiviti kelas dan latihan penilaian yang diberi. Akan tetapi, perubahan positif berikutan pelaksanaan CA adalah di bawah tahap yang dijangkakan. Faktor-faktor yang mendorong atau menghalang kesan faedah *washback* dalam CA dikaji dan dikenalpasti dalam kajian ini. Antara faktor yang dikenalpasti adalah persepsi guru terhadap CA dan tahap penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris pelajar. Secara ringkasnya, kajian ini menunjukkan kesan faedah *washback* dalam CA terhadap amalan guru di kolej TVTC selepas pelaksanaan CA adalah terhad disebabkan oleh tahap persediaan dan persepsi guru. Untuk mencapai faedah *washback* dalam CA yang diinginkan, kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa latihan guru, penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris dan pembangunan secara profesional adalah penting demi menambahbaikkan persepsi dan amalan pengajaran mereka. Selain itu, pelaksanaan pendekatan mengajar yang boleh digunakan secara berkesan dalam kelas dan konteks CA, terutamanya pendekatan yang boleh memenuhi keperluan pelajar kolej TVTC adalah penting dan digalakkan.

# **WASHBACK OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN SAUDI ARABIA: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES**

## **ABSTRACT**

In applied linguistics, the phenomenon of tests' influences on teaching and learning is denoted by many educationalists as “washback” or “backwash” (Alderson, 1986; Morrow, 1986; Pearson, 1988; Hughes, 1989; Morris, 1990). Because of the significant role that washback plays in instruction and learning, those connected to the learning and teaching processes are required to completely understand the concept of washback, as a common educational phenomenon, and how to manipulate it in a positive way. Continuous assessment (CA) has been introduced as a part of the examination and assessment innovation in the Saudi educational system. CA is intended to substitute the traditional assessment (summative assessment) to better assess and evaluate students' performance and achievement and improve the whole process of teaching and learning. This study investigates teachers' perception of the beneficial washback of CA and its impact on the English teaching and learning; and, more specifically, its impact on teachers' practices at the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) colleges in Saudi Arabia. It also investigates why CA beneficial washback is not utilized properly after the implementation of CA in TVTC colleges. This study involved 124 English teachers in 9 different TVTC colleges in Saudi Arabia. A mixed methods research design was used where data were collected through surveys, interviews, and classroom observation. It was found that the teachers acknowledged some of the underlying principles of CA and recognized its potential beneficial washback. Teachers' preparation and perception were also found to influence their classroom activities and assessment practices. However, the intended positive changes as a

result CA implementation were below expectation. A number of factors facilitating or hindering the beneficial washback of CA were investigated and identified in this study such as teachers' perceptions of CA and students' English language proficiency. In brief, this study indicates that the impact of the beneficial washback of CA on teachers' practices in TVTC colleges after the implementation of CA seemed to be limited due to teachers' preparation and perception. To achieve the intended beneficial washback of CA, it is suggested that teachers' training, English proficiency and professional development are essential in order to improve their perceptions and teaching practices. Also, including other effective teaching approaches that can be used in their classroom instruction and CA context, particularly approaches that fulfill the needs of TVTC colleges' students, is highly significant.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction of the Study

Continuous assessment (CA) is a modern method of educational assessment which has been adopted by many countries as a substitution for the widely criticized traditional assessment. As stated by Nitko (1995), the justifications for the adoption of CA are based on the notion that good teaching practices require the availability of continuous data about the students progress that provide regular feedback for the sake of improving the teaching and learning process, and the fear of unfair use of tests.

This chapter identifies a clear and brief explanation of the topic under investigation. It also provides an idea about the research goals and approach, and defines the overall importance of the problem areas. It introduces a concise background on the research's topic and its gap. It also briefly discusses the main concepts and variables on which this study is based. These concepts and variables include assessment, continuous assessment, washback, beneficial washback, teachers' demographic variables, and teachers' perception and practices of assessment (continuous assessment in our case).

Specifically this chapter highlights the main aspects of this study that include background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, hypotheses of the study, conceptual framework, definition of terms used in this study, significance of this study,

delimitation and limitations. This chapter also presents a brief overview of the framework for literature review and the research design and methodology.

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

The background of the study comes from two different perspectives. First, a theoretical background briefly introduces theories and empirical studies related to the research problem through which a theoretical framework can be figured out. Next, a contextual background, that describes the context and scope of the study, introduces the research by providing the background that sets the stage for the problem of the study to be investigated.

### **1.1.1 Theoretical Background**

In order to better understand the key issues of this study which are essentially related to its structural and conceptual framework, it is important to have a brief theoretical background about these essential components. Therefore, a brief theoretical explanation about assessment, teachers' perception and practices, washback (impact of tests on teaching and learning; Alderson, 1986), beneficial washback, and continuous assessment are introduced in the following paragraphs. This study is based on Hughes (1993) trichotomy backwash model which focuses on the three main components of the teaching and learning process; which are participants, process and product. Hughes (1993) elucidates his model as follows:

The trichotomy . . . 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 the work. (p. 2)

Table 1.1 shows Hughes model which consist of the three components of the teaching and learning process with brief explanation for each component.

Table 1.1  
*Hughes (1993) Trichotomy Backwash Model*

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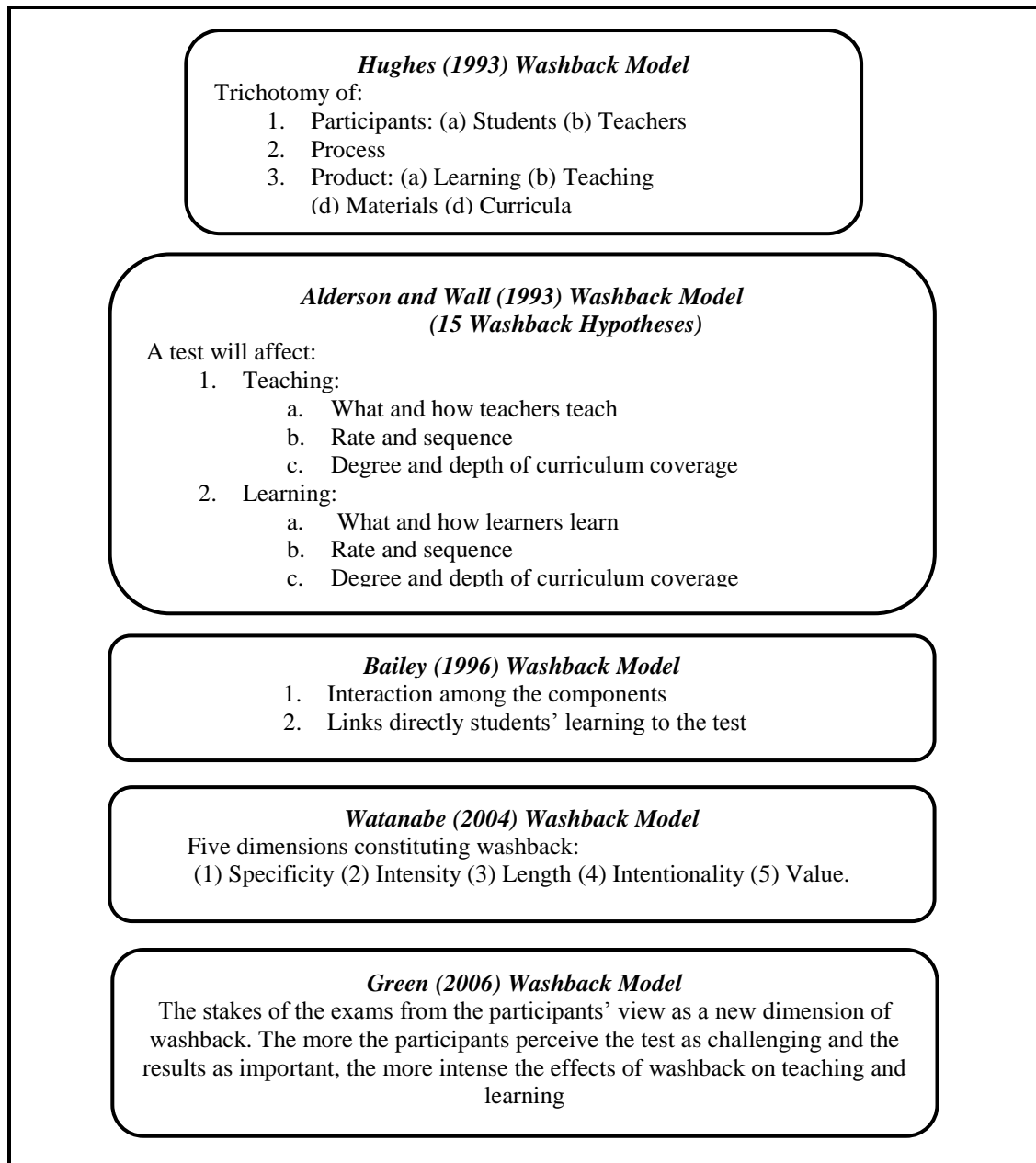
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants: students, classroom teachers, administrators, materials developers and publishers, whose perceptions and attitudes toward their work may be affected by a test.</li><li>• Processes: any actions taken by the participants which may contribute to the process of learning.</li><li>• Products: what is learned (facts, skills, etc.) and the quality of the learning.</li></ul>
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Source: Adapted from Hughes, 1993, p. 2. Cited in Bailey (1996).

As summarized in Figure 1.1, there are many other models on washback. Among these models of washback such as Alderson and Wall (1993), Bailey (1996), Green (2006) and Watanabe (2004); Hughes model fits the purpose of this study because it predicts teachers' behaviours. More particularly, it explains that teachers' perception can affect classroom practices which are the process component of the model. The final product is the learning or the outcomes of the implemented continuous assessment system.

Hughes' model is used in this study to focus on the teacher as the main player in the assessment system of the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) colleges in Saudi Arabia and thus the main participant in the study. This model is explained in greater detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2 .



*Figure 1.1 Washback Models*

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), and National Education Association (NEA) defined assessment as “the process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students, to give feedback to the student about his or her progress, strengths and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy and to inform policy” (AFT, NCME, NEA, 1990, p.1). Greaney (2001) defines assessment from the learner or group of learners' perspective. He

indicates that assessment refers to any procedure or activity that is designed to collect information about the knowledge, attitude, or skills of the learners.

Assessment has become a significant instrument of educational reform, development, and improvement. In the field of educational reform, policy-makers and educationalists often use assessment and testing as a tool to measure and evaluate their educational system. Therefore, the assessment of students' achievement has been used extensively in many countries around the world to improve their educational system (Kellaghan, 2001).

Teachers' perception and understanding of any educational innovation and assessment system, continuous assessment in our case, is essential to get the expected positive outcomes and improve their students' performance and achievement. Teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment affect students' cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities (Rueda & Garcia,1994; Adams,1998; Gao & Watkins, 2002; Black et al., 2003; Brown, 2003, Van de Watering et al., 2006; Sethusha, 2012). Therefore, this study explores teachers' perceptions and how they relate to their practices which in turn affect students' performance and achievement.

From another perspective, teachers' perception of assessment is one of the prominent factors that affect their behaviours and practices in the classroom. For instance, some teachers view and use assessment for learning while others perceive it as assessment of learning. In their study of "assessment for learning", Black et al. (2003; cited in Gonzales, 2012 ) state that it is difficult for teachers to change their classroom practices that were closely embedded within their whole pattern of

pedagogy. Accordingly, the implementation of changes in classroom assessment “would call for rather deep changes both in teacher’s perceptions of their own role in relation to their students and in their classroom practice” (Black et al., 2003, p.13). Shohamy et al. (2008) investigate assessment perceptions and practices in the advanced foreign language classroom and the role of teachers’ perceptions in the learning and teaching process. The study indicates that teachers have a significant role in conducting classroom assessment and activities. It also emphasizes that teachers’ understanding of their perceptions and assessment practices is vital for successful assessment (Shohamy et al., 2008).

In applied linguistics, the phenomenon of tests’ influence on teaching and learning is denoted by many educationalists as “washback” or “backwash” (Alderson, 1986; Morrow, 1986; Pearson, 1988; Hughes, 1989; Morris, 1990). Because of the significant role that washback plays in instruction and learning, teachers, counsellors, administrators, assessment professionals, and everyone connected to the learning and teaching processes are required to completely understand the concept of washback, as a common educational phenomenon, and how to manipulate it in a positive way.

Based on the nature of washback effects, washback can be described as positive or negative, these effects represent washback’s beneficial or harmful impact on educational practices (Hughes, 1989). Positive washback is the beneficial impact of tests on teachers and learners that motivate them to fulfil their teaching and learning goals (Anderson & Wall, 1993). Pearson (1988) states that good tests can be utilized and designed as beneficial teaching-learning activities so as to encourage a positive teaching-learning process.

It is imperative to explain the meaning of continuous assessment system of evaluation to better understand the theoretical background of the main focus and subject of this study. For instance, the Federal Ministry of Education in Lagos advocates continuous assessment as one of the ways of implementing the 6-3-3-4 system of education. According to the 1980 Handbook on Continuous assessment (Federal Ministry of Education), as cited in Anyanwu (2006),

"Continuous assessment is a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour takes account, in a systematic way of all his performances during a given period of schooling; such assessment involves the use of variety of modes of evaluation for the purpose of guiding and improving learning and performances of the student" (p.10)

Continuous assessment is a systematic, objective, progressive, and continuous process to determine the extent of students' performance. Also, continuous assessment is an effective method of assessing students' performances in classroom activities such as tests, interviews and portfolios.

Continuous assessment is a type of assessment that offers a methodology for assessing students' progress in the classroom and using the result to improve their success. It is a multiple tasks strategy by which teachers conduct ongoing assessment in different ways to help them observe many tasks and collect information about what students know, understand, and can do. Continuous assessment occurs over a long time and during the semester or school year. It also assists teachers to adjust and/or change their pedagogical strategies. In other words, continuous assessment enhances teachers' self-evaluation and students' assessment over time. Ogunnyi (1984) explains that continuous assessment is a formative

systematic evaluation process in which overall student achievement is accomplished in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills after a given set of learning experiences.

Moreover, many studies in the international literature advocated the use of continuous assessment in education as a reform policy (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007; Alausa, 2004; Pryor, 1998; Russell, Jaselskis & Lawrence, 1997). Alausa (2004), for instance, discussed the rationale for advocating continuous assessment. He pointed out that the following appears important for supporting the use of continuous assessment in the educational system:

1. It is a primary part of the teaching process that is supposed to be continuous and systematic.
2. It observes and monitors the students' learning skills and capabilities.
3. It is an incremental feedback process to identify students' learning problems at their earliest stage.
4. This type of assessment methodology is more likely to be valid and more expressive of the students' overall ability than a traditional assessment.
5. A significant characteristic of effective classroom instruction is the appropriate guidance of the students' learning strategies. Continuous assessment procedures facilitate such guidance.
6. Teachers are in need to assess their own instructional methods from time to time to improve their performance and pedagogical knowledge and skills. Data from continuous assessment help teachers achieve such goals. It also provides them with a self-evaluation tool.

The application of Hughes' (1993) washback model that links participants, process, and product is useful for the present study in the Saudi context. It is hoped that this model can explain the findings that concern teachers' perceptions and practices of CA.

### **1.1.2 Contextual Background**

In order to introduce the problem to be addressed in the study and accomplish the purposes of it, it is crucial to have an idea about the context of the study. The study under investigation takes place in Saudi Arabia which is the largest country in the Middle East and occupies about 2.25 million square kilometers. More specifically, the study is conducted in TVTC colleges.

TVTC expands its activities by opening new technical colleges to cover all towns and cities of Saudi Arabia so that the total number of technical colleges reaches 35 colleges. The opening of new technical colleges is taking place in view of the value of the technical education in meeting the needs of the community with the aim to prepare a new generation of skilled technicians so that it can replace the foreign workers as well as to contain the graduates of secondary schools who cannot join government universities for any reason and afford them the opportunities to pursue their education. Also, the aim of this expansion is to make the choice of technical education available for every student throughout the regions of Saudi Arabia. The technical colleges train the students via providing two years and half diploma program. Besides, there is a bachelor degree program in a number of specialties that are taught at certain technical colleges.

Among the most needed non-technical specialties at the technical colleges is the English language as being taught as one of the key subjects within the program of these colleges. About nine academic units out of the aggregate hours of the diploma program which is estimated to be 60 academic units or the percentage of English language is 15% out of the aggregate academic units of the diploma program. The distribution of hours of English language is three academic units in general English language which is taught in the first semester of the program and six academic units to be taught in the form of two complementary subjects in the technical or commercial language as per the specialty of the student. More details are given in Chapter 2.

English language teachers are the subjects targeted in this study. There are more than 400 English language teachers in these colleges. However, due to some constraints, this study is conducted in nine colleges which include the central college in the capital city of Riyadh.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

As cited in Susuwele-Banda (2005), continuous assessment is a type of assessment teachers can utilize to improve and monitor their teaching practices and students' learning. Unfortunately, the rationale of continuous assessment is ambiguous, therefore, not supporting learning (Ainscow, 1988; Stiggins, 2002; Swan, 1993).

As stated in the background of the study, continuous assessment influences the quality and style of teaching and learning. When implementing continuous assessment in certain teaching and learning environment, teachers utilize a range of



teaching, learning and assessment strategies that when used effectively, positive impact on teachers' practices and students' performance and achievement will be attained. On the other hand, teachers' misunderstanding and misconception of continuous assessment may lead to wrong implementation and undesirable consequences.

Continuous assessment can be an effective tool for education reform (Resnick & Resnick, 1992). A review of the international literature has advocated the use of continuous assessment. It has been used in many countries around the world as an examination innovation reform. Researchers and educational organisations and empirical studies support the use of continuous assessment as a substitution of traditional assessment (Nitko, 1995). As a result, continuous assessment is adopted and implemented in many countries including Saudi Arabia. In 1999, traditional assessment in Saudi Arabia was replaced by continuous assessment. It was first implemented in the three grades of primary schools. After that, the new assessment methodology was implemented in all primary schools and teacher guidelines of assessment standards for each subject were distributed.

The educational system in Saudi Arabia has been changed and improved over the years. In the last decade, continuous assessment as an examination innovation has gone through many stages of implementation. It is the last phase of reform in the Saudi Arabian educational system. Throughout the stages of implementation of the new assessment system, schools and educational institutions encountered difficulties that affect the proper use of continuous assessment. Although the purpose of the new assessment system by-law was to promote the use of continuous assessment, in reality the implementation policy resulted in

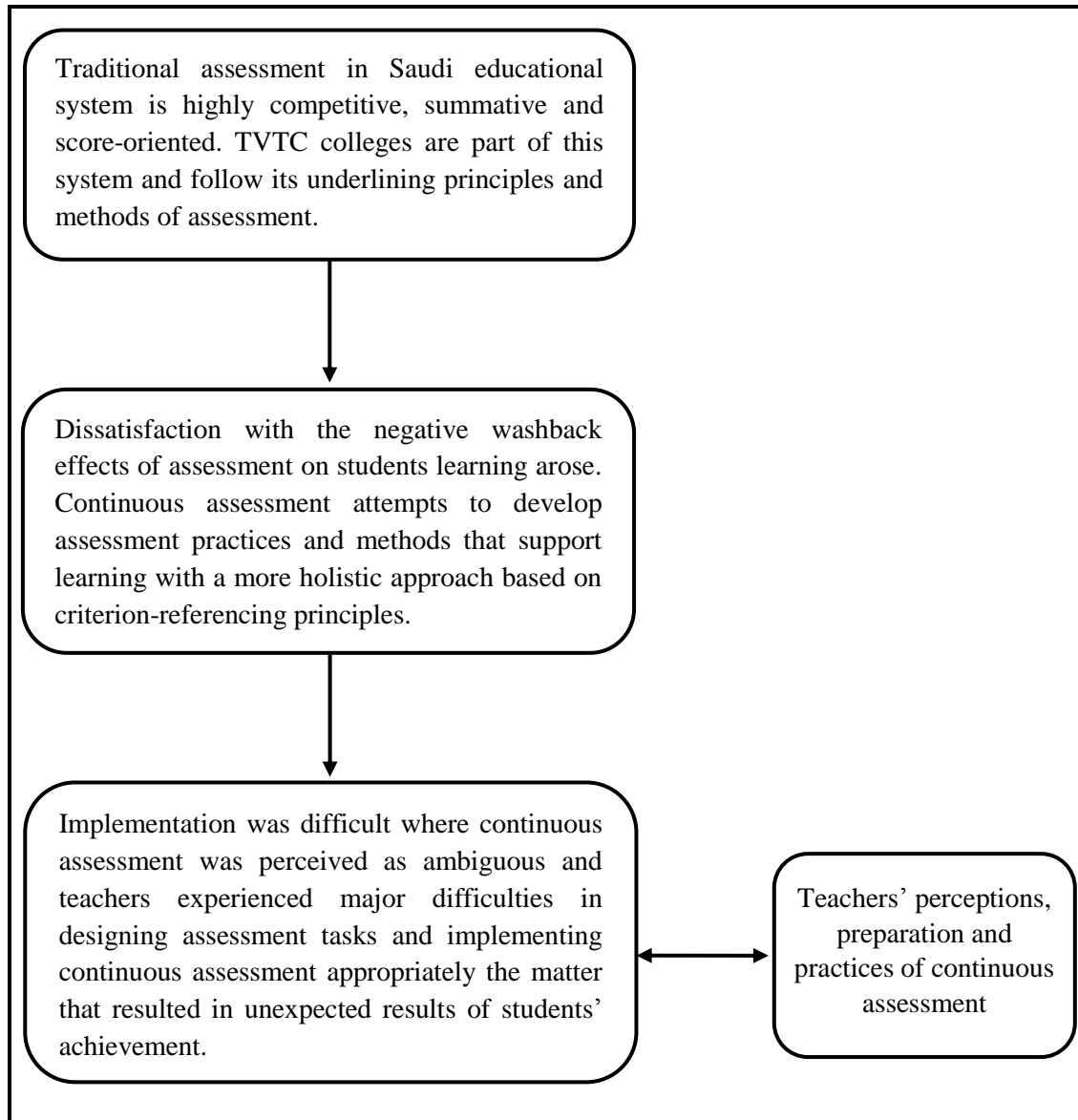
unchanged assessment behaviours by teachers and the use of tests and traditional assessment instead of focusing on the right implementation of continuous assessment (Alabdelwahab, 2002). In an attempt to improve and urge teachers to properly implement continuous assessment, the Ministry of Education issued further explanatory material containing skills and knowledge levels required for a students' promotion to the next grade.

The lack of teacher training might be a difficulty encountered in the implementation of continuous assessment. It could also be the lack of preparation and understanding of the principles of the new assessment system by teachers. Additionally, the ambiguity of continuous assessment concept affected teachers' perception which resulted in poor implementation of continuous assessment. More details (Eisasaimi,2002) are found in Chapter 2. All this is directly related to English language teaching at TVTC colleges.

Teaching of English language to students of technical colleges is significant to the teaching of science and technology subjects with the aim to train and upgrade the students' level in English language in general as per their specialty and to elaborate their technical linguistic skills so that they can compete with other foreign technicians in the labor market. Due to the importance of English language among the graduates of technical colleges, the curriculum of technical colleges has been a subject for reforming and development that include the methods of assessment, evaluation and examinations that is based on the continuous assessment system during the recent years. The technical colleges rely on the continuous assessment system in evaluating the performance of students like any other educational institutions operating in Saudi Arabia whereas the continuous assessment is being applied at various types of educational institutions as part of the development plan

of education in Saudi Arabia (Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, 2010).

TVTC is one of the Saudi institutions that adopt continuous assessment as a new examination innovation in its colleges in Saudi Arabia to improve teachers' practices and students' performance and achievement. TVTC encountered the same problems in a different degree. However, teachers' perception of the new assessment system seems to be the most prominent factor that affects teachers' practices and the implementation of continuous assessment (Al-Ebrahhim, 2001) and, therefore, the expected positive educational outcomes, particularly students' achievements, are below expectation (Al-Najim, 1999).



*Figure 1.2 Statement of the Problem*

By referring to the previous studies and researches at the researches centers, libraries, and electronic libraries at the Saudi Universities, it appears to the researcher that no study has been conducted neither in the subject of washback nor beneficial washback and how to utilize it in making the continuous assessment method a success as currently being applied in the technical colleges. All of what has been studied is about the development of curriculum of the technical colleges or evaluation of its curriculum in general and not what has been applied at the English language centers in particular at the level of technical colleges (e.g., Al-Zubaie, O.

& Aljinabi, 2003; Riyadh Economic Forum, 2011; Althubaiti, 2011). Moreover, it is clear that previous studies have not paid sufficient attention to the positive aspect of washback, more specifically positive washback of continuous assessment (e.g., Al-Ebrahim, 2001; Alabdelwahab, 2002; Eissaimi, 2002; Al-Dawood, 2004; Al-Saadawi, 2009). From the search in the database, international literature, and all studies done in Saudi Arabia; previous studies also have not investigated the aspect of positive washback of continuous assessment in relation to teachers' perceptions and practices in the classroom. The focus of these studies was about the effectiveness of continuous assessment system, its strengths and weaknesses, and its impact on teaching and learning process and students' achievement.

Teachers' demographic variables are of great importance due to their impact on the teaching and learning process. Studies showed that age, qualification, and experience have an influence on teachers' practices (Brew, 2002; Severiens & Dam, 1997). The TVTC colleges' population of English teachers are made up of teachers of different ages, qualifications, and experiences. Therefore, it is useful to know if these three variables are related to practices in any way. Also, the important focus of this study is the exploration of the current methods applied by the teachers of English language at the technical colleges in applying the continuous assessment system inside the classroom. Also, the study addresses some other problematic aspects related to the English language teachers such as whether the practices of continuous assessment are linked to age, experience and qualifications.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate EFL teachers' practices in the classroom in conjunction with other related and significant issues that affect their instructions such as the implementation of the new examination innovation (continuous assessment), impact of continuous assessment, washback of continuous assessment particularly beneficial washback, and teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment. Moreover, the purpose of this study is to determine and identify the EFL teachers' perceptions on the implementation of the continuous assessment in TVTC colleges that might affect their classroom practices and, in turn, students' achievement. Finally, this study attempts to explain and identify the factors facilitating or hindering teachers' implementation of continuous assessment in a successful way.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To find out how well prepared EFL teachers are in the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) colleges to conduct continuous assessment.
2. To investigate the extent of EFL teachers' practices of continuous assessment in their classrooms.
3. To investigate the relationship between EFL teachers' preparations to conduct continuous assessment and EFL teachers' practices.
4. To investigate the differences between EFL teachers' practices of continuous assessment according to their
  - a) age

- b) qualification
  - c) teaching experience
5. To identify EFL teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment in TVTC colleges.
  6. To investigate the relationship between EFL teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment and their practices.
  7. To identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the beneficial washback of continuous assessment from the perspectives of EFL teachers.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

In line with the objectives above, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How well prepared are EFL teachers in the TVTC colleges to conduct continuous assessment?
2. To what extent do EFL teachers practice continuous assessment in their classrooms?
3. Is there a significant relationship between EFL teachers' preparations to conduct continuous assessment and their practices?
4. Is there a significant differences between EFL teachers' practices of continuous assessment according to their
  - a) age
  - b) qualification
  - c) teaching experience
5. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment in TVTC colleges?

6. Is there a significant relationship between EFL teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment and their practices?
7. What are the factors that facilitate or hinder the beneficial washback of continuous assessment from the perspectives of EFL teachers.?

### **1.6 Research Hypotheses**

The study includes and tests 5 null hypotheses which are listed below:

H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant relationship between EFL teachers' preparations to conduct continuous assessment and their practices.

H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no significant difference between EFL teachers' practices of continuous assessment according to their age.

H<sub>0</sub>3: There is no significant difference between EFL teachers' practices of continuous assessment according to their qualifications.

H<sub>0</sub>4: There is no significant difference between EFL teachers' practices of continuous assessment according to their teaching experience.

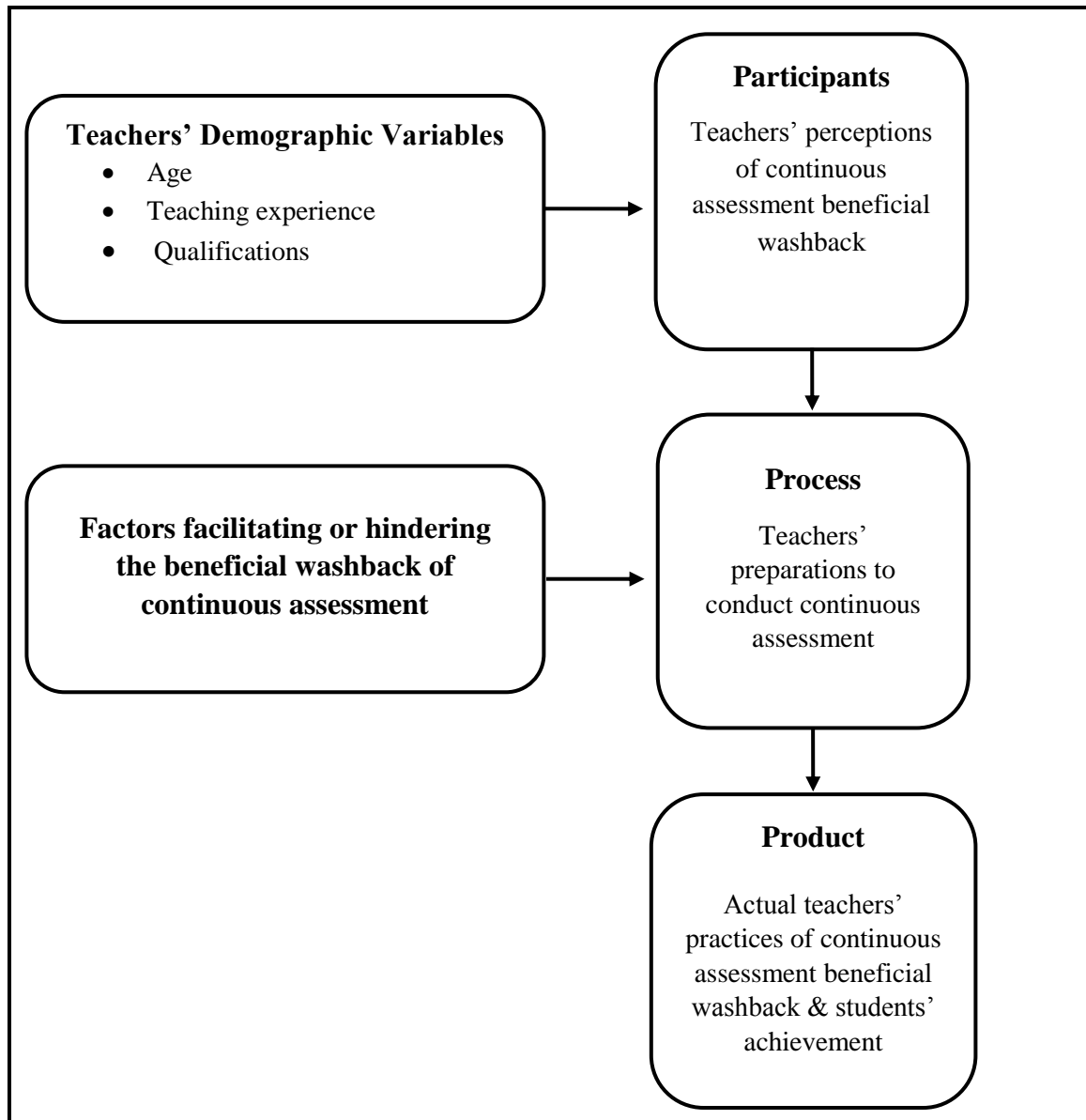
H<sub>0</sub>5: There is no significant relationship between EFL teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment and their practices.

### **1.7 Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is an integral part of the research process. It represents a clear idea about how the main components of the research are connected with each other. The conceptual framework illustrated in the Figure 1.3 below demonstrates the relationships and conceptual link between the research topic and other issues of the study.



The conceptual framework of this study is guided by Hughes (1993) Trichotomy Backwash Model which is made up of participant, process, and product. It explains and predicts teachers' behaviours throughout the implementation process.



*Figure 1.3 Conceptual Framework*

EFL Teachers' practices and preparations of continuous assessment are affected by their perceptions to conduct continuous assessment in the classroom. Teachers' demographic variables have an impact on teachers' perceptions which

will affect their practices in the classroom. With different EFL teachers' Age, years of experiences, and qualifications, different effects are expected (Brew, 2002; Severiens & Dam, 1997). On the other hand, factors facilitating or hindering the beneficial washback of continuous assessment have an impact on EFL teachers' (participants) preparations and practices of continuous assessment (process). EFL teachers at TVTC colleges are under the college administration. They receive training and teaching materials from the English language center in their college. If the administration feels the need for CA training, the teachers will receive it. If not the teachers may lack guidance which will affect whether they practice or don't practice CA. As a result of the relationships among these elements, a new classroom practices (product) will emerge which is the actual teachers' practices of continuous assessment that affect students' achievement.

Different methods were used to explore these aspects. To sum up the research methodology, both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the research design were used. The research instruments used in this study included questionnaires, classroom observation and interviews. A detailed discussion of this is found in Chapter 3.

### **1.8 Significance of the Study**

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment and their current practices in the classroom. The results of this study will help teachers, instructors, curriculum developers in TVTC colleges to improve their practices and have the right perception and understanding of continuous assessment. Also, the results can be used to develop continuous assessment guidelines for the TVTC colleges. Moreover, this study investigated teachers' assessment methods and

practices in the classroom according to their perceptions of continuous assessment and how well prepared teachers were in TVTC colleges to conduct continuous assessment and obtain its beneficial washback. Findings of this study can contribute to teachers' preparation for effective use of continuous assessment.

Few studies, if any, have investigated Saudi classroom continuous assessment practices from the perspective of washback. The results of this study will definitely add more insights to the existing literature particularly the notion of utilizing continuous assessment to improve teachers' perceptions and practices in the Saudi context as well as globally. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia to find out the factors facilitating or hindering the beneficial washback of continuous assessment and their impact on teachers' practices.

The results of this study will help better understand how teachers' perceptions play a significant role in properly implementing continuous assessment. The findings of this study will guide educationalists, teachers, administrators, and policy makers to concentrate on the factors and notions investigated in this study when planning for educational reform. Also, findings of the study will help the researcher to understand why students' achievement in English language centers at TVTC colleges in Saudi Arabia is below the expected outcomes after the implementation of continuous assessment.

### **1.9 Delimitation of the Study**

Delimitations are choices made by the researcher which should be stated in the research. They describe the boundaries controlled by the researcher and set for the study. The delimitation of this study is that the study did not cover a big number of colleges spread all over Saudi Arabia. Studying all 35 colleges in Saudi Arabia was not possible. Therefore, the study focuses on a certain number of colleges sampled from different parts of the country.

### **1.10 Limitations of the Study**

Limitations are those conditions beyond the control of the researcher. They put some restrictions on the conclusion and application of the study to other contexts. The study has certain limitations. The main limitation of the study is that because of the cultural and religious constraints, the educational system in Saudi Arabia is a single-gender education, i.e., it is not a co-educational system where males and females can study together in the same school or university. The study is thus limited to male teachers in TVTC colleges. Therefore, the results can only reflect the male practices and perceptions of the issues investigated.

This study has been applied on the members of teaching board who are teaching the English language in the TVTC technical colleges. The results are also limited to the English teachers only even though continuous assessment implementation applies to all subjects in the TVTC technical colleges.

This study is limited to TVTC technical colleges' English language centers; i.e., it does not include any other TVTC educational or training departments,

centers, or institutions. It is also limited to the continuous assessment which is applied and used in evaluating the students' performance and achievement level inside the classrooms at TVTC technical colleges' English language centers. Therefore, the findings of this study limited to continuous assessment only and can not be generalized to other types of assessment. The findings are also limited to the context where this study took place. However, the findings can be generalized to other populations that share similar characteristics.

### **1.11 Operational Definitions of Terms**

The terms and definitions used in this study and worth stating are as follow:

*Assessment:* For the purpose of this study Assessment is defined as “the process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students, to give feedback to the student about his or her progress, strengths and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy and to inform policy” (AFT, NCME, NEA, 1990, p1). This definition will also be used in this study to describe assessment in the Saudi context.

*Continuous Assessment:* It is defined in this study as a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour takes account, in a systematic way of all his performances during a given period of schooling; such assessment involves the use of a variety of modes of evaluation for the purpose of guiding and improving learning and performances of the student (Anyanwu, 2006).

*Teachers' perceptions:* It is defined in this study as a learned predisposition to respond to an object or class of objects in a consistently favorable or unfavorable

way (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). For the purpose of this study, a Likert scale in a questionnaire adapted from Yu (2010) is used to measure teachers' perceptions.

*Teachers' Practices:* This study defines teachers' practices as teachers' strategies of teaching in the classroom, pedagogical knowledge and skills, and approaches of teaching. A Likert scale in a questionnaire adapted from Yu (2010) is also used in this study to identify and measure teachers' practices in the classroom. Besides, a classroom observation form adopted from Heritage et al. (2008) is used for the same purpose.

*Washback:* Many researchers define washback as the impact of tests. Alderson and Wall (1993) define washback as the impact or influence of testing on teaching and learning. This study conforms to their definition of washback.

*Beneficial washback:* It is defined as the tests that influence teaching and learning beneficially (Alderson & Wall, 1993). This study adopts this definition to focus on and investigate the beneficial washback of continuous assessment in TVTC colleges. For the purpose of this study, the results of statistical analysis will identify the actual beneficial washback in TVTC colleges.

*Technical Colleges:* They are intermediate technical colleges in Saudi Arabia where the graduates of secondary schools and secondary technical institutes are admitted. Such intermediate colleges teach and train qualified students in specialties such as electronics, electricity, computer and administrative technology.

*English Language Teachers:* An English language teacher in this study is anyone working at the technical colleges in teaching the English language whether