

## The Washback of Midterm Examination on First-Year Students' Perception Regarding the Final Exam

Kanar Zirak Haseeb Chicho<sup>1</sup> & Soma Hassan Hussein<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University-  
Erbil, Iraq

Correspondence: Kanar Zirak Haseeb Chicho, Tishk International University-Erbil, Iraq.

Email: kanar.zirak@tiu.edu.iq

Doi:10.23918/ijsses.v9i2p267

**Abstract:** The examinations are an essential part of the education system. Therefore, the importance of examinations cannot be dismissed. However, assessments and evaluations affect the program of the study, students, and teachers. These effects cause different types of washback which has been defined as the impact of testing and evaluation on both students and teachers. The negative washback from the examination makes the students study to pass the exams rather than learn the class objectives. On the other hand, positive washback motivates the students to work harder and learn. This study investigates the washback of midterm exams on students' perception regarding the final exam. A mixed method has been used for conducting this research project. A survey and an interview have been implemented for the data collection. The data have been collected from 108 first-year students in the Departments of English Language Teaching (ELT), Biology Education, Computer Education, Physics Education, and Mathematics Education department in Tishk International University Erbil, Kurdistan. In brief, the examinations determine the type of washback that the students have after exams, either positive or negative. The results showed a positive washback.

**Keywords:** Washback, Exams, EFL learners, Assessments, Positive Washback

### 1. Introduction

Assessments and evaluations are integral parts of the curriculum. Students are involved with both summative and formative assessments. Washback occurs in both situations, either positively or negatively. The term "Washback" (alternatively "Backwash") in education is defined as the influence of assessment on learning and teaching. That influence is either constructive or unconstructive. Although the term washback, in general, is compelling, numerous studies focused on the positive or negative impacts of examinations on the course content, teachers' methods of teaching, and teacher and learners' attitudes and perceptions. Thus, this study aims to determine the washback of midterm exams on students' perceptions for the final exams. The washback helps the learners discover their strengths and power in learning and development. Thus, this study is helpful for the teachers and the students, and it makes the learners more

Received: April 9, 2022

Accepted: May 29, 2022

Chicho, K.Z.H., & Hussein, S.H. (2022). The Washback of Midterm Examination on First-Year Students' Perception Regarding the Final Exam. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 9(2), 267-277.

mindful. Additionally, the teachers will be more familiar about their learners' perceptions. Then they can prepare the assessment tool and teaching facilities accordingly.

The research hypothesis is that the midterm exam makes the learners demotivated to study more for final, and it is making them feel more anxious about their finals.

This study was conducted based on the following inquiries:

1. How does washback change the students' perceptions regarding finals?
2. What type of washback do the students have after doing their midterm examinations?
3. Which type of the washback do first year students in education faculty have?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Definition of Washback**

The term washback has been valued in the field of applied linguistics. According to Collins dictionary, washback is an "unpleasant after-effect of an event or situation. Wall (1997) distinguished between "test impact" and "test washback. "The term "test impact" refers to the effects of exams on the classroom, curriculum, educational system, and schools. However, the "test washback" refers to examination effects on only teaching and learning.

Additionally, many scholars have defined washback in different ways. For (Messick, 1996), defining washback is problematic. He stated that defining washback is critical for positive or negative washback. The term washback has been defined by scholars, researchers, and language examiners. They stated that washback is a dimension of impact on the context of education (Hamp-Lyons 1997). Other testers put the washback and impact in separate notions. In brief, washback is the psychological response to assessment and evaluation because it focuses on learning and teaching. The teachers and the students need to take benefit from it. In other words, washback should not be destructive (Cheng, 2005).

### **2.2 The Origin of Washback**

Thirty years ago, the term washback was defined by Alderson in 1986. He emphasized that washback is distinct, and it is an emerging area, it should be focused on, and attention needs to be paid to it. In addition, he discussed that the impact of the test needs to be taken into consideration. Morrow 1986 extended the usage of washback validity. For him, washback validity is the relation between the tests and teaching and learning.

### **2.3 Types of Washback**

This section explores positive and negative washback in terms of both the classroom setting and the educational/political system. Mainly, washback is classified into two main types: Positive and negative, based on whether it has advantages or disadvantages for education (Hughes, 1989). This section describes the two significant types of washback.

### **2.3.1 Positive Washback**

In positive washback, the teachers and the learners are encouraged to achieve their goals and objectives (Anderson & Wall, 1993). Good tests are used as helpful teaching and learning activities. In a syllabus, innovative and creative tests can inspire learners to develop and improve (Davis, 1985). Thus, positive washback has been recommended by scholars. In brief, positive washback motivates students in the classroom.

### **2.3.2 Negative Washback**

If tests fail to reflect learning principles, it is mainly considered to have a negative washback (Cheng, Curitis & Watanabe, 2008). Furthermore, if those tests that teachers do with their students leave a negative trial on their students and lead the teachers to use an old-fashioned and ineffective way of teaching, they are also considered to have negative washback (Loumbourdi, 2013). Lombardi has defined negative washback as following "the real purpose of using a test is neglected, and instead, it becomes the most important part of the teaching and learning process" (2013). This kind of washback may be intentional or unintentional. One of the main effects that negative washback is associated with is the anxiety of both teachers and the students. Loumbourdi (2013) stated that students that have not felt anxious about their exams feel the anxiety about the exams after taking them.

## **2.4 Effects of Washback on Students and Teachers**

The scholar has defined test impact as the effect of the test on the individuals (Cheng, Curitis & Watanabe, 2008). Many scholars in their books stated that the washback of tests affects both teachers and students in different ways, either negative or positive. The negative washback affects the teachers when they try to change their teaching strategies to ways that only teach for testing and getting marks in the exams. Positive washback affects the teachers so that it will let the teachers have broader ideas about teaching and testing. Furthermore, to use testing to learn, not for passing the exams. As for students', positive washback lets the students be more eager for learning and studying, not for passing the exams, and vice versa for negative washback.

## **3. Methodology and Setting**

This study focuses on the washback of midterm exams on students' perception of the final exams. A mixed-method has been used for collecting data. The mixed-method was implemented in a wide range of roles to investigate, and there is an international interest in combining quantitative and qualitative methods into a single method (Cathain, 2007). An online survey was constructed and shared via Google Forms. Additionally, a structured interview has been conducted to ask about the students' opinions about the washback of the midterm exam. The setting of this study is Tishk International University, located in Erbil-Kurdistan, Iraq.

### **3.1 Participants**

The participants were first-year students from Tishk International University-Education Faculty-Mathematics, Computer, Biology and Physics and English Language Teaching (ELT) departments. One

hundred and eight students had responded to the survey. Forty-two of them were males, and sixty-six of them were females. Fifty-two of them were between 16-and 18 years old, and forty-nine were between 20-and 23 years old. Seven of them were between 24-and 26. Fourteen of the students study in the Physics education department. Fifteen of them were studying in the Mathematics Education Department.

Furthermore, there are twenty students who study at Computer Education department. Twenty-six of them are Biology students, and thirty-three are in the ELT department. They finished with their midterm exams and were approaching the final exams. The ethical issues were considered, and the students responded to the surveys voluntarily. Their responses do not affect their grades, and their identification will be anonymous.

### 3.2 Survey Description

Google Forms were used to construct the survey. The questions were constructed by the inspiration of previous literature. The researchers prepared eleven questions. Demographic questions such as age, department, and gender were a part of the questions. “Demographic questions in a survey allow researchers to gain background information on their participants” (Driscoll, 2011, p.156). Eight more questions followed the demographic questions. These questions were asked in two different forms: multiple choice and a Likert scale. These questions provided options that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The range of the Likert scale was (1-10) points. The results of this survey were analysed by IBM SPSS program V.28.

### 3.3 Interview Description

The second method of data collection in this study is an interview. The researchers interviewed the students via CAPI (computer-assisted personal interview). It allows the researchers to analyse the data faster (Salmons, 2009). An open-ended question was asked to gather the interviewees' opinions regarding the washback of the midterm exam towards the final. The question had been constructed to find out the students' ideas about the change that midterm exams caused them for their finals.

### 4.1 Survey Results

This study aimed to determine the types of washback that foundation year students have after midterms. The survey resulted in some data that will be mentioned in this chapter. As mentioned in chapter three, these results have been analysed by IMB SPSS program version 28.

Table 1: Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.041	-.312	8

First of all, to ensure the internal consistency of the survey, the researchers conducted a Cronbach's Alpha test. The test results showed .041 internal consistencies. This reliability test is considered one of the good-reliability scores.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
My participation changed for better after doing my midterm examinations.	108	3.67	.832
I have a better feeling about my final after midterm exams.	108	3.95	.790
I feel worse about my finals after doing midterms.	108	1.98	.820
I feel anxious about my finals because of the midterm.	108	2.94	1.096
I feel less anxious about my finals because of the midterm.	108	3.06	.926
I feel motivated to do better in my finals because of my midterm exams.	108	3.88	.794
I feel demotivated to do better in my finals because of my midterm exams.	108	2.16	.987
Valid N (listwise)	108		

The descriptive statistics (mean test) show that the highest and lowest means score goes to the questions that ask the students about their feelings toward final exams after doing their midterm exams. The highest mean score goes to question number two, asking the students about their feelings and changing to better their final exam questions after doing their midterm exam. The mean results of a 3.95 score indicate that most students feel better about finals after their midterms. The lowest mean score is 1.98, indicating that the students disagreed with the statement (I feel worse about my finals after midterms.). Figures in the following pages better interpret these results.

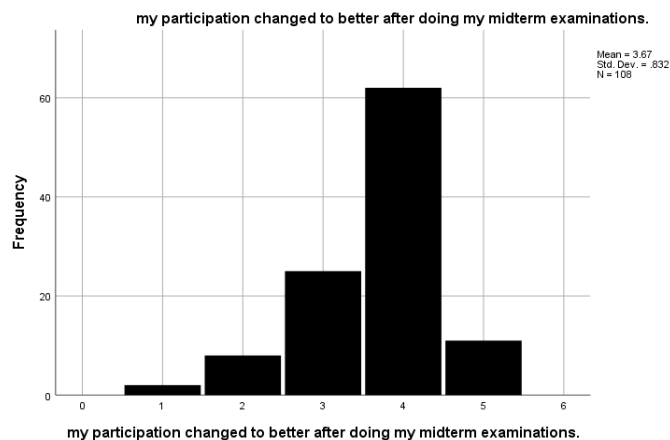


Figure 1: My participation changed to better after doing my midterm examinations

The students across all of the Education departments have changed their attitudes regarding their participation in daily classes after they have gone through their midterms. As shown in Figure 4, the

students felt a positive change in their participation levels after their midterm examinations by more than 60%.

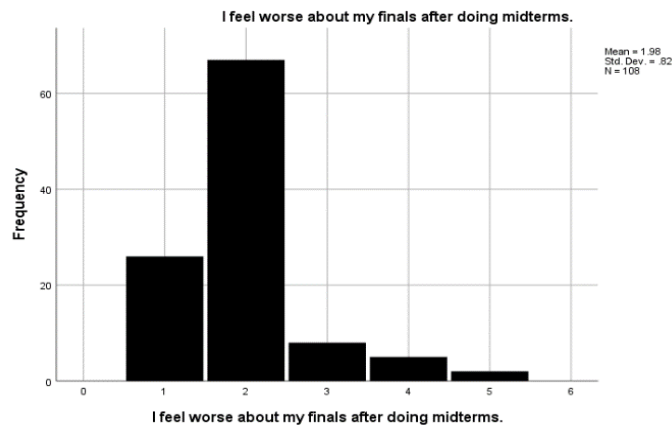


Figure 2: I feel worse about my finals after doing midterms

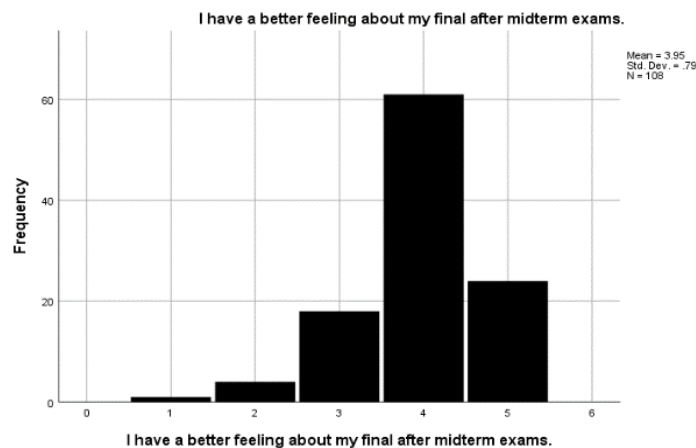


Figure 3: I have a better feeling about my final after midterm exams

The students' responses showed the same positive manner about their participation. Figures (2 and 3) show a positive change in students' feelings, and both figures show an alignment with each other. In Figure 4, the students disagreed with the statement that states (I feel worse about my finals after doing midterms.) on the other hand, in Figure 5, the students agreed with the statement that states (I have a better feeling about my final after midterm exams.). Their data declares that more than 60% percent of the students feel better after their midterms regarding their finals.

Table 3: How anxious are you about your finals? \* Department Crosstabulation

			department					Total
			ELT	Biology	Physics	Math	Computer	
How anxious are you about your finals?	1	Count	1	0	0	1	2	4
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	25.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	25.0 %	50.0 %	100.0 %
	2	Count	3	2	1	1	1	8
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	37.5 %	25.0 %	12.5 %	12.5 %	12.5 %	100.0 %
	3	Count	0	1	0	1	1	3
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	0.0 %	33.3 %	0.0 %	33.3 %	33.3 %	100.0 %
	4	Count	4	4	0	0	1	9
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	44.4 %	44.4 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	11.1 %	100.0 %
	5	Count	11	2	3	4	4	24
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	45.8 %	8.3 %	12.5 %	16.7 %	16.7 %	100.0 %
	6	Count	1	2	1	0	5	9
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	11.1 %	22.2 %	11.1 %	0.0 %	55.6 %	100.0 %
	7	Count	2	3	1	3	1	10
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	20.0 %	30.0 %	10.0 %	30.0 %	10.0 %	100.0 %
	8	Count	2	6	2	4	1	15
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	13.3 %	40.0 %	13.3 %	26.7 %	6.7 %	100.0 %
	9	Count	0	1	2	0	0	3

		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	0.0 %	33.3 %	66.7 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100.0 %
	10	Count	9	3	4	1	6	23
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	39.1 %	13.0 %	17.4 %	4.3 %	26.1 %	100.0 %
Total		Count	33	24	14	15	22	108
		% Within How anxious are you about your finals.	30.6 %	22.2 %	13.0 %	13.9 %	20.4 %	100.0 %

The researchers used the Crosstab test to indicate the interaction between two variables: the student's anxiousness level from one to ten scale and their departments. For example, the percentage level of anxiousness in the ELT and Biology departments is 44.4%, which means they are not highly anxious about their final exams. The third department, the Physics department, had the highest anxiousness regarding their finals with a 66.7% score, meaning they were more anxious than the other departments. Moreover, the Mathematics Education Department had 55.6% scores, meaning they are reasonably anxious about their final. The last department with the lowest level of anxiousness is the Computer Education department, which has a 33.3% score.

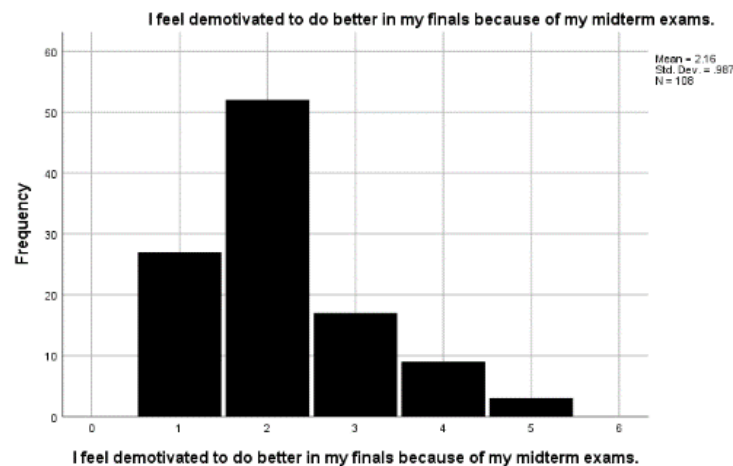


Figure 4: I feel demotivated to do better in my finals because of midterm exams



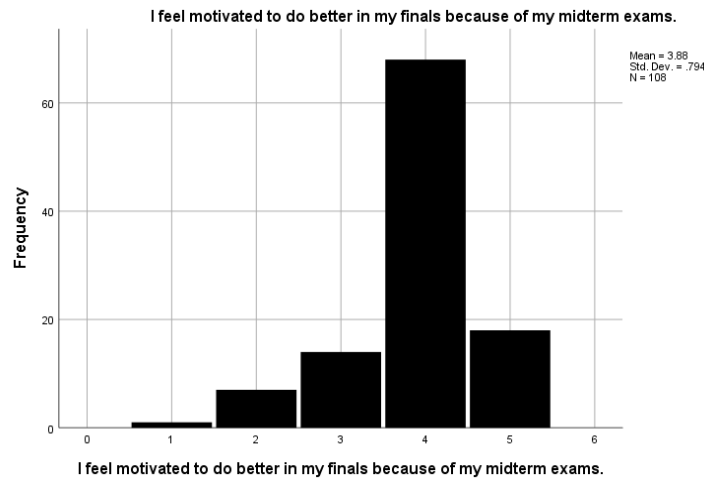


Figure 5: I feel motivated to do better in my finals because of midterm exams

Motivation was one of the basics of this paper. For that reason, the researchers asked the students to see if they got motivated or demotivated after doing their finals. The results show that the students got motivated to do better by more than 50% of the students. Both figures (4 and 5) show the exact alignment of results which are positive results showing an increase in motivation levels for doing better in their final exams after their midterms. The abnormal point of the figure (4) is that more than 25% of the students strongly disagreed with the fact that they felt demotivated after midterms. On the other hand, both figures show that the students agreed with the statement of feeling motivated after their midterms.

## 4.2 Interview Results

The researchers also conducted a thematic analysis to reach the individual students' perceptions. The following themes have been found (development, positive washback, negative washback).

### 4.2.1 Development

The students claimed that they needed to study more after midterm exams to get better grades in the finals. Moreover, they have developed time management skills because of the midterms. In addition, they claimed that they are more self-dependent and corrected their own mistakes by themselves. Finally, they reported that they had adopted the assessment system in their university. Furthermore, they are more familiar with the teacher's exam styles.

Most of the students stated, "It made me study more" "My grades were not good. I'm trying to study better. in response to the interview question. This student felt the importance of time management by answering "we have to be more careful about my time" for the interview question.

### 4.2.2 Positive Washback

The midterm exams had been considered a means of motivation and encouragement. Most students claimed they are less anxious and more comfortable about their finals after midterm exams. Furthermore,

many of the students were optimistic regarding final exams. They claimed that they have less stress for their finals.

Most of the students stated that they are more relaxed than before, and this is student A response that was taken as a sample "Because I feels more relaxed at the exams. In addition, the." students felt optimistic about the finals as one of the students mentioned, "My grades are good in the midterm, so I think I will be good in final too."

#### **4.2.3 Negative Washback**

During the interview, few of the students had felt a negative or nothing after the midterm for their finals. Instead, they claimed that midterms were inadequate for their finals, and they had not changed their ideas. As student F mentioned, "It is almost the same for me". On the other hand, student G shared that "it was not effective."

### **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper aimed to determine the students' perceptions of their finals after taking midterms. For that matter, a survey and an interview have been conducted. It was found that the hypothesis that the researchers had was incorrect, and it was proven that it was the other way around. The students had a positive perspective about their finals, unlike the hypothesis they would have a negative perspective.

Exams have always been putting pressure and anxiety on students. As (Davis, 1985) states, if the exams are well designed and are more on the creative side, they will have a productive effect on the students. On the other hand, (Loumbourdi, 2013) strongly suggests that using old-fashioned and ineffective ways of testing students will have a negative trial on students' perception of the exams. As well as constructing exam papers, Loumbourdi mentions that if the students do not feel the anxiety of the exams, they will feel it when they take those exams, which will have a negative washback on the students (2013). This statement contracts with this study, and in this study, the mean score of those students that said they felt better after doing their exams is 3.95 scores. The score was five lacerate scale scores that ranged from strongly disagree to agree strongly, which means that 3.95 is agreed on the scale. The students felt better about the final exams after their midterms. For approving the result, the same question was asked differently. The two questions aligned with each other, and the same result was achieved. The mean score was 1.98 for the second question asking the students about their feeling if they feel worse after midterms. On a scale of one to two, a five, this score means that the students disagreed with the statement of feeling worse.

According to the survey and the interview, it has been found that the participants had positively changed their perceptions. They see the examinations as a tool of motivation. After the midterms, they boosted their participation by 60%. These results align with a paper published by (Rayan, Rayan, Arbuthnot& Samuels, 2007), stating that tests motivate students.

Anxiety affects both students and teachers, as was found by (Loumbourdi, 2013), but only students have been focused on in this paper. The Crosstab test shows that all the departments at Tishk International University feel some kind of anxiety for their finals which is quite normal for human nature. The majority of the departments show less than 50% anxiety level out of 100%. On the other hand, only two departments

show higher levels than 50%. Computer Education Departments show the lowest levels of anxiety, resulting from students' higher level of English or the type of questions they had from their teachers.

In conclusion, the washback of the exams is not a concept that can be ignored in the education process for its high level of importance. The paper shows that the students at Tishk International University have a positive washback for their exams, which can be felt strongly by the students in the university. The students felt better and more motivated after their finals after their midterms. Hence, they got better in their class and changed their class participation levels. The researchers suggest further studies on this topic. Further studies can include more departments or other universities.

## References

- Airasian, P.W., Kelleghan, T., Madaus G. F. (2011). *The Power and Impact of Standardized Tests*. Kluwer. Nijhoff.
- Barzani, S.H.H., Barzani, I.H.A., & Meena, R.S. (2022). Investigating Kurdish EFL students' attitudes towards the use of authentic materials in learning English. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Cheng, L. (2005). *Changing language teaching through language testing: A washback study* (Vol. 21). Cambridge university press.
- Cheng, L., Watanabe, Y., & Curtis, A. (Eds.). (2004). *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Chicho, K. Z. H. (2022). An analysis of factors influencing EFL learners' writing skills. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 2(2), 28-38.
- Davis, F. D. (1985). *A technology acceptance model for empirically testing new end-user information systems: Theory and results* (Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology).
- Driscoll, D. L. (2011). Introduction to primary research: Observations, surveys, and interviews. *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, 2(2011), 153-174.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. 1997. 'Washback, impact, and validity: ethical concerns. *Language Testing* 14/3: 295–303.
- Hughes, John. (1989) "Why functional programming matters. *The Computer Journal*, 32 (2) 98-107.
- Hussein, S., Meena, R. S., & Ali, H. F. (2021). Integration of literature in English language teaching: learners' attitudes and opinions. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 1(1), 27-43.
- Messick, S. (1996). *Validity and washback in language testing*. *Language Testing*, 13(3), 241-256.56.
- O'Cathain, A., Murphy, E. & Nicholl, J. (2007). Why, and how mixed methods research is undertaken in health services research in England: a mixed-methods study. *BMC Health Serv Res*, 7, 85.
- Ryan, K. E., Ryan, A. M., Arbuthnot, K., & Samuels, M. (2007). Students' motivation for standardized math exams. *Educational Researcher*, 36(1), 5-13.
- Sadiq, D. A., & Hakeem, S. N. (2020). Gender Differences in the Speech Events of Kurdistan Parliament. *Journal of University of Raparin*, 7(1), 80-94.
- Salmons, J. (2009). *Online interviews in real-time*. Sage.
- Zirak Haseeb Chicho, K. (2021). Embodied learning implementation in EFL classroom: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 8(1), 51-58.