High school graduation assessment practices for foreign languages: Trends and future directions

Karen Ashton, Duong Thu Mai, Sai Cong Hong, Nguyen Thi Mai Huu, Nguyen Thi Kim Anh
Overview of presentation

- Part one: Current trends and directions in English language graduation tests across Asia
- Part two: The high school exit examination in foreign languages in Vietnam: current practices
- Part three: The high school exit examination in foreign languages in Vietnam: future directions
Current trends and directions in English language graduation tests across Asia

Karen Ashton
Overview of current trends

• Trend towards communicative language teaching (CLT) curriculum and pedagogy
  – e.g. Thailand, Indonesia, China, South Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam.

• Trend towards formative and classroom-based assessment practices, computer-based and internet assessment

• Issues between changes and high stakes exit examinations
The university entrance examination uses only multiple-choice tests, with no focus on listening or performance skills. ‘Students therefore consider practicing listening, speaking skills a waste of time’ (Dhanasobhon, 2006, Thailand).

The format of the exam ‘multiple-choice items, proofreading, and controlled writing – fail to embody the test constructors’ intention to encourage teaching and learning for real-world’ language use (Qi, 2005 - China).
The National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) / Gaokao

• Over 9 million test-takers each year
  – Considered the most high-stakes and impactful exam in the world (Qian and Cumming, 2017).

• Huge expenditure on supporting students to achieve well in the test:
  – 43% of 10,000 parents surveyed spent equivalent of 20% of annual family income on extra study support for their children (Zheng, 2019).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>University entrance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Anhui University Entrance" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Beijing University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chongqing</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Chongqing University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fujian</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Fujian University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gansu</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Gansu University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Guangdong University Entrance" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Guangxi University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Guizhou</td>
<td><img src="image8" alt="Guizhou University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hainan</td>
<td><img src="image9" alt="Hainan University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hebei</td>
<td><img src="image10" alt="Hebei University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Henan</td>
<td><img src="image11" alt="Henan University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td><img src="image12" alt="Hubei University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunan</td>
<td><img src="image13" alt="Hunan University Entrance" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inner Mongolia</td>
<td><img src="image14" alt="Inner Mongolia University Entrance" /></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Proposal for NCEE structural change**

**Table 2** The proposed plan of NCEE in Beijing in 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The three major subjects in NCEE</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td>150 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td>150 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>180 points</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>180 points</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Current NCEE structure

#### Table 3: The decided plan of NCEE across China in 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The three major subjects in NCEE</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>150 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 2017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The National Matriculation English Test (NMET) is the English component of the NCEE.

### Table 1. Test Format in 2001-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Listening Comprehension</td>
<td>Section 1 short dialogue</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section 2 long dialogue or monologue</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Use of language</td>
<td>Section 1 multiple choice</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section 2 cloze test</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>Choose the best answer</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Section 1 error correction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section 2 letter writing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proposed changes to the English language test

- Key changes were proposed 2014
  - Writing
  - Fewer MCQ
- Piloted in some provinces, due for implementation across all of China in 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Use of language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 1 cloze test</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 2 Filling in the blanks with words</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 1 reading comprehension</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 2 Complete a passage with sentences</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 1 short dialogue</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 2 long dialogue or monologue</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 2 Continuation writing based on reading/summary writing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Changes to the writing component

Original tasks:
– Error correction in a passage
– A practical writing task, usually letter writing

New tasks:
– Continuation writing based on reading
– Summary writing

More focus on integrated skills of reading and writing, removal of error correction task.
Another significant change

• Tests of English (NMET) will be held twice a year
  – the highest score used to apply to university
Early impacts of two test opportunities

• Mixed findings
• Positive washback: Lowers stress and anxiety (Chen et al., 2018)
• Negative washback: Intended impact of reducing anxiety not achieved (Zheng, 2019, Zhang (2018)
  – Study time more pressured (Zheng, 2019)
  – Students take both tests to gain higher score (Hu, 2015).
Early impacts of the writing changes

- Mixed findings
- Positive washback: more focus on writing in teaching and learning (Zhang, 2018)
- Negative washback:
  - Time challenge for teachers and learners (Hou, 2017)
  - Other skills even more neglected (Zheng, 2019)
- Task design and focus:
  - Lack of communicative focus (Zhang, 2018)
  - Rote learning and memorising NMET topics (Zhang, 2018)
  - Lack of critical thinking, development of argument or opinion (Weeks et al., 2019)
Regional variation

• Freedom to develop own tests:
  – Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Hainan island, Jiang Su province and Zhejiang province

• Cities and provinces have freedom over test regulations:
  – e.g. number of points, test dates, test components with one province Jiang Su incorporating speaking (Weeks et al., 2019, Ministry of Education, 2019).
Inclusion of speaking and writing?

- Plan for internet-based National English Ability Test (NEAT):
  - include speaking and writing alongside listening and reading
  - replacement for the English national college entrance exam?
- Teachers generally in favour of change (Kwon, 2010)
Failed (?) reform

• NEAT not implemented
  – Internal Government changes
  – Concerns over too much competition and pressure for students
  – Online testing system issues
• Proposal to use NEAT as classroom-based assessment but this did not eventuate.
The high school exit examination in foreign languages in Vietnam: current practices

Duong Thu Mai

(University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University – ULIS-VNU)
Phụ huynh càng thăng chở con trong buổi chiều thi môn Ngoại ngữ

Thu Ngà - © Thứ sáu, ngày 01/07/2016 16:00 GMT+7
The highschool exit test on foreign languages

- Foreign languages have been considered a compulsory subject since 2015.
- Foreign languages: English (99%), French, Russian, Japanese, German, Chinese
## The past HEET formats (to 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Role of foreign languages</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Types of test questions</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Expected performance level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Certifying of students completing the high school programme</td>
<td>• 1 in 3 compulsory subjects since 2001</td>
<td>• 60 mins</td>
<td>• Before 2013: 50 MCQ + MCQ fill-in + cloze fill-in</td>
<td>• The contents of the last years in the 7-year curriculum</td>
<td>• not clearly stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 2014: 30 MCQ (75%) + writing a paragraph</td>
<td>• Pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing (indirect except 2014), use of language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Current format of the HEET (from 2016)

1. Discriminating students
2. Qualifying and certifying students exiting high school programmes
3. Selecting students for colleges and universities

Purposes according to Decree 04/2017
Time: 60 minutes

Expected exit performance level: B1 (CEFR Vietnam)

Types of test questions:
- MCQ

Sample Questions:

1. Question 1: "Who is your favorite yoghurt brand?"
   - A. Fage
   - B. Yoplait
   - C. Dannon
   - D. Yoplait

2. Question 2: "Do you think the economy will improve in the next year?"
   - A. Yes, it will.
   - B. No, it won’t.
   - C. I don’t know.
   - D. I don’t care.

Mark the letter A, B, C, or D on your answer sheet to indicate the choice that best completes each sentence.
Contents of the test

• 2017: based largely on the 12th grade curriculum
• 2018: based on both 11th and 12th grade curricula
• 2019: based on 10th, 11th, 12th grade curricula
• Question: which curriculum? The 7-year or 10-year curriculum?
## Content structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grammar and vocabulary</th>
<th>Communication functions</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Pronun</th>
<th>Sentence error correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>24MCQ</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 passages, 30MCQ</td>
<td>5 sentence rewriting, 1 short paragraph with suggested main points</td>
<td>5 MCQ</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>24MCQ</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 passages, 30MCQ</td>
<td>5 sentence rewriting, 1 short paragraph with suggested main points</td>
<td>5 MCQ</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 passages, 20 MCQ</td>
<td>2 Sentence combination MCQ, 3 sentence paraphrasing MCQ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(50Q)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Content structure of the current HEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grammar and vocabulary</th>
<th>Commu. functions</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Pronun</th>
<th>Sentence error correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-2019 (50 MCQ)</td>
<td>16 MCQ</td>
<td>2 MCQ</td>
<td>3 passages, 20 MCQ</td>
<td>2 Sentence combination MCQ, 3 sentence paraphrasing MCQ</td>
<td>4 MCQ</td>
<td>3 MCQ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive level</th>
<th>Grammar and vocab</th>
<th>Commu. functions</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Pronun</th>
<th>Sentence Error correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher-ordered applying</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample Sentence error correction question

Question 23: It **concerns** many sociologists that inadequate **parents** skills may lead to an increase
in the number of **incidents** of juvenile delinquency.

Sample writing questions

Mark the letter A, B, C, or D on your answer sheet to indicate the sentence that is closest in meaning
to each of the following questions.

Question 26: I find it useful to join the sports club.
A. Joining the sports club is not useful for me.  B. It is useful for me to join the sports club.
C. I used to join the sports club.  D. I never like joining the sports club.

Mark the letter A, B, C, or D on your answer sheet to indicate the sentence that best combines each
pair of sentences in the following questions.

Question 29: Mary left home to start an independent life. She realised how much her family meant to her.
A. Only when Mary realised how much her family meant to her did she leave home to start an independent life.
B. To realise how much her family meant to her, Mary decided to leave home to start an independent life.
C. Not until Mary had left home to start an independent life did she realise how much her family...
Changes between 2015-2016 and 2017-2019

- Number of vocabulary-grammar MCQ decreases from 24 to 16
- Writing question type: from sentence rewriting and paragraph writing to MCQ sentence paraphrasing and sentence combination
- Number of reading questions decreases from 30 to 20
- Number of pronunciation and sentence error correction decreases slightly
Existing studies on current HEET

- Limited published empirical studies
- MOET and NFLP’s confidential and internal studies comparing the difficulty of test papers and item parameters in each year
- Example findings of 2019 test papers (404)

**Vocabulary question difficulty**

- B1: 73.84%
- >B1: 26.16%

**Grammar question difficulty**

- A1-B1: 57%
- B1: 43%

**Reading vocabulary input difficulty (404)**

- A1-B1
- >B1
Needed further research on current HEET

- Validation studies from external parties on test format, test contents: alignment with the existing curricula
- Washback on the participants, processes, products
- Relations to students’ after-test education, employability and other educational goals
A framework of washback

• ‘the extent to which the test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise necessarily do’. (Messick, 1996, p.241)

• The influence of the test over teaching and learning (Bailey, 1996)
Bailey (1996)
A test will influence teaching.

what teachers teach
how teachers teach
the rate & sequence, degree and depth of teaching
attitudes to teaching content, methods
washback for all, for some teachers, but not for others

A test will influence learning.

what learners learn
how learners learn
the rate, sequence, degree and depth of learning
attitudes to learning content, method, etc.
washback for all, for some learners, but not for others
The current high school exit examination in foreign languages: future directions

Nguyen Thi Mai Huu
(National Foreign Language Project of Vietnam)
The curriculum reform in Vietnam

New national curriculum for general education in Vietnam
MOET Circular No. 32 in 2018, to be implemented from the next academic year of 2020-2021

English language subject
Mandatory from grade 3 to grade 12, to be implemented from the academic year of 2022-2023
The National English Curriculum

Beginning → Assessment for learning → Level 3 (B1)

- Competence-based
- CLT-based
- Learning/learners-centered
High school exit examinations
# High school exit examinations

## MOET’s proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-based</th>
<th>Nation-based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local exams</td>
<td>National exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local certification</td>
<td>National certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/Vocational learning</td>
<td>Work/University and Higher education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English Language Subject

School exams

TESTS

National exams
BEING IMPLEMENTED

• Investigating:
  – the suitability/alignment of the HEET test to the 7-year and the new 10-year English teaching curriculum
  – the impacts of the test for key participants and their teaching-learning processes
  – More appropriate test formats
## BEING IMPLEMENTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do we have to propose a new test(s)?</td>
<td>What should the tests look like?</td>
<td>Proposing the format for the high school exit tests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 1

To what extent are the tests aligned with the old and new curriculum?
– Content analysis of the construct and method alignment
– Expert opinions

To what extent are the tests valid?
– Students’ test performance data analysis
– Expert opinions
What is the washback of the examinations based on the 7-year-curriculum on the 10-year-programme on students’ learning, teachers’ teaching and educational policy makers’ practices?

– What is the intended washback?
– What is the realized washback?
– How does the washback differ for participants, processes and products of the 7-year curriculum and the 10-year one?
Phase 2

What
- Theoretical background
- International practices
- Washback analysis
- Curricula analysis
- Stakeholders analysis

How
- Literature review
- Surveys, interviews
- Expert opinions
- Empirical data (piloting...)

Test format(s)
Test specifications
What is the opinion of stakeholders on the proposals?
References

Thank you

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