


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

The bottom of the slide features a decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes. These shapes are primarily triangles and quadrilaterals in shades of light blue, light orange, and light purple, creating a layered, abstract landscape effect. A solid dark blue horizontal bar runs along the very bottom edge of the slide.

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



Impetus for change

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).



University entrance



			2018		2017		2016	
			Humanities	Science	Humanities	Science	Humanities	Science
Anhui	Maximum Score	Tier 1	550	505	515	487	521	518
	750	Tier 2	486	432	440	413	482	473
Beijing	Maximum Score	Tier 1	576	532	555	537	583	548
	750	Tier 2	488	432	468	439	532	494
Chongqing	Maximum Score	Tier 1	524	524	525	492	527	525
	750	Tier 2	434	428	436	395	435	416
Fujian	Maximum Score	Tier 1	490	551	489	441	501	465
	750	Tier 2	378	446	380	333	403	352
Gansu	Maximum Score	Tier 1	502	483	505	460	504	490
	750	Tier 2	456	436	458	408	455	435
Guangdong	Maximum Score	Tier 1	443	376	520	485	514	508
	750	Tier 2			418	360	417	402
Guangxi	Maximum Score	Tier 1	484	513	535	473	545	502
	750	Tier 2	403	345	387	318	400	333
Guizhou	Maximum Score	Tier 1	575	484	545	456	551	473
	750	Tier 2	477	379	453	361	457	365
Hainan	Maximum Score	Tier 1	579	539	578	539	653	602
	900	Tier 2					577	543
Hebei	Maximum Score	Tier 1	559	511	517	485	535	525
	750	Tier 2	358	441	395	326	416	364
Heilongjiang	Maximum Score	Tier 1	490	472	481	455	481	486
	750	Tier 2	406	353	400	335	401	369
Henan	Maximum Score	Tier 1	547	499	516	484	517	523
	750	Tier 2	436	374	389	342	458	447
Hubei	Maximum Score	Tier 1	561	512	528	484	520	512
	750	Tier 2	441	375	406	345	403	350
Hunan	Maximum Score	Tier 1	569	513	548	505	530	517
	750	Tier 2	526	450	485	424	476	439
Inner Mongolia	Maximum Score	Tier 1	501	478	472	466	477	484
	750	Tier 2	399	336	375	328	375	346

Proposal for NCEE structural change

Table 2 The proposed plan of NCEE in Beijing in 2013

		The three major subjects in NCEE		
		Chinese	Mathematics	English
Before 2016	Arts	150 points	150 points	150 points
	Science	150 points	150 points	150 points
After 2016	Arts	180 points	150 points	100 points
	Science	180 points	150 points	100 points

Current NCEE structure

Table 3 The decided plan of NCEE across China in 2014

	The three major subjects in NCEE		
	Chinese	Mathematics	English
Since 2017	150 points	150 points	150 points

The English language test - past structure

- The National Matriculation English Test (NMET) is the English component of the NCEE.

Table 1. Test Format in 2001-2013

Format		weight	
Part I	Listening	Section 1 short dialogue	7.5
	Comprehension	Section 2 long dialogue or monologue	22.5
Part II	Use of language	Section 1 multiple choice	15
		Section 2 cloze test	30
Part III	Reading Comprehension	Choose the best answer	40
Part IV	Writing	Section 1 error correction	10
		Section 2 letter writing	25
Total			150

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.

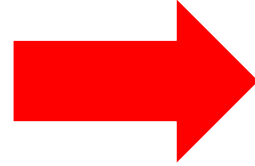
Table 2. Test Format in 2014 Reform

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

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)



58%



23%

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 căng thẳng chờ con trong buổi chiều thi môn Ngoại ngữ

Thu Nga - Thứ sáu, ngày 01/07/2016 16:00 GMT+7

Thích

Chia sẻ

LinkHay



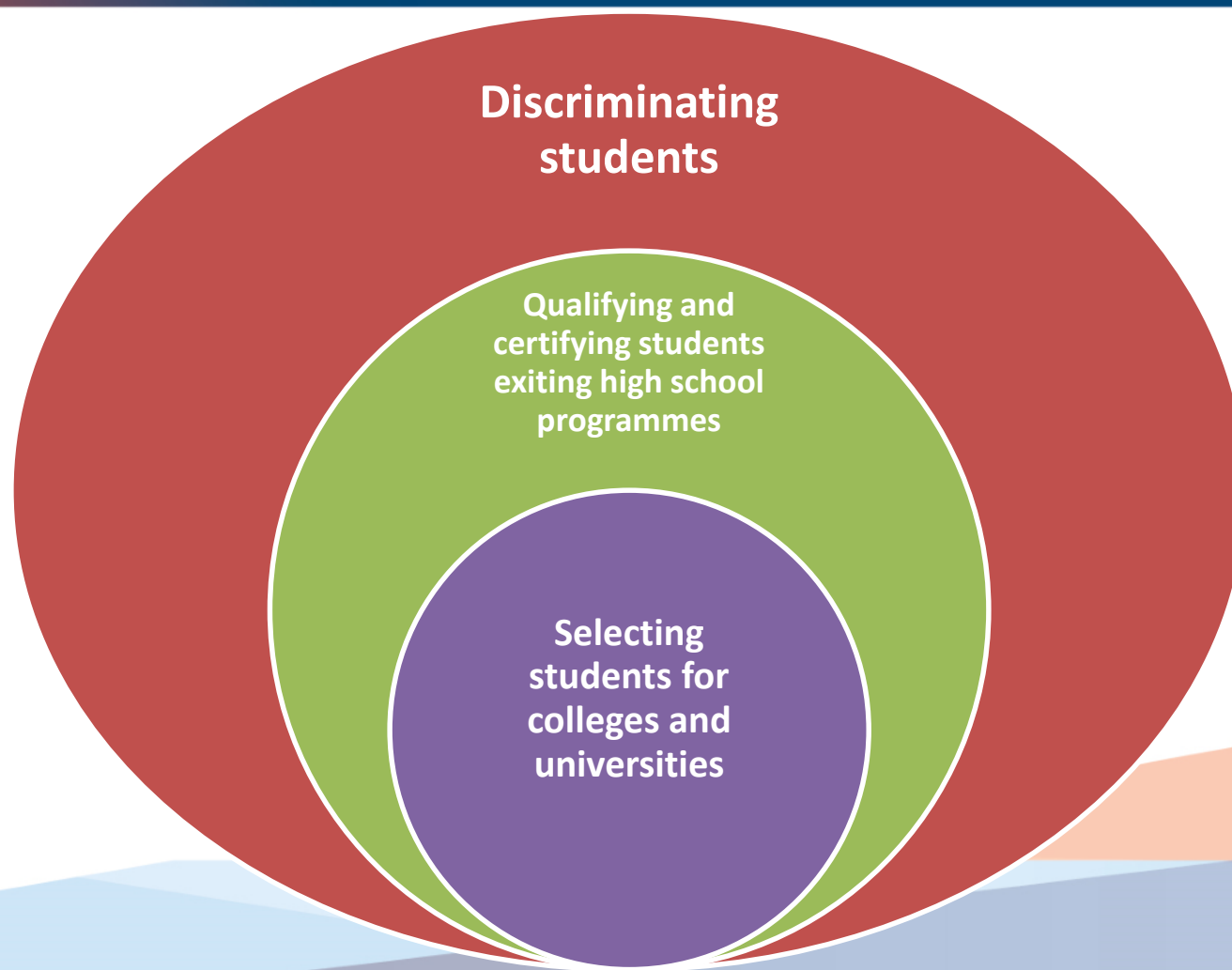
The highschool exit test on foreign languages

- 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)

Purposes	Role of foreign languages	Time	Types of test questions	Contents	Expected performance level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Certifying of students completing the high school programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 in 3 compulsory subjects since 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 60 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Before 2013: 50 MCQ + MCQ fill-in + cloze fill-in• 2014: 30 MCQ (75%) + writing a paragraph	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The contents of the last years in the 7-year curriculum• Pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing (indirect except 2014), use of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• not clearly stated.

Current format of the HEET (from 2016)



Purposes according to Decree 04/2017

Time: 60 minutes

Types of test questions:
MCQ

Expected exit performance
level: B1 (CEFR Vietnam)

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
ĐỀ THI CHÍNH THỨC
(Đề thi có 05 trang)

KỲ THI TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG QUỐC GIA NĂM 2018
Bài thi: NGOẠI NGỮ; Môn thi: TIẾNG ANH
Thời gian làm bài: 60 phút, không kể thời gian phát đề

Mã đề thi 401

Họ, tên thí sinh:

Số báo danh:

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

Question 1: Silas is talking to his roommate, Salah, about the Olympic Games.

- Silas: "Do you think our country can host the Olympic Games some day in the future?"

- Salah: " _____. We can't afford such a big event."

A. You can say that again

B. I can't agree with you more

C. Yes, you're right

D. No, I don't think so

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

Year	Grammar and vocabulary	Communication functions	Reading	Writing	Pronun	Sentence error correction
2015	24MCQ	2	3 passages, 30MCQ	5 sentence rewriting, 1 short paragraph with suggested main points	5 MCQ	5
2016	24MCQ	2	3 passages, 30MCQ	5 sentence rewriting, 1 short paragraph with suggested main points	5 MCQ	5
2017 (50Q)	16	2	3 passages, 20 MCQ	2 Sentence combination MCQ, 3 sentence paraphrasing MCQ	4	3

Content structure of the current HEET

Year	Grammar and vocabulary	Commu. functions	Reading	Writing	Pronun	Sentence error correction
2017-2019 (50 MCQ)	16 MCQ	2 MCQ	3 passages, 20 MCQ	2 Sentence combination MCQ, 3 sentence paraphrasing MCQ	4 MCQ	3 MCQ

Cognitive level	Grammar and vocab	Commu. functions	Reading	Writing	Pronun	Sentence Error correction
Remembering	5	1	2	1	2	
Understanding	7	1	9	3	2	2
Applying	1		5	1		
Higher-ordered applying	3		4			1

- Sample Sentence error correction question

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

- 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.

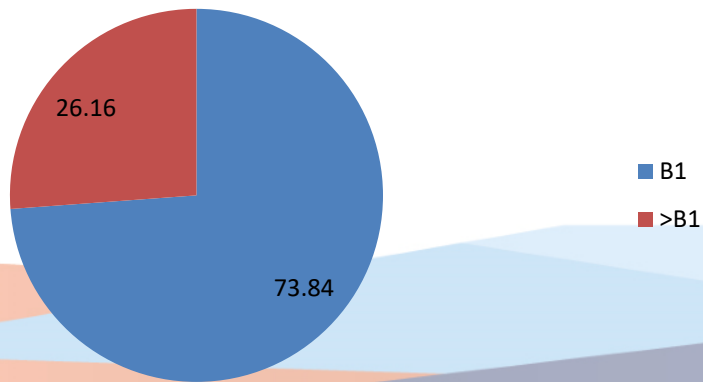
- A. Only when Mary realised how much her family meant to her did she leave home to start an independent life.
- B. To realise how much her family meant to her, Mary decided to leave home to start an independent life.
- C. Not until Mary had left home to start an independent life did she realise how much her family

- 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

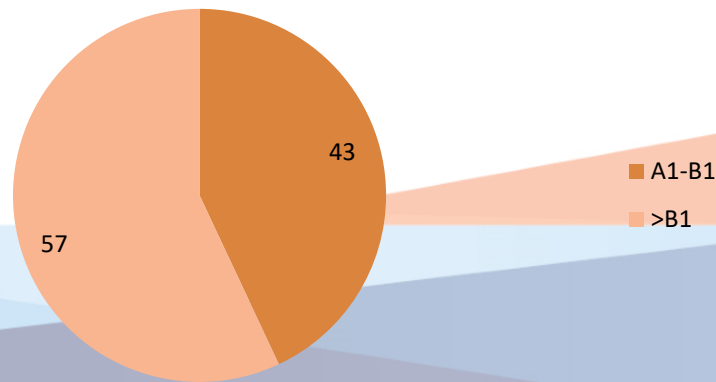
Existing studies on current HEET

- 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)

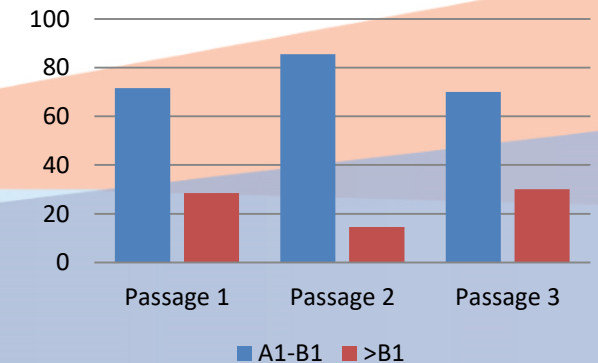
Vocabulary question difficulty



Grammar question difficulty



Reading vocabulary input difficulty (404)



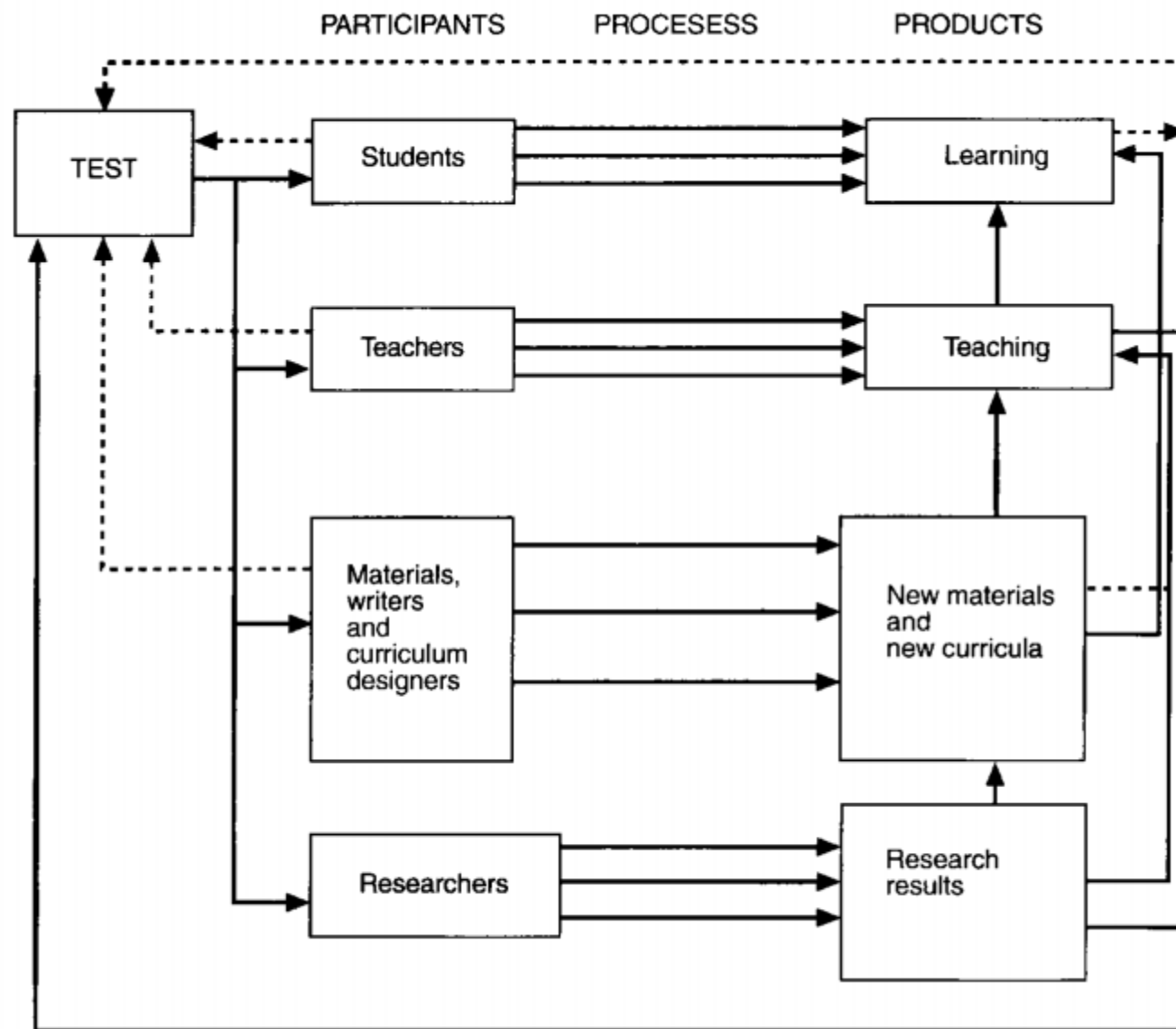
Needed further research on current HEET

- 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)



Alderson and Wall (1993)



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



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)

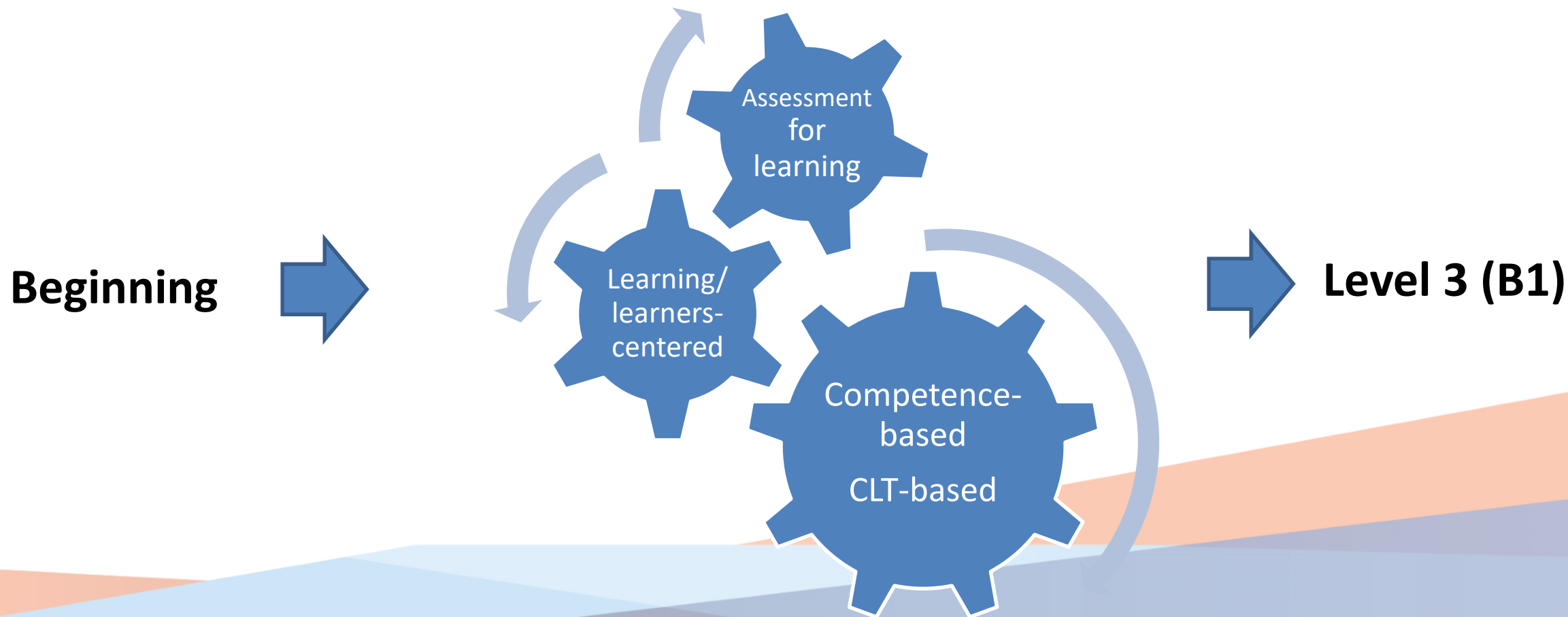


The curriculum reform in Vietnam

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

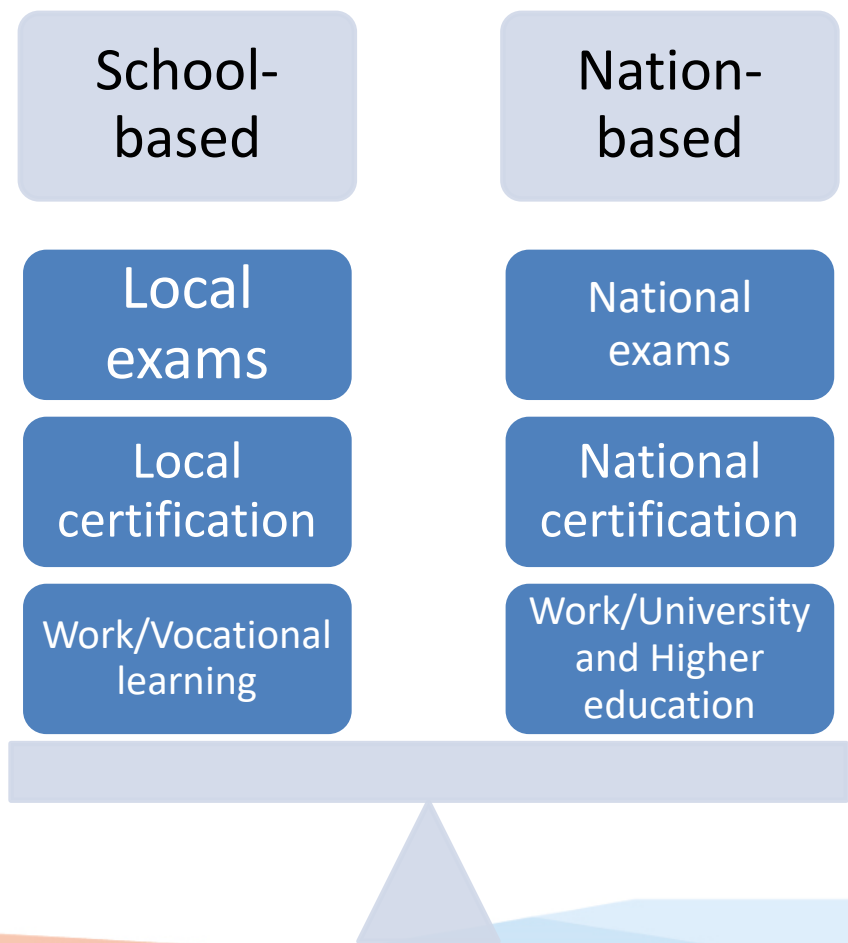
The National English Curriculum



High school exit examinations



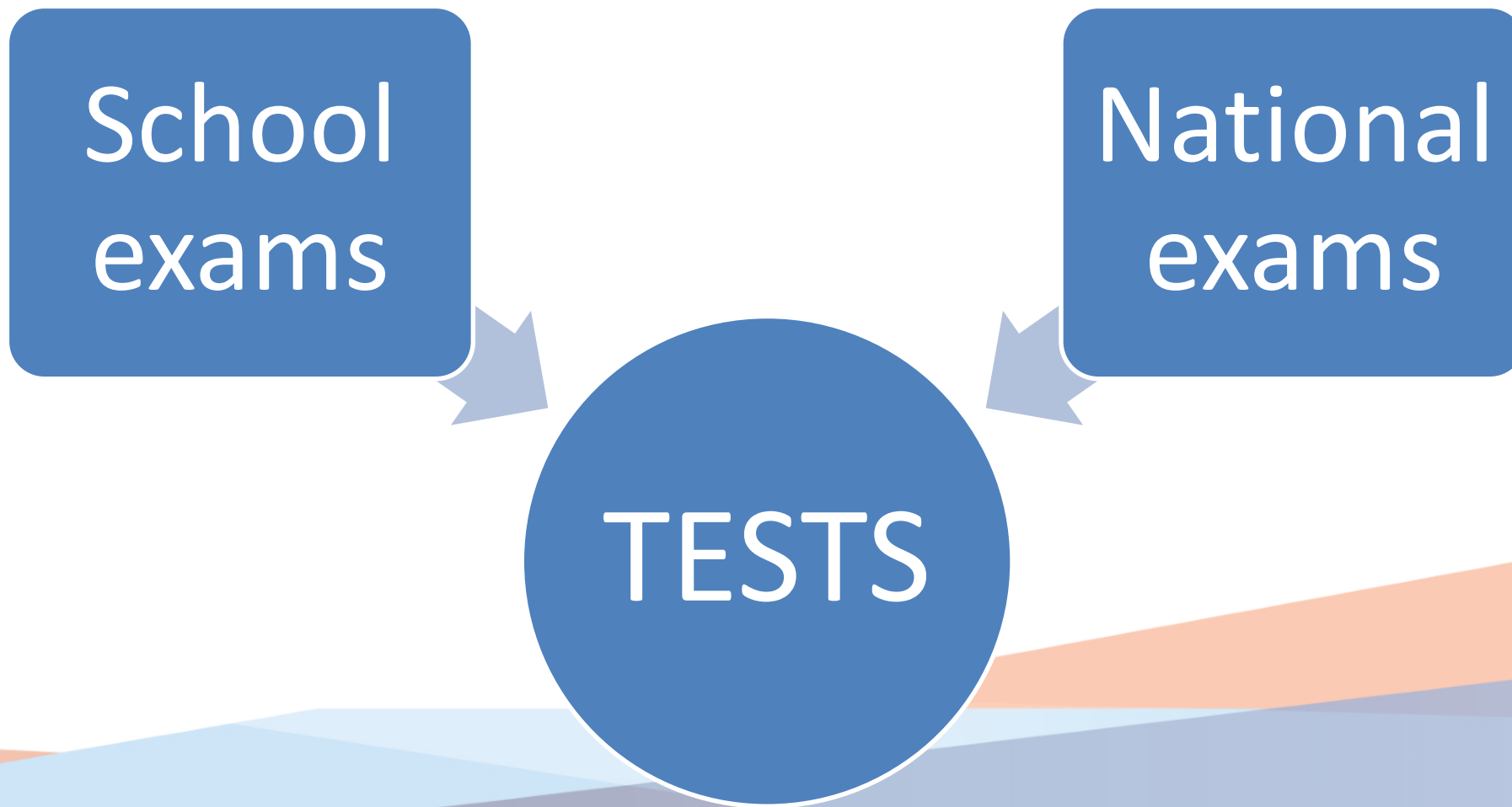
High school exit examinations



MOET's proposal



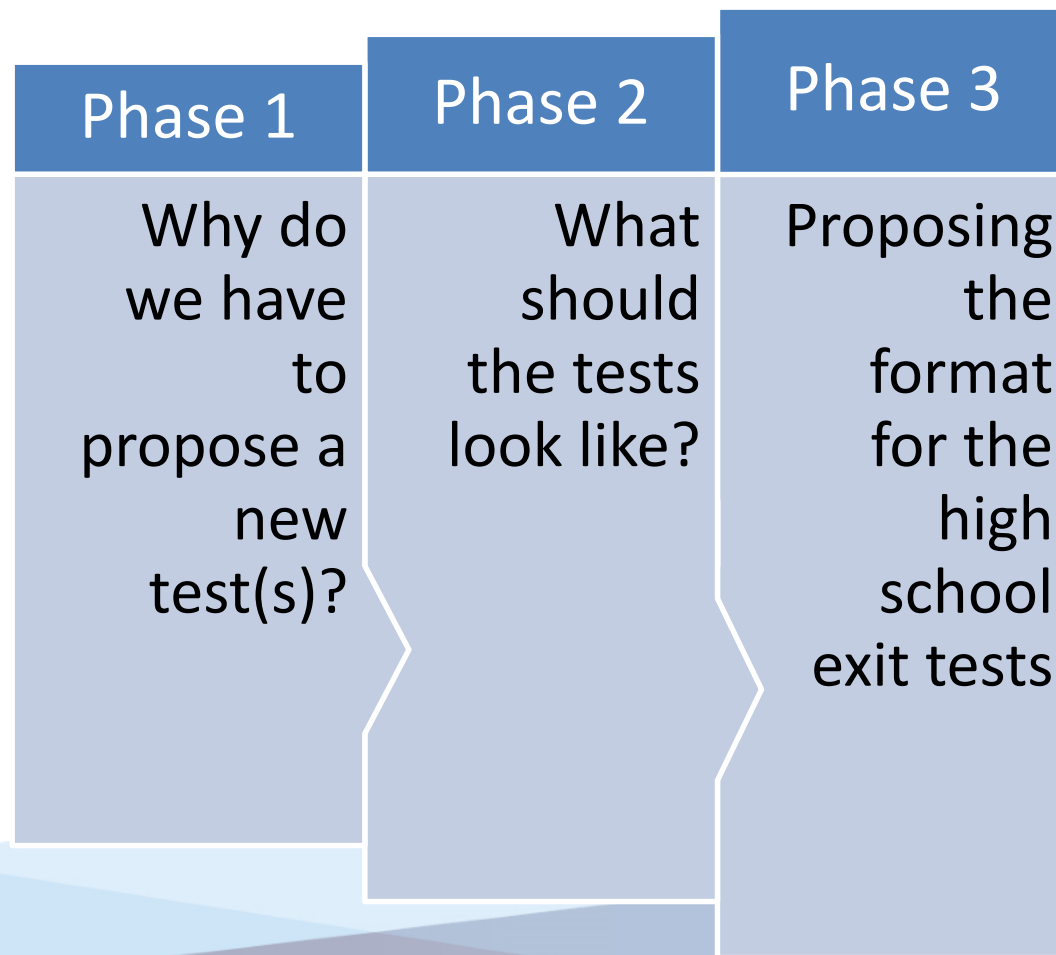
English Language Subject



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



To what extent are the tests aligned with the old and new curriculum?

- Content analysis of the construct and method alignment
- Expert opinions

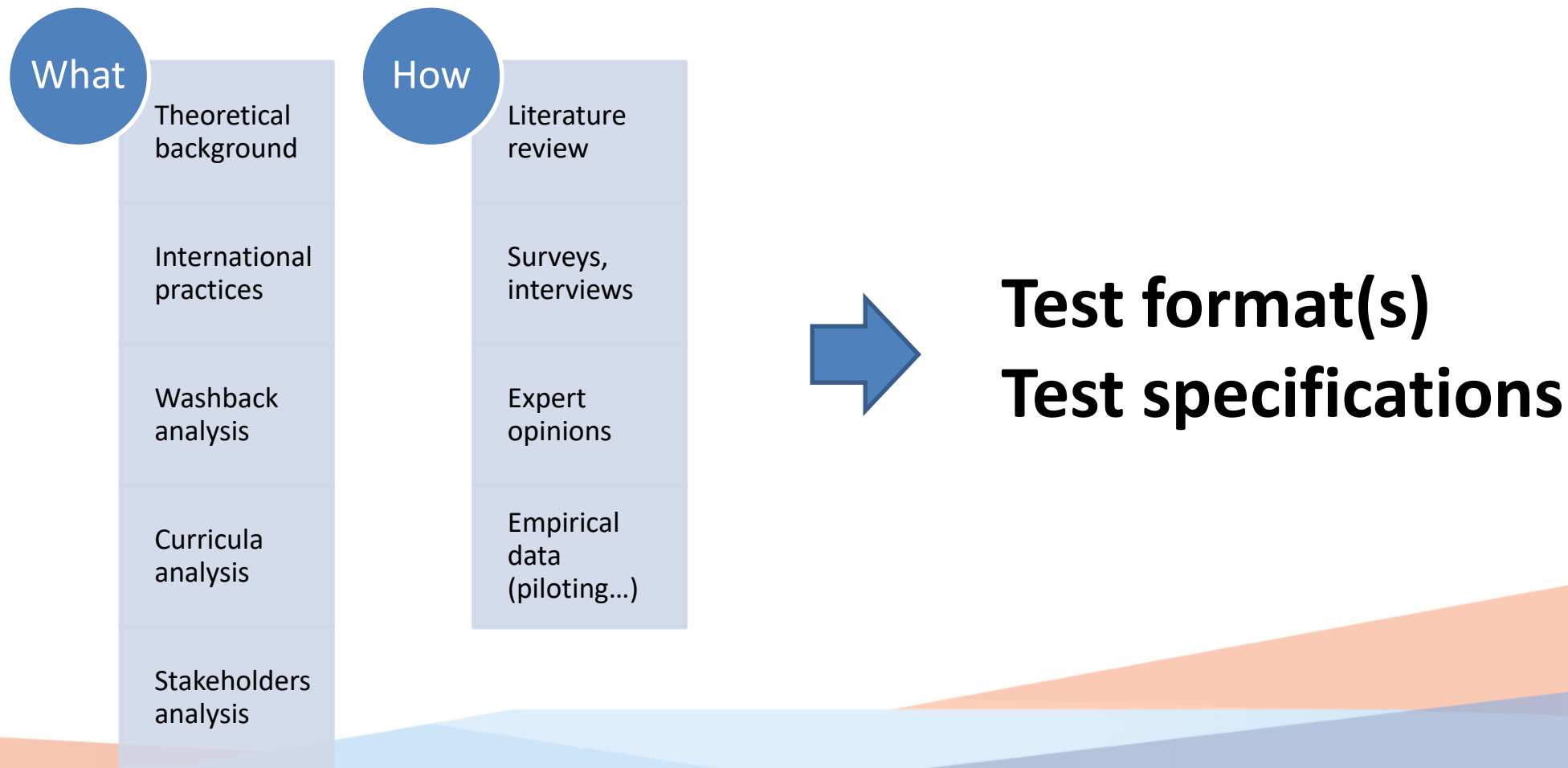
To what extent are the tests valid?

- 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 is the opinion of stakeholders on the proposals?



References

- Alderson, J. C., & Wall, D. (1993). Does washback exist? *Applied Linguistics*, 14, 115-129.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/14.2.115>
- Bailey, K. (1996). Working for washback: A review of the washback concept in language testing. *Language Testing*, 13(3) 257-79
- Chen, Y. et al. (2018). The washback effect of the new model of foreign language examination in NCEE. *Foreign Language Research* (1), 79-85.
- Dhanasobhon, S. (2006). *English language teaching dilemma in Thailand*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.curriculumandinstruction.org>
- Kwon, J. I. (2010). Korean language policy and globalization. *Korean Language and Literature* 155, 5-17.
- Messick, S. (1996). Validity and washback in language testing. *Language Testing*, 13(3), 241-256.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026553229601300302>.
- Ministry of Education (2019) *Gaokao*. Retrieved from: <http://www.gaokao.com/baokao/gkgg/>
- Qi, L. (2005). Stakeholders' conflicting aims undermine the washback function of a high-stakes test. *Language Testing* 22, 142–173.
- Qian, D. & Cumming, A. (2017) Researching English language assessment in China: Focusing on high-stakes testing, *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 14(2), 97-100, <http://dx.doi:10.1080/15434303.2017.1295969>
- Weeks, D., Zhou, H., Newton-Tanzer, J & Liu, Y., A White Paper bAssessing the Chinese gaokao exam in the context of the test-optional trend in international admissions. Sunrise International Education.
- Zhang, L. (2018). *A study of 'two-test English examination system' in Shanghai College Entrance Examination*. Unpublished MA dissertation, Shanghai Normal University.
- Zheng, L. (2019). *Exploring the washback effects of the Chinese national matriculation English test (NMET) on student learning and their test anxiety*. Unpublished MEd dissertation, Queen's University, Canada.

Thank you

Karen Ashton: k.ashton@massey.ac.nz

Duong Thu Mai: duongthumai@yahoo.com

Sai Cong Hong: schong@moet.gov.vn

Nguyen Thi Mai Huu: ntmhuu@moet.gov.vn

Nguyen Thi Kim Anh: nguyenthikimanh@vinhuin.edu.vn

