

Exploring the Chinese proficiency test Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi and its washback effects: The test-takers' perspective

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Chinese Proficiency Test

- Also known as the **HSK** or **Chinese TOEFL**, the HSK is a national standardized test designed to evaluate Chinese proficiency of non-native Chinese speakers.
- It aims to be a certificate of language proficiency for **higher educational** and **professional** purposes.
- As of 2013, it is available in over 120 countries and areas.
- The purpose of the test is to “**promote training through testing**” and “**promote learning through testing.**”

HSK Test Levels

New HSK	Vocabulary	CLPS	CEFR
HSK (Level VI)	Over 5,000	Level V	C2
HSK (Level V)	2500		C1
HSK (Level IV)	1200	Level IV	B2
HSK (Level III)	600	Level III	B1
HSK (Level II)	300	Level II	A2
HSK (Level I)	150	Level I	A1

Level	Written			Oral	Description
	Listening	Reading	Writing		
1	20 questions	20 questions	Not tested	17 mins	Designed for learners who can understand and use some simple Chinese characters and sentences to communicate, and prepares them for continuing their Chinese studies.
2	35 questions	25 questions	Not tested		Designed for learners who can use Chinese in a simple and direct manner, applying it in a basic fashion to their daily lives.
3	40 questions	30 questions	10 items	21 mins	Designed for learners who can use Chinese to serve the demands of their personal lives, studies and work, and are capable of completing most of the communicative tasks they experience during their Chinese tour.
4	45 questions	40 questions	15 items		Designed for learners who can discuss a relatively wide range of topics in Chinese and are capable of communicating with Chinese speakers at a high standard.
5	45 questions	45 questions	10 items	24 mins	Designed for learners who can read Chinese newspapers and magazines, watch Chinese films and are capable of writing and delivering a lengthy speech in Chinese.
6	50 questions	50 questions	1 composition		Designed for learners who can easily understand any information communicated in Chinese and are capable of smoothly expressing themselves in written or oral form.

Washback

- generally understood as **the influence of an examination on teaching and learning.**
- it also refers to the extent to which the test influences language teachers and learners **to do things “they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test”** (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p.117).
- the effect could be **positive or negative, either or neither.**

Washback Literature Review

- A majority of research has investigated washback on teaching; **little research has examined the effects on learning** (Shih, 2007; Wall, 2000; Watanabe, 2004).
- Researchers have noted that **languages besides English are neglected** (Huang, 2013; Manjarrés, 2005; Özmen, 2011) .
- Most studies concerning washback effects are **mixed methods** research.

The Rationale of the Study

- The amount of literature on washback has demonstrated the **importance** of this issue and has **provided valuable considerations for language education**.
- Despite the **claims for** validity and reliability of the HSK (Chen, 2009; Luo et al., 2011), **very few empirical studies** related to its washback effects have been conducted.
- This study involves examining the HSK as an assessment **OF** learning, **FOR** learning, and **AS** learning.
- **Personal experience** – CSL / CFL + HSK

Research Questions

- **A global question:**

What are the washback effects of the HSK on CSL learner factors?

- **Four secondary questions:**

1. Why are learners interested in learning Chinese and taking the HSK?
2. Does the washback exist? What is the evidence of washback effects on the learner factors?
3. How does the HSK affect the way learners learn Chinese? In other words, what factors contribute to the washback effects?
4. What are the views of the CSL learners towards the HSK and its impact?

Method

Phase	Procedure	Product	Timeline
Qual Data Collection and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents review Content analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field notes Thematic analysis 	July - Sept, 2012
QUAN Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=60 CSL learners Questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numeric data 	Sept - Nov, 2012
QUAN Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptive Statistics Hypothesis Testing Multiple Regression Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Means, SDs T-tests Predict variables 	
Qual Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=8 Individual in-depth interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcripts Field notes 	Dec, 2012 - Jan, 2013
Qual Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coding Thematic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coded text Themes 	
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpretation and explanation of the quan and qual results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion Implication Future research 	Feb - Mar, 2013

Findings - <Q1>

- They would like to study, work, travel in China.
- They are interested in learning a new language and culture.
- It is required by their academic programs and / or professional projects.
- They are encouraged by their friends or relatives.

Reason for taking the HSK	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
To have an indicator of your language proficiency	23	38.3	38.3
To be able to pursue higher education in China	19	31.7	70.0
To help job hunting	14	23.3	93.3
Others	4	6.7	100

Findings - <Q2>

- The significant differences between strategies used in regular learning and test-specific learning show that **there were washback effects from the HSK.**
- **Positive washback:** benefiting learner's motivation for learning Chinese and helping them to understand their strengths and weaknesses and, as a result, helping them to adjust their learning strategies.
- **Negative washback:** overemphasizing linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar rules, and neglecting communicative skills.

Findings - <Q3>

- **Nationality, language proficiency, HSK performance and motivation** were significant predictors for the change of learning strategies between regular learning and test-specific learning.
- However, **gender, age, the time of learning Chinese, purpose of learning Chinese and the type of Chinese course** were not significant predictors.
- **Asian CSL learners** were found to be **quite different from learners from other countries** in terms of learning beliefs and practices.

Findings - <Q4>

- They stated that the HSK fairly and accurately **reflected their proficiency level**.
- They **perceived several advantages to becoming HSK-certified**, such as increasing motivation to learn Chinese and increasing job opportunities.
- Though there are separate HSK speaking tests, they do **not appear to have public credibility** and some CSL learners do not seem to be aware of them.
- They believed that it is **unclear whether test scores actually reflect the communicative ability** to use language through real-life tasks.

Conclusion

- This study is a new contribution to HSK research.
- Adopting the MMR approach to both data collection and analyses is a strength of the study.
- It has implications for students, teachers and test-developers.

Limitations

- The findings discussed were based on a limited number of participants.
- The results of the quantitative data of this research relied on students' self-reported strategy use.
- Learners' test performances in this study were based on pass or fail, not a real score.

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THANK YOU!



QUESTION

