



Voice from Test-takers: An Exploratory Study on Business English Certificates Within Chinese Context

Xiangdong Gu

Professor/Director, Chongqing University

Consultant, Cambridge English



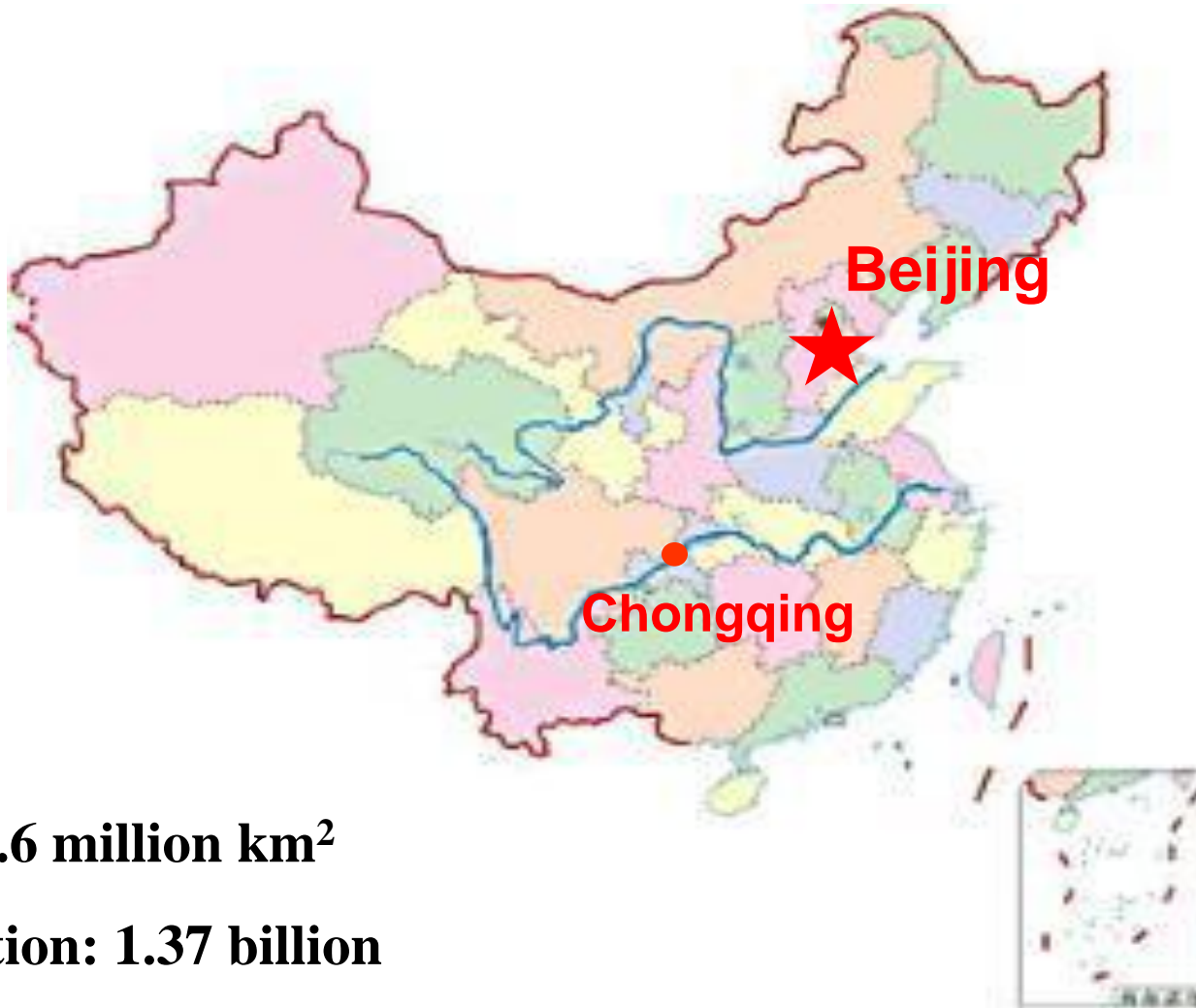
Impact research....

investigates the effects and consequences of the use of examinations in educational contexts and throughout society (Saville 2012)

as Cambridge English has done e.g. In France, Spain, Italy **and, of course, China**



Research contexts

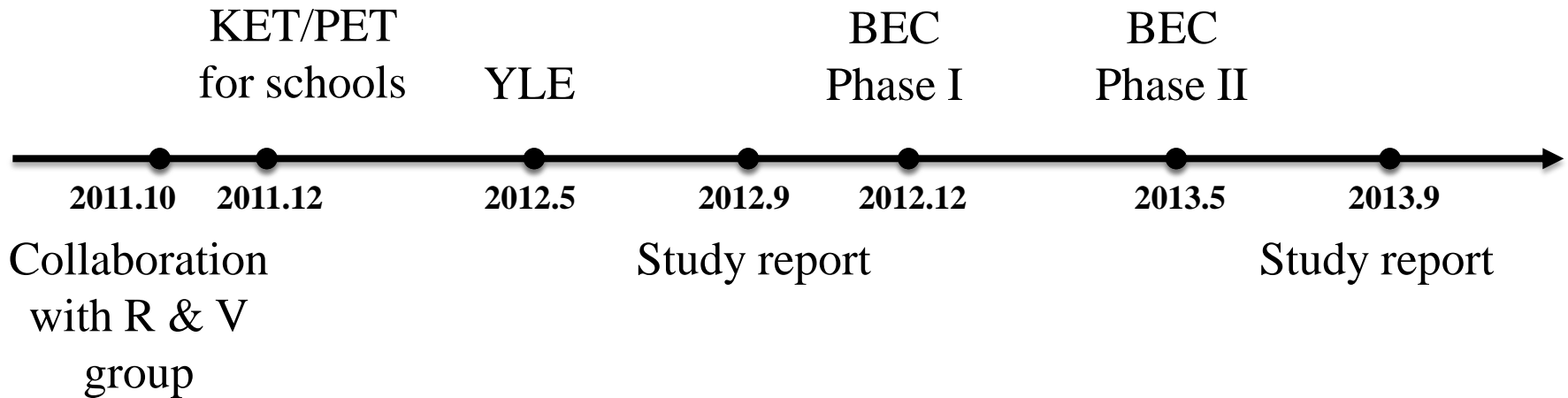


Area: 9.6 million km²

Population: 1.37 billion



Cambridge English Impact Studies in China





Overview of Our Cambridge English Impact Studies in China

Test	Time	Place	Participant	Method
YLE	May 2012	Chongqing	72 test-takers	Questionnaire
			3 teachers	Interview
KET/PET for Schools	Dec. 2011	Beijing	592 test-takers, 142 parents & 30 teachers	Questionnaire
			20 test-takers & 48 parents	Interview
			4 teachers	Classroom observation
BEC	Dec. 2012	Chongqing	676 test-takers & 49 speaking examiners	Questionnaire
			60 test-takers & 8 speaking examiners	Interview
			2 speaking examiners	Certification observation
	May 2013	Chongqing	99 Speaking Test test-takers, 210 test-takers & 35 speaking examiners	Questionnaire



Brief Introduction to BEC

Cambridge English: Business Certificates, also known as *Business English Certificates (BEC)*, are a suite of internationally recognized examinations that provide a progressive way to develop and improve Business English ability, including ***BEC Preliminary, BEC Vantage and BEC Higher.***

- ❖ They are typically taken by candidates preparing for a career in business, or seeking to advance their present business career.
- ❖ They are rigorous and thorough tests of English at Levels **B1, B2 and C1.**
- ❖ They are qualifications that show candidates can use English confidently in **international business contexts.**

(see <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-qualifications/business-certificates>).

They were introduced to **China in 1993.**

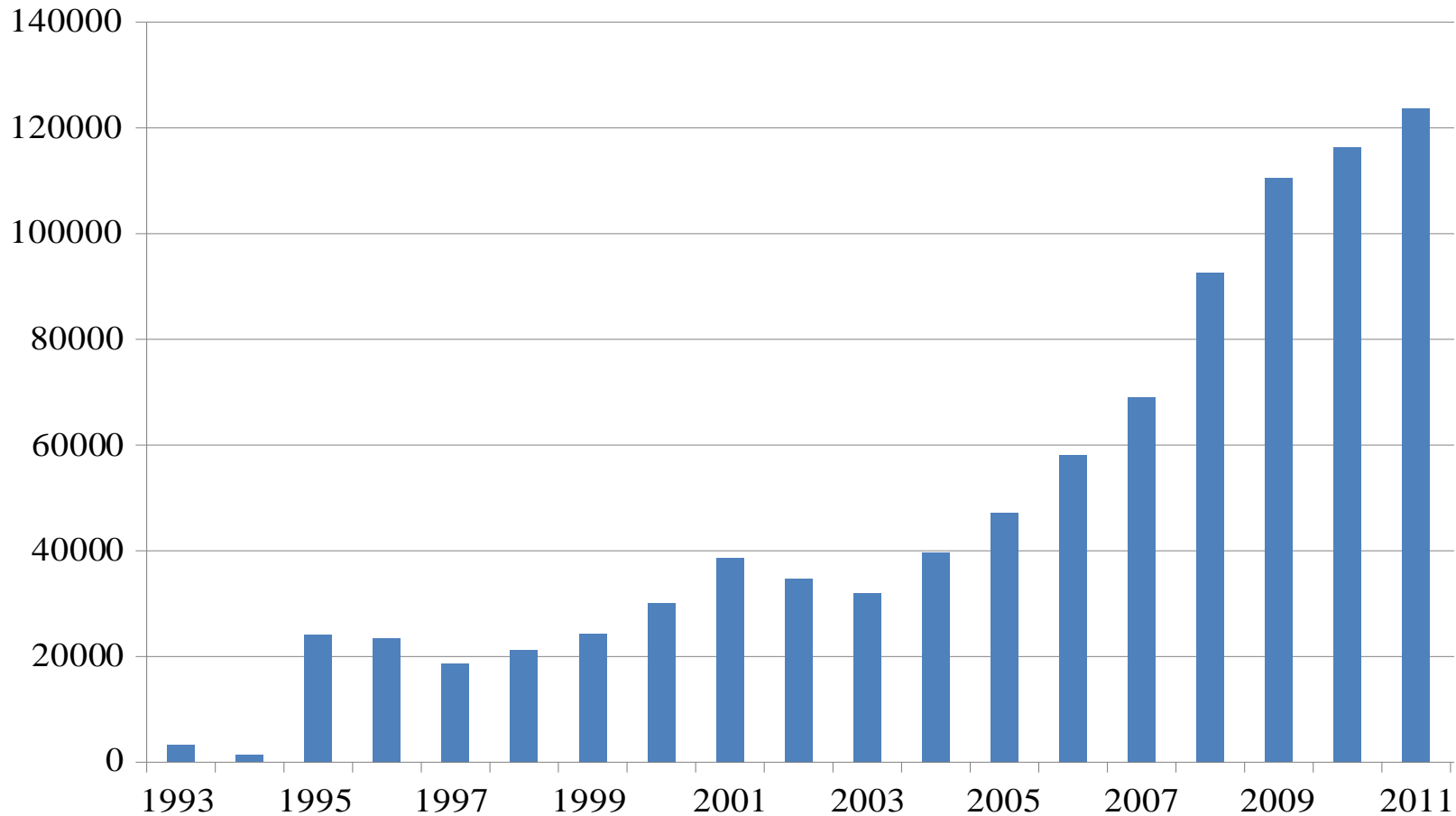


BEC overview

	Preliminary			Vantage			Higher		
	Timing (min.)	Content (part)	Weighting	Timing (min.)	Content (part)	Weighting	Timing (min.)	Content (part)	Weighting
Reading (R)	90	R 7 W 2	50%	60	5	25%	60	6	25%
Writing (W)				45	2	25%	70	2	25%
Listening (L)	40 (app.)	4	25%	40 (app.)	3	25%	40 (app.)	3	25%
Speaking (S)	12 per group	3	25%	14 per group	3	25%	16 per group	3	25%

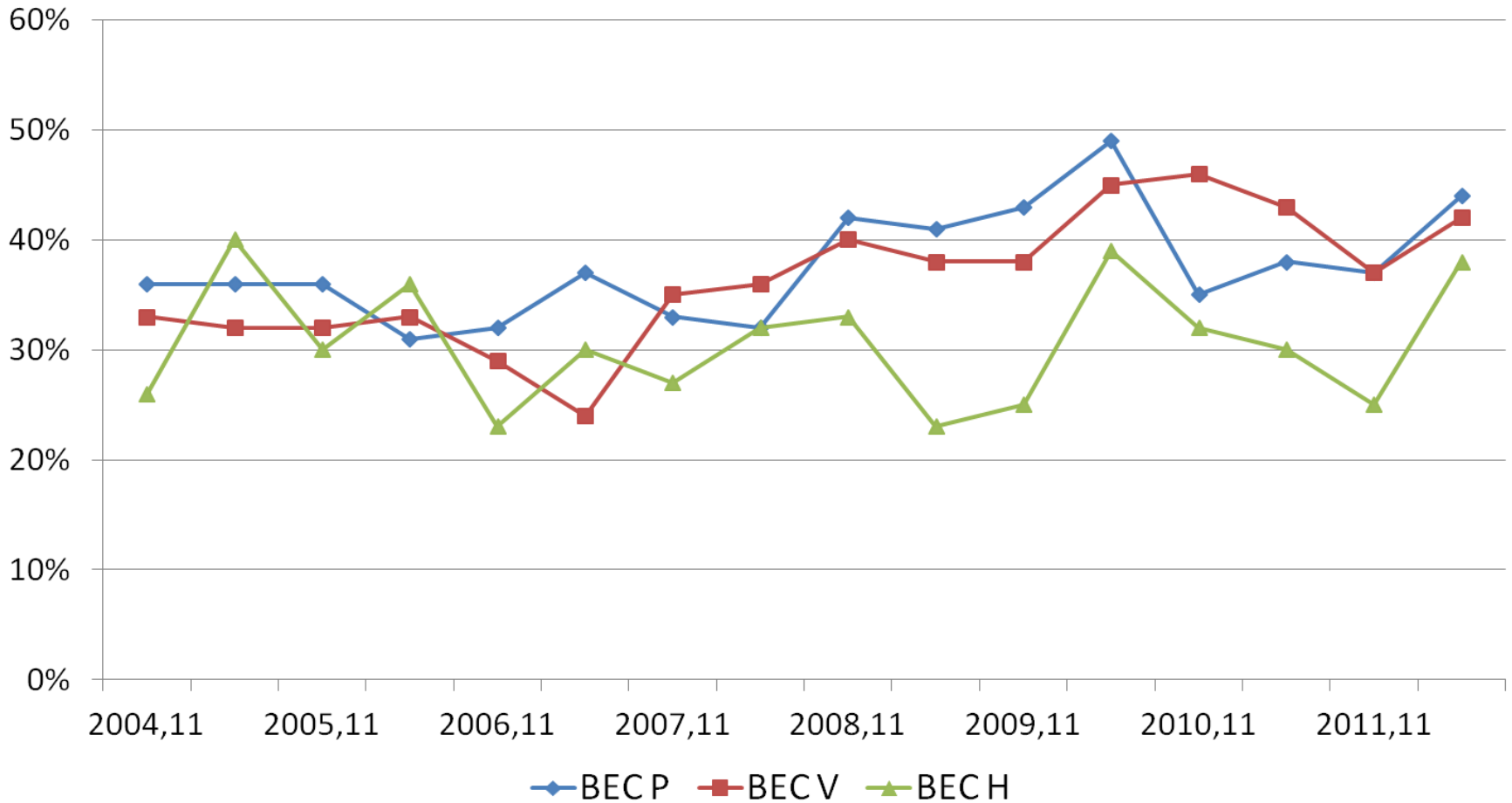


Chinese BEC test taker population





Chinese BEC test takers pass rate





Key constructs under investigation

- ❖ **Attitudes** of various stakeholders to BEC: test-takers and oral examiners
- ❖ Test-taker motivations and learning **processes**
- ❖ Examiner motivations and rating **processes**



Approaches and Participants

Phase I (Oct.-Dec. 2012)

- Analyse BEC **sample** tests and test **data**
- Analyse **users'** information
- Attend BEC **annual** meeting
- Observe a BEC **teacher** training
- Visit universities and give **talks** on Cambridge English
- Observe BEC Speaking Test **certification** processes
- Conduct **focus** group interviews to speaking examiners
- Design **questionnaires** for speaking examiners (Preliminary, Vantage & Higher)
- Collect speaking **examiners'** questionnaire data
- Design questionnaires for written tests **test-takers** of three levels
- Collect written tests test-takers' questionnaire data
- Design semi-structured **interviews** to test-takers of speaking tests
- Conduct interviews to speaking tests test-takers in **pairs**
- Present preliminary findings at **academic** conferences in China



Phase I Data Collection (Chongqing, Dec. 2012)

Participant	Questionnaire			Interview		
	BEC P	BEC V	BEC H	BEC P	BEC V	BEC H
Test-takers	16	392	266	7	32	19
Examiners	\	36	13	\	4	4



Phase II (May 2013)

- Focus on BEC Vantage
- Revise speaking examiners' questionnaires
- Revise questionnaires for written test test-takers
- Design a questionnaire for speaking test test-takers
- Collect questionnaire data

Phase II Data Collection

Participant	Questionnaire (BEC V)
Written test test-takers	210
Speaking examiners	35
Speaking test test-takers	99



Test-takers' basic demographic information (%)

Item		BEC Vantage	BEC Higher
Gender	Male	12.8	20.1
	Female	87.2	79.9
Highest qualification obtained or to obtain	Junior college degree or under	4.7	5.3
	Bachelor	91.4	82.8
	Master or above	3.9	11.8
Currently at college or university	Yes	95.1	93.1
	No	4.9	6.9



Test-takers' major (%)

Item	BEC Vantage	BEC Higher
Linguistics	42.8	37.4
Management	16.5	11.0
Literature	12.6	23.6
Economics	11.3	13.8
Engineering	8.7	4.3
Law	3.9	3.9
Education	1.3	1.2
Medical science	0.5	0.4
Psychology	0.5	1.6
Philosophy	0.3	/
Agronomy	0.3	0.8
Science	/	1.6
History	/	0.4
Others	1.3	/



Test-takers' means to know BEC (%)

Item	BEC Vantage	BEC Higher
Classmates	69.2	72.6
Teachers	50.8	35.7
Internet/TV/Radio	21.8	21.3
English training institution	6.9	8.4
Family	2.8	2.7
Outdoor ads	2.3	1.9
Others	1.5	1.5
Colleagues	1.0	3.4
Mobile phone ads	/	0.4



Reported Impact

- Accumulating and increasing vocabulary
- Learned business knowledge
- Enhanced reading proficiency that is beneficiary to postgraduates' entrance English exams
- Cultivated interest in English learning
- Become self-disciplined
- Improved psychological quality, such as anti-pressure ability
- Got acquainted with some new friends

.....



Impact Issues in China

A male candidate:

One year ago I went with my boss to a job market to recruit new employees. There were so many applicants who handed in their resumes that my boss just passed by many of them even without bothering to have a look. But one applicant came up, handed in his resume and said he had a BEC Vantage Certificate. The boss immediately received the resume, read it carefully, and then told the applicant to come next week for an arranged interview. That was the first time I heard about this test and got to know its value. So I went back, learned more about the test through the internet, and started to prepare for it in my spare time. I thought if I got the certificate, it would be very helpful in my career promotion or job-hopping.



Impact Issues in China

A male candidate:

*One year ago I went with my boss to a job market to recruit new employees. There were so many applicants who handed in their resumes that my boss just passed by many of them even without bothering to have a look. But one applicant came up, handed in his resume and said he had a BEC Vantage Certificate. The boss immediately received the resume, read it carefully, and then told the applicant to come next week for an arranged interview. **That was the first time I heard about this test** and got to know its value. So I went back, learned more about the test through the internet, and started to prepare for it in my spare time. I thought if I got the certificate, it would be very helpful in my career promotion or job-hopping.*

How to make sure test-takers have easy access to the information and resources of BEC rather than know it by chance?



Impact Issues in China

A male candidate:

*One year ago I went with my boss to a job market to recruit new employees. There were so many applicants who handed in their resumes that my boss just passed by many of them even without bothering to have a look. But one applicant came up, handed in his resume and said he had a BEC Vantage Certificate. The boss immediately received the resume, read it carefully, and then told the applicant to come next week for an arranged interview. That was the first time I heard about this test and **got to know its value**. So I went back, learned more about the test through the internet, and started to prepare for it in my spare time. I thought if I got the certificate, it would be very helpful in my career promotion or job-hopping.*

How to make more companies recognize the value of BEC certificates?



Impact Issues in China

A male candidate:

*One year ago I went with my boss to a job market to recruit new employees. There were so many applicants who handed in their resumes that my boss just passed by many of them even without bothering to have a look. But one applicant came up, handed in his resume and said he had a BEC Vantage Certificate. The boss immediately received the resume, read it carefully, and then told the applicant to come next week for an arranged interview. That was the first time I heard about this test and got to know its value. So I went back, learned more about the test through the internet, and started to **prepare for it in my spare time**. I thought if I got the certificate, it would be very helpful in my career promotion or job-hopping.*

What kind of support can we provide for test-takers in their test-preparation?



Impact Issues in China

A male candidate:

*One year ago I went with my boss to a job market to recruit new employees. There were so many applicants who handed in their resumes that my boss just passed by many of them even without bothering to have a look. But one applicant came up, handed in his resume and said he had a BEC Vantage Certificate. The boss immediately received the resume, read it carefully, and then told the applicant to come next week for an arranged interview. That was the first time I heard about this test and got to know its value. So I went back, learned more about the test through the internet, and started to prepare for it in my spare time. I thought **if I got the certificate, it would be very helpful in my career promotion or job-hopping.***

What kinds of effects and consequences does a test have on individuals?



Next Phase to Consider and to Do

- How to refine the research questions and instruments to collect data on a nationwide scale?
- What kind of support can we provide for test-takers and other stakeholders?
- In what way can our study inform the organization's marketing and strategic development in China?

References



- Alderson, J and Hamp-Lyons, L (1996) TOEFL preparation courses: a study of washback, *Language Testing* 13 (3), 280-297.
- Alderson, J and Wall, D (1993) Does washback exist? *Applied Linguistics* 14 (2), 115-129.
- Ashton, K, Salamoura, A and Diaz, E (2012) The BEDA impact project: A preliminary investigation of a bilingual programme in Spain, *Research Notes* 50, 34-42.
- Bailey, K (1996) Working for washback: A review of the washback concept in language testing, *Language Testing* 13 (3), 257-279.
- Cheng, L (2005) *Changing Language Teaching through Language Testing: A washback study*, Studies in Language Testing, Volume 21, Cambridge: UCLES/Cambridge University Press.
- Cheng, L and Curtis, A (2004) Washback or backwash: A review of the impact of testing on teaching and learning, in Cheng, L, Watanabe, Y and Curtis, A (Eds.) *Washback in Language Testing: Research Contexts and Methods*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 3-17.
- Green, A (2007) *IELTS Washback in Context: Preparation for academic writing in higher education*, Studies in Language Testing, Volume 25, Cambridge: UCLES/Cambridge University Press.
- Gu, X (2003) Case studies of College English teachers' lessons, *Research in Foreign Languages & Literature* 4, 45-51.
- Gu, X (2004) Trends and problems: Washback studies over the past decade, *Research in Foreign Languages & Literature* 4, 69-89.
- Gu, X (2005) Positive or negative? An empirical study of CET washback on College English teaching and learning in China", *ILTA Online Newsletter* 2.
- Gu, X (2007) *Positive or Negative? – An empirical study of CET washback*, Chongqing: Chongqing University Press.
- Gu, X and Peng, Y (2010) A longitudinal research into College English teachers' perceptions of the CET and its washback effect, *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching* 6, 37-41, 56.
- Gu, X (2011) *A Longitudinal Study of CET Washback*, unpublished manuscript.
- GU, X, Khalifa, H, Yan, Q and Tian, J (2012) A small-scale pilot study investigating the impact of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* in China, *Research Notes* 50, 42-48.
- Gu, X and Saville, N (2012) Impact of *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Preliminary for Schools*-Parents' perspectives in China, *Research Notes* 50, 48-56.
- Gu, X and X Wei (2012) CET washback on Chinese non-English majors' test-taking strategy use, paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching Methodology in China, Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, China, 13-14 April, 2012.



References

- Gu, X, Yang, Z and Liu, X (2012) A longitudinal study of CET Washback on teachers' teaching processes and behaviors: Classroom observation, seminar presented at University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 16 January, 2012.
- Hawkey, R (2006) *Impact Theory and Practice: Studies of the IELTS test and Progetto Lingue 2000*, Studies in Language Testing, Volume 24, Cambridge: UCLES/Cambridge University Press.
- Liu, X and Gu, X (2013) A review of empirical washback studies worldwide over the past two decades, *Foreign Language Assessment and Teaching* 1: 4-17.
- Chambers, L, Elliott, M and Hou, J (2012) The Hebei Impact Project: A study into the impact of Cambridge English exams in the state sector in Hebei province, China, *Research Notes* 50, 20-23.
- Qi, L (2004) *The Intended Washback Effect of the National Matriculation English Test in China: Intentions and Reality*, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Saville, N (2010) Developing a model for investigating the impact of language assessment, *Research Notes* 42, 2-8.
- Saville, N (2012) Applying a model for investigating the impact of language assessment within educational contexts: The Cambridge ESOL approach, *Research Notes* 50, 4-8.
- Shohamy, E, Donitsa-Schmidt, S and Ferman, I (1996) Test impact revisited: washback effect over time, *Language Testing* 13 (3), 298-317.
- University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (2011). Cambridge English Making an Impact. UCLES.
- University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (2012). *Cambridge English: Key for Schools Handbook for Teachers*. UCLES.
- University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (2012). *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools Handbook for Teachers*. UCLES.
- Wall, D (2005) *The Impact of High-stakes Examination on Classroom Teaching: A case study using insights from testing and innovation theory*, Studies in Language Testing, Volume 22, Cambridge: UCLES/Cambridge University Press.
- Wall, D and Horák, T (2011) *The Impact of Changes in the TOEFL Exam on Teaching in a Sample of Countries in Europe: Phase 2, The Role of the Coursebook; Phase 4, Describing Change*, unpublished manuscript.
- Watanabe, Y (1996) Does grammar translation come from the entrance examination? Preliminary findings from classroom-based research, *Language Testing* 13 (3), 318-333.
- Watanabe, Y (2004) Methodology in washback studies, in Cheng, L, Watanabe, Y and Curtis, A (Eds.) *Washback in Language Testing: Research Contexts and Methods*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 19-36.



Acknowledgements

Cambridge Team

Nick Saville
Rebecca Stevens
Hanan Khalifa
Steven Miller
Gerry Delaney
Jim So
Karen Ashton
Meizi He
Fengju Lu
Fang Wang

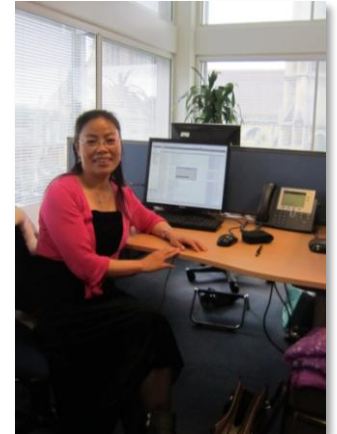
Chongqing Team

Lu Zhao
Yanqi Huang
Yuehua Yang
Weidong Qi
Jian Tang
Zhiqiang Yang
Wei Xiao
Xiaohua Liu
Qiaozhen Yan
Ji Yang



Thank you

**Contact
information**



0086-13983732737



0086-23-65102602



xiangdonggu@263.net