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The Washback Effect of HSK on Students' Learning and Teachers' Teaching: Implications for Chinese Language Education

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Abstract: This study uses the literature review method to explore the washback effect of HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) on students' learning and teachers' teaching. It is found that HSK has washback effect on both learning and teaching, and the positive effect on both is greater than the negative ones. In general, the washback effect on learning is more significant than that on teaching, and the motivation for taking the test, the perception of HSK, the difficulty of the test and the regulations of colleges and universities are the main factors that affect the intensity of the washback effect. Based on the above findings, this paper puts forward feasible suggestions for students, teachers and the test itself, in order to give full play to the positive washback effect of HSK on Chinese teaching and learning, and promote the development both of test and teaching. In addition, at the end of the paper, the limitations of this study and the prospect of future research are put forward.

Keywords: Chinese Learning, Chinese Teaching, HSK, Language Test, Washback Effect.

1. Introduction

With the rapid improvement of China's comprehensive national strength, interest in learning Chinese continues to grow around the world. HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) is a national standardized test with high promotion degree and large scale, which aims to test the ability of testees whose first language is not Chinese to use Chinese for communication in life, study and work. In November 2009, China reformed the original HSK and launched the new HSK, which was officially implemented worldwide in 2010 (the HSK mentioned in this study refers to the new HSK). Nowadays, HSK test scores have become an important indicator for foreign students applying for degrees and short-term further studies in China, and more and more government departments and multinational corporations have included HSK certificates as a reference basis for recruitment, evaluation, and promotion. The washback effect is of great significance. On the one hand, it is an integral part of construct validity as a part of the after-effect of the test (Messick, 1989), and it is also one of the indicators to evaluate the quality of the test. On the other hand, tests are closely integrated with teaching, for it is not only a means of teaching evaluation, but also a part of education reform to promote teaching (Petrie, 1987). This concept prompts people to pay attention to the influence of tests on teaching, that is, the washback effect. Research into the washback effect of language tests has been well established for other widely recognized exams, such as the TOEFL, IELTS, and Cambridge English exams. However, the HSK, despite its significant role in promoting Chinese as a global language, has been relatively underexplored in terms of its washback effect. This gap in research is particularly evident in how the HSK affects teachers' instructional practices, students' learning strategies, and the overall educational environment in China and abroad. Moreover, as the global demand for Chinese language proficiency grows, understanding and mitigating any negative washback effects becomes increasingly important for the optimization of both the exam and the educational practices that support it. By investigating the washback effects of the HSK, this study aims to contribute to the improvement of the test's design and implementation, ensuring that it serves not only as a valid measure of language proficiency but also as a constructive force in promoting effective and engaging Chinese language teaching. The findings of this research will offer insights for educators, policymakers, and test developers, providing actionable recommendations for harnessing the positive impacts of the HSK while minimizing any unintended consequences that may hinder educational progress.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Washback Effect

To study the washback effect of language testing, it is necessary to understand its definition first. Generally speaking, the washback effect refers to the impact of language tests on teaching and learning, involving testees, teachers, schools and even the whole society. Pearson (1988:98) pointed out that, since tests are usually placed at the end of a course, the effect is seen to run in a backward direction. Therefore, it is called "washback" or "backwash" in English. For a long time, scholars have tried to define the washback effect from various aspects.

2.1.1. Definition of Washback Effect

Buck (1988) believed that teachers and students will design classroom activities according to the requirements of the test, if the test is very important to students, or the passing rate of the test becomes the benchmark to evaluate the success of the teacher's teaching. There will be a washback effect, which may be positive or negative. Hughes (1989) defined the washback-effect as the impact of language testing on teaching and learning. He also distinguishes between two types of it, positive and negative. Shohamy (1992) argued that the washback effect is the use of external language tests to influence and facilitate students' language learning at school, which occurs because of the strong authoritative power of the

external tests. Alderson & Wall's (1993) first offered a more formal definition of the washback effect in 1993 in the article entitled Does Washback Exist? They thought tests influenced teachers and students to do things that they would do because of the test. Cohen (1994) proposed a broader definition, describing the washback effect as the impact of testing on educational practices and beliefs. Bachman & Palmer (1996) stated that the washback effect refers to a series of influences brought by language tests on language teaching, including influences on teachers, testees, society and the education system. Prodromou (1995) saw the washback effect as the effect of testing on teachers' teaching methods, because teachers' teaching is primarily concerned with the content involved in the tests. Messick (1996) viewed both test-related effects on teaching and learning as washback effects. Hamp-Lyons (1997) suggested that washback effects are the effects of testing on teaching behavior, learning behavior, education system and other test risk-takers in the education process. Gu Xiangdong (2007) proposed the concept of the washback effect in both a broad and a narrow sense, the former refers to the impact of testing on the whole society, and the latter refers to the impact of testing on teaching and learning.

2.1.2. Classification of Washback Effect

Different researchers have different views on the classification of washback effect. According to the previous studies, the washback effect can be divided into strong and weak, expected and unexpected, instrumental and ideological, implicit and explicit, general and specific, positive and negative, etc.

Cheng (1997) introduced the concept of "washback-effect strength", that is, the degree of washback-effect of testing on certain aspects of teaching and learning. If a test produces a strong washback effect, it will have a noticeable impact on the participants involved in the test, otherwise the impact is small or insignificant. The washback effects are also categorized as expected effect and unexpected effect. Expected effect usually refers to the washback effect expected by the test designer or relevant researchers, which is generally positive. An unexpected effect is the unanticipated effect, which can be positive or negative. Generally speaking, no matter what kind of washback effect the test produces, it can't purely change the teaching, because washback-effect is also affected by personal, environmental and other factors.

This paper focuses on the positive and negative washback effects. According to Heaton (1988), the positive washback effect refers to the facilitating effect of tests on teaching and learning, as opposed to the negative effect, which is the hindering effect of tests on teaching and learning. Positive and negative washback effects can co-exist in language testing and may have contradictory impacts. For example, the same test may have a positive effect on one aspect of teaching and learning, but a negative effect on others; similarly, the same test may have a positive effect on some people, but a negative effect on others.

2.1.3. Model of Washback Effect

In the 1990s, academics concentrated on various theoretical studies of the washback effect, the more prominent are mainly the following five:

(1) Alderson & Wall's Washback Hypothesis

Alderson & Wall (1993) first made a comprehensive and in-depth discussion on the washback effect of language testing, and they put forward 15 washback effect hypotheses. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons (1996) added a hypothesis on the basis of these 15 points: Tests will have different degrees and types of washback effects on different teachers and students. In this paper, they are rearranged and disrupted the order into three categories: Influence on Teachers, Influence on Learners, Influence scope, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Alderson & Wall's Washback Hypothesis

1) Tests affect teaching.	Influence on Teachers
3)Tests affect what teachers teach.	
4) Tests affect how teachers teach.	
7) Tests affect the rate and sequence of teaching.	
9) Tests affect the degree and depth of teaching.	
11) Tests affects attitudes toward teaching and learning.	
2) Tests affect learning.	Influence on Learners
5) Tests affect what students learn.	
6) Tests affect how students learn.	
8) Tests affect the rate and sequence of learning.	
10) Tests affects the degree and depth of learning.	
11) Tests affects attitudes toward teaching and learning.	
12) Tests that have important consequences will have washback.	Influence scope
13) Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback effect.	
14) Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers.	
15) Tests only have a washback effect on students and teachers, not on others.	
16) Tests will have different degrees and types of washback effects on different teachers and students.	

It can be seen that Alderson & Wall paid attention to teaching and learning from the micro level, which has set out an idea for the study of the washback effect, and laid a certain foundation for later researchers to conduct empirical studies in this field.

(2) Hughes's "PPP" Washback Effect Model

Hughes (1989) proposed a three-part model of washback effect (3P or PPP), that is, a "Participants-Process-Product" model, which represents the mechanism of washback effect. Participants refer to learners, teachers, test administrators, test material editors, syllabus makers, publishers, etc. Process refers to the behaviors of participants in the learning process, such as the improvement of teaching methods, the formulation of plans, the compilation of textbooks, etc. Product refers to the results obtained by the participants after taking the test, such as the knowledge, skills and quality of learning. The breakthrough of this model is to realize the complexity of the washback effect, which involves many participants and processes, and even includes the entire education system. The revelation of the PPP model for us is that the study of the washback effect should not only consider unilateral factors, but should take into account all aspects in as comprehensive and detailed as possible. Gu Xiangdong (2007) proposed the "4P" model (Participants-Perceptions-Processes-Products) by adding participants' perceptions on the basis of the "PPP" model. He believed that participants' cognition and opinions on the test would have a certain impact. Simply put, the test will first have an impact on participants' perceptions or attitudes, and the process will also be influenced by such perceptions and attitudes, which will ultimately affect the results of the teaching and learning.

(3) Bailey's Washback Effect Model

Since the hypothesis of washback effect lacks an internal mechanism to play its role, Bailey (1996) conducted an in-depth study based on the views of Alderson &Wall and Hughes et al., and built a basic model of washback effect. This model reflects the complexity of the washback effect and describes the interplay between the test itself, the participants, the process, and the results. He pointed out that the test directly affects different participants, and the washback effect on each participant is different; the influence between the test and the participants is mutual. In addition to the interaction among the test itself, the participants, the process and the results, there is also a relationship between the results, which will in turn affect the test.

(4) Shih's Student Learning Washback Effect Model

Shih (2007) explored the factors contributing to the production of the student learning washback effect in terms of external factors, internal factors and test factors and proposed a model of the student learning washback effect. External factors include social economy, school education, family, colleagues, friends, individual factors, etc. Internal factors include individual characteristics, individual differences, and individual perceptions of the test, etc. Test factors involve twelve aspects: test risk, the immediate importance of the test, the extent to which the test deviates from current learning practices, the difficulty of the test relative to the student's ability level, the omission of the test, the content of the test, the structure of the test, the nature of the skills being tested, the status of the language being tested, the form of the test, the skill being tested, and the purpose of the test. The model describes the direct washback effect of these three factors on student learning, and also takes into account the indirect washback effect of the interactions between these three factors.

(5) Green's Washback Model

Green (2007) incorporated the intensity and direction into his model of the washback effect. According to Green, test design, such as test form, content and complexity, is related to the washback effect of test. However, focusing solely on test design and neglecting to reflect the comprehensiveness of the competence to be tested will have a negative washback effect. Green also suggested that the degree of risk involved in the test affected the nature of the washback effect, with the more important the test is perceived to be by the participant, the more likely it was to have a strong washback effect, while the opposite is not true. If the test is too easy or too difficult, it will not cause a strong washback effect. But if the test is perceived by the testee as challenging and passable with some practice, then this kind of test will have a strong washback effect. At the same time, the view of the test designer on the test results also affects the direction of washback effect.

2.2. Previous Research on the Washback Effect

In the 1990s, some researchers scrambled to carry out various theoretical studies on the washback effect. The washback effect models proposed by Alderson & Wall, Hughes, Bailey, Shih and Green were recognized by academics. In addition, Shohamy (1993,1996) proposed the "diagnosis-feedback model" through the empirical research on the washback effect of testing on teachers, students and teaching supervisors. Watanabe (2004) believed that the washback effect can be divided into three parts and five dimensions. The three parts are the scope of the washback effect, the influence of tests on teaching and learning, and the factors affecting the washback effect. The five dimensions to be considered include value, intensity, length, specificity, and intentionality. Watanabe argued that studying the washback effect of any test should take these dimensions into account.

International empirical research on washback effect started early, developed fast, and made some achievements. Alderson & Wall (1993) found that the Sri Lankan O-level English test had both positive and negative washback effects on the teaching content, but had no effect on the teaching methods. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons (1996) found that the TOEFL test had a great influence on the teaching methods and contents of teachers, but due to the different teaching philosophies of the teachers themselves, the degree of effects also different. Green (2007) analyzed the washback effect of the IELTS test in the UK and found that students benefited from exam preparation courses, but there was no significant difference in writing performance compared with students who took other courses, indicating that the impact of exam preparation courses was limited. Jin (2017) investigated the washback effect of TOEIC test on undergraduate students' learning through teaching experiments, and the study showed that test preparation had a favorable impact on students' learning, thereby improving the independent learning of students at different levels. Cholis and Rizqi (2018) studied the washback effect of the Indonesian University Entrance Examination on teaching and learning, and the research showed that the examination had a positive impact on the teaching and learning styles, attitudes and methods, but had a certain negative washback effect on teaching objectives. Maria Larsson (2020) studied the Swedish National Foreign language test and found that the Swedish foreign language speaking test and writing test have positive and negative washback effects on teaching.

In China, most of the research focuses on standardized large-scale English tests such as CET (College English Test)-4 and CET-6, TEM (Test for English Majors)-4 and TEM-8, and College entrance examination English test. Qi Luxia (2004) found that the positive effect of the college entrance examination on English teaching was limited, and some negative phenomena occurred in teaching. Gu Xiangdong (2007) analyzed the impact of CET on English teaching and learning in colleges and universities, and the research showed that the positive washback effect of CET was greater than the negative effect on the whole. Gu Xiangdong, Yang Zhiqiang, and Liu Xiaohua (2013) studied the reform of CET and found that the teaching mode of college English classrooms remained basically unchanged before and after the reform, but CET after the reform had an impact on teaching plans, contents, methods, etc. Dong Manxia (2018) studied the washback effect of College Entrance Examination English test on senior high school English classroom teaching by using log analysis. The results showed that the test had a washback effect on teaching, and the degree and manifestation of the effect were different in different grades, while teachers' perceptions of the test regulated the washback effect. Zhang Hao & Zhang Wenxia (2020) also studied high school English teachers and students, and the results showed that most teachers gave positive evaluation to the washback effect of the college entrance examination English test. Most of the studies used classroom observation, questionnaire survey and interview, and a few studies incorporated log analysis.

In general, the research results on the washback effect of foreign language test provide a research paradigm and

reference significance for the washback study of the new HSK.

2.3. Studies on the Washback Effect of HSK

HSK began to be developed in 1984, was officially implemented in 1990, and was introduced overseas in 1991, playing a positive role in the promotion of Chinese. In order to meet the needs of Chinese language promotion in the new era, the HSK after reform was implemented in November 2009, generally referred to as the new HSK. The new HSK is adjusted to the current level 1-6, and the HSKK (HSK Speaking Test) is also added, which is divided into three levels: elementary, intermediate and advanced. The new HSK puts less emphasis on grammatical knowledge and more emphasis on situational and language use ability.

The attention to the washback effect of HSK began in recent decades. Huang and Li (2010) took international Chinese teachers and international students in China as research objects, and found that HSK had both positive and negative effects on teaching, and put forward several suggestions to improve its positive effects. Huang (2013) found that HSK does have an effect on Chinese learners, and the positive effect is greater than the negative effect. Yang (2016) took students of the Confucius Institute at Kenyatta University as research objects and discussed the main aspects of HSK's impact on students, such as learning methods, strategies and attitudes. Yuan Yuwei (2017) took Chinese language learners in Southern Thailand as the research object and found that HSK level-3 produced different intensities of washback effects on students of different genders, and also had different impacts on different aspects of learning. Chen Qi (2019) took international students from Madagascar in China as the research object, found the co-existence of positive and negative impacts of the test. The former shows that it has a certain guiding effect on students, while the latter shows the phenomenon of exam-oriented learning. Kong Fuyu & Zhang Yanli (2020,2021) conducted empirical and non-empirical studies on the washback effect of HSK, and based on this, proposed an ecological model integrating examination, teaching and learning.

3. An Analysis of the Research Results of the Washback Effect of HSK on Teaching and Learning

This section examines the washback effect of HSK on students' learning and teachers' teaching, analyzes the factors influencing its intensity, and highlights the differences in washback effects across various HSK levels.

3.1. The Washback Effect of HSK on Students' Learning

3.1.1. The Influence of HSK on Chinese Learning

HSK has an impact on students' learning, both positive and negative effects coexist, and the positive effect is greater than the negative effect. The positive washback effect is mainly reflected in the following four aspects: (1) HSK provides students with learning objectives for a period of time, but students do not regard passing HSK as the ultimate goal of Chinese learning. At the same time, the feedback of HSK results makes students more confident in Chinese learning, so the follow-up motivation provided by HSK helps students to study for a long time and constantly improve their Chinese proficiency. (2) HSK affects students' learning attitude and makes students have a more positive attitude towards Chinese learning. Gardner (1976) defined learning attitude as "the persistence of learners to achieve learning goals." The formation of learning attitude involves various complex factors, external factors play a part, but it is mainly influenced by learners' internal learning experience and reflection results. In terms of external factors, HSK is not only given the relevant significance of Chinese achievement and level, but also has social functions such as promotion to higher education and talent selection. Students realize the importance of the test, so they pay attention to it subjectively and are more inclined to adopt a positive learning attitude towards the HSK. Internally, the HSK increases students' enthusiasm for learning Chinese to a certain extent, thus providing lasting intrinsic motivation for Chinese learning. (3) HSK affects students' learning strategies, mainly in terms of learning content, learning plan and learning time. Firstly, students' learning content is more centered on the test, and they adjust their learning plan to learn more relevant contents in order to pass the test. Secondly, students spend more time learning Chinese, actively use real test questions, simulation questions and various supplementary materials for training, and strengthen the study of vocabulary and grammar in the test syllabus. Finally, students will adjust their learning focus and plan according to the deficiencies or strengths found in the test in order to further improve their Chinese language proficiency. (4) HSK has a positive washback effect on students' learning outcomes. After taking the HSK, students' overall Chinese language proficiency as well as their listening, reading and writing skills have been improved to a certain extent.

The negative washback effect is mainly reflected in the following aspects: (1) Some students are too focused on preparing for the test and do not perform well in the daily Chinese class, ignoring the daily Chinese teaching content. The process of preparing for HSK and the pressure of the difficulty of the test made students feel anxious, which weakened their self-confidence and some students lost their motivation to learn. (3) In the process of preparing for the test, some students excessively pursue problem solving skills and ignore language knowledge. Biggs (2001) classified learning methods into deep learning method and shallow learning method, each of which consists of two dimensions: motivation and strategy. Deep learning focuses on long-term learning and development, which is gradual and less influenced by the outside world. However, learners usually adopt shallow learning methods in order to achieve certain learning or examination purposes in a short period of time, which is often utilitarian. Some students, in the process of preparing for HSK, adopt the shallow learning method, which is not conducive to learning Chinese in a gradual and orderly manner.

3.1.2. Factors Influencing the Intensity of the Washback Effect of Students' Learning

Factors affecting the intensity of the washback effect in Chinese learning mainly include: (1) The importance students attach to the HSK. In Green's model of the washback effect, the riskiness of the test plays an important role. The washback effect is stronger if the student considers the test to be very important. Based on the results of many studies and surveys, students generally attach great importance to HSK, and HSK has a strong washback effect on students in general. (2) Students' perception of the difficulty of HSK. Green pointed out in his model that only moderate difficulty and challenging

tests can stimulate strong washback effect. If the difficulty coefficient and distinguishability of the test are reasonable, students have different perceptions of the difficulty and ease of the test, then there will be different washback effects. In general, students perceive the reading part of HSK is more difficult, which indicates that the test is challenging to a certain extent, and has a strong washback effect on students' Chinese learning. (3) Students' familiarity with HSK test questions. The parts of the test that students find difficult are also the parts they are least familiar with. Therefore, different degrees of familiarity with the test will also produce different intensity of washback effect. (4) Students' motivation to take HSK. Learning motivation can be divided into external and internal motivation, and it is usually believed that internal motivation will provide more lasting motivation for students, such as students themselves love Chinese; external motivation is more interfered by external factors, such as applying for scholarships, graduation, job hunting, etc. The motivation of students to take HSK is diversified, and HSK has a greater impact on students with internal motivation.

3.1.3. The Difference of Washback Effect of HSK at Different Levels

There are some differences in the washback effect of HSK on students at different levels. The intensity of the positive washback effect is relatively low at higher levels, especially at Level 6. The reading part of the HSK is the most difficult, and the difficulty gap between level 5 and level 6 is large, resulting in some students losing confidence and enthusiasm for learning in the process of preparing for the test. In contrast, students at the lower levels (levels 1-3) show more significant washback effects than those at the higher levels, and students at HSK level 1 show the least familiarity with the test questions, which may be due to the fact that they take HSK for the first time and are relatively unfamiliar with the test, and this affects the intensity of the washback effect to some extent. HSK Level 2 students show the strongest interest in Chinese learning, and their enthusiasm for Chinese learning gradually decreases with the increase of the level. Students' perception of the difficulty of the test increases with the increase of the level, and the difficulty of the HSK level 1 test is the lowest, which is consistent with the current design concept of HSK. The low-level test reduces the difficulty of the test and the entry threshold to stimulate students' learning interest.

3.2. The Washback Effect of HSK on Teachers' Teaching

3.2.1. The Influence of HSK on Chinese Teaching

In short, HSK has a positive washback effect on teachers' teaching as follows: (1) HSK has a certain guiding effect on teaching and makes the teaching objectives clearer, and at the same time, it is also a "ruler" to measure teaching and provides feedback information for teaching. (2) HSK contributes to the reform of teaching content. Teachers make use of the real test questions to practice and explain in class, which is helpful for teachers to grasp the important and difficult points of Chinese teaching and promote the improvement of students' Chinese proficiency. The negative washback effect is mainly manifested in the fact that teachers believe that HSK will solidify the teaching content, with insufficient training in the communicative function of the language and little cultural content involved. In addition, some teachers believe that HSK does not have much impact on teaching, which suggests that HSK has not yet had a significant impact on teaching on a large scale.

3.2.2. Factors Influencing the Intensity of the Washback Effect of Teachers' Teaching

Teachers' understanding of HSK and the policies and regulations of colleges and universities are the main factors affecting the intensity of teachers' teaching washback effect. This is manifested in the following ways: (1) Teachers' understanding of HSK test syllabus, overall design concept and proficiency standards. Teachers do not conduct in-depth research on the test syllabus and do not understand the test standards, thus it will be difficult for them to take it as one of the due teaching results when teaching the corresponding level of classes, so it is impossible to realize the integration of testing and teaching. Due to the lack of teachers' understanding of this aspect, the washback effect is not significant to a certain extent. (2) Teachers' perceptions of the difficulty of the HSK. Unlike students, teachers perceive that the overall difficulty of HSK is not high, and only level 6 is relatively difficult. Many teachers believe that students' self-study is sufficient to cope with the test, so they only pay attention to the test when students ask test questions, and HSK has little impact on their daily teaching. (3) The HSK is not a high-stakes test for teachers. At present, there is almost no regulation linking students' HSK scores with teachers' assessment in domestic colleges and universities, so the intensity of washback effect on teaching will be affected.

4. Conclusion

The research shows that the HSK has an impact on students' learning process and learning results, the positive washback effect is greater than the negative ones, and the washback effect on lower-level students is stronger than that on higher-level students. Factors affecting the intensity of the washback effect are mainly students' motivation, their perceptions of the test, and the difficulty of the test. The positive effect of HSK on teachers' teaching is greater than the negative effect, but in general, the washback effect is not as significant as that on students' learning. The main influencing factors are teachers' understanding of the test and the policies and regulations of colleges and universities.

According to the research results, this paper puts forward the following suggestions to give full play to the positive washback effect of the new HSK test and restrain its negative effect as much as possible, so as to truly achieve the purpose of promoting learning and teaching of Chinese by test. As for Chinese learning, learners should have a reasonable understanding of HSK, set up a correct view of the test and treat it correctly. They should clarify their learning objectives, adjust their learning behaviors appropriately, adjust their mindset positively, and dispel their excessive anxiety. They should not see passing the exam as the only goal of learning Chinese, but they can use the HSK test results to check for deficiencies and fill in the gaps, so as to pursue greater progress and guide future learning. As for Chinese teaching, teachers should deepen their understanding of the design concept of HSK and clarify the test standards of HSK, so as to help students establish correct learning goals. Teachers also need to appropriately expand the teaching content, adopt a variety of teaching methods to enhance students' interest in learning Chinese and improve their language application ability. Regarding the development of HSK, a more detailed test syllabus and corresponding proficiency standards should be formulated, and the difficulty of different types of

questions at the same level should be balanced as much as possible, while the content of the test should be as close as possible to daily life.

This study is only an inductive summary of the results of many previous studies, and the analysis of articles is not detailed enough, mostly summarizing common characteristics and lacking comparisons between different individuals. In addition, this study analyses the washback effect of HSK as a whole, and lacks the comparison of the washback effect studies among different levels of HSK tests, which is rather one-sided. Future research can continue to improve on this basis, and pay more attention to policies and managers to expand the backwash effect of HSK to a more macro level.

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