



The Washback Effects of the Thai General Aptitude Test (TGAT1) (English Communication) on Teaching in the Upper Secondary School Level in the Bangkok Area

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ABSTRACT

Despite increasing attention to assessment-driven instruction in Thailand, the mechanisms and extent of the washback effects of the Thailand General Aptitude Test (English for Communication), or TGAT1, on English language teaching at the upper secondary level remain underexplored. This study investigated the washback effects of TGAT1, which serves as a university entrance examination, on English language

	teaching practices. A mixed-methods research design was employed. One hundred upper secondary school English teachers responded to a questionnaire, and 17 of them were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that TGAT1 notably influenced teachers to prioritize test demands. Teachers put substantial effort into developing teaching materials and adapting instructional strategies to meet test requirements and motivate students to improve their English proficiency. Moreover, teachers' beliefs and perceptions of the TGAT1 were found to mediate the relationship between the test and their teaching practices. The study also underscores the importance of enhancing teachers' assessment literacy to promote more positive washback effects and highlights the necessity of integrating critical thinking into the test design. Keywords: TGAT1, washback, university entrance examination, English language teaching, assessment literacy
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Introduction

High-stakes tests are commonly used worldwide for admissions to educational institutions. Consequently, they have been shown to exert different types of washback effects on various stakeholders (Xie & Jia, 2025). The term washback generally refers to the intended or unintended consequences of tests on teaching and learning. Prior research has traditionally associated washback as having negative, rather than positive effects (Belkbir, 2023).

In the Thai educational context, university admissions have historically relied on high-stakes standardized tests as gatekeeping mechanisms (Pensiri & Adunyarittigun, 2019). The O-NET, introduced by the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), functioned as a mandatory national examination for students in Grades 6, 9, and 12 since 2006 and also served as an admission requirement for Grade 12 students. However, this requirement was discontinued in 2022, and O-NET is now optional for Grade 12 students. Currently, the Thai General Aptitude Test (TGAT) and Thai Professional Aptitude Test (TPAT), administered via the Thai University Central Admission System (TCAS), form the basis for university selection across four admission rounds. Among these, TGAT1, which attracts over 260,000 test takers annually, is the key criterion for admission to university.

Studies on university entrance examinations yield many aspects of washback on the educational system in Thai contexts. Since getting a high

score on the admission examinations is the ultimate goal of students who want to get admitted to a good university, research has shown that these students prioritized exam preparation over classroom learning (Zhang et al., 2023). This stresses students (Phadyen, 2020). On the other hand, teachers have been forced to focus on teaching to the test rather than helping students develop their communicative competence because they feel pressured to help students achieve high scores on the examinations (Imsa-ard, 2020). It has become a common phenomenon that teachers teaching Grade 12 students spend the academic year's last semester reviewing and drilling to prepare students for the university entrance examinations (Huang & Zeng, 2025). Obviously, university entrance examinations have had substantial washback effects on the education system.

At present, students wishing to study at Thai public universities need to take the Thai General Aptitude Test (TGAT), a high-stakes test initiated in 2022. TGAT is a recent change to the university entrance examinations in Thailand, yet there is little understanding of its washback effects on teaching. This study aims to fill the research gap by focusing on the effects of TGAT1 on teaching Grade 12 students in the Bangkok metropolitan area. The selection of Bangkok as the research site is justified on the grounds that schools in metropolitan areas are subject to unique pressures, especially around high-stakes tests. These schools are often judged on students' test results, school rankings, and university admission rates. Furthermore, expectations from parents and administrators may strongly influence teachers' instructional practices, with the primary aim of helping students perform well in high-stakes tests. In addition, Bangkok is one of the primary test venues for TGAT1, accounting for 34 out of 199 centers across the country in 2023. Consequently, investigating the washback effects of a high-stakes test such as TGAT1 in Bangkok is appropriate. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question: Does TGAT1 (English Communication) have washback effects on teaching? If so, to what extent? The merits of this study lie in its contribution to understanding how the washback effects of TGAT1 shape teaching practices in Thai high schools. These insights can inform improvements in instructional strategies and guide teacher professional development by identifying key mediating factors influencing the nature and extent of test-driven teaching.

Understanding Washback Effects

Washback refers to a phenomenon where tests generate various effects, particularly on classroom practices. A related concept is *impact*, which refers to the broader effects of tests on individual test takers, educational systems, and society beyond the classroom (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Washback can be either positive (beneficial) or negative (harmful) (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019; Porter-Szucs et al., 2025). Positive washback, illustrated by measurement-driven instruction, emerges when teachers' and learners' favorable attitude towards a test motivate collaborative efforts towards shared and individual goals. Likewise, positive washback arises when classroom writing tasks are aligned with those assessed in a writing test. In such cases, the test supports and reinforces teaching and learning. Essentially, positive washback is achieved when testing aligns with the skills and abilities developed through instruction. In contrast, negative washback occurs when tests hinder the development of learners' language skills. This often results in misalignment between test objectives and instructional goals (Rahman et al., 2021). For example, tests may lead teachers to prioritize test-taking strategies over skill development. High-stakes tests can cause teachers to deviate from the curriculum in terms of content, instructional approaches, materials, and classroom assessment in order to improve students' test performance.

Content of Teaching

Content of teaching refers to the situation in which a test influences what is taught and how it is taught in the classroom. This may include factors like the materials used for teaching. The key aspects of washback effects on content of teaching include curriculum alignment, materials used, and the focus of the subject matter.

Several findings from washback studies have shown both positive and negative effects of tests on the teaching content (Rahman et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2023). A test can narrow the curriculum and lead teachers to skip topics they believe are unnecessary (Rahman et al., 2021). Teachers may focus on teaching grammar, using past papers as learning material, and aligning teaching goals with test demands (Ahmad et al., 2025). The integration of higher-order thinking skills is lacking because such skills are not perceived as being tested in high-stakes tests (Khan et al., 2025). When this situation happens, the teaching content is forced to align with only the test format and test objectives, but ignores the curriculum objectives to develop students' language proficiency. In contrast, a test can help teachers improve students' learning. When teachers see the connections between the test content and the course content, they can reinforce learning strategies (Rahman et al., 2023). Additionally, a test can lead to curriculum alignment when teachers understand the curriculum objectives and test objectives, creating a balance between teaching and test preparation (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022).

Teaching Methods

Teaching methods involve techniques and strategies used by teachers to facilitate their teaching and help students achieve learning outcomes. They include lectures, inquiry-based learning, game-based learning, individual learning, group learning, class discussion, among others. The impact of tests on teaching methods can be seen in how teachers organize their classrooms to promote learning.

As teachers are always concerned about their students' learning and test results, it is difficult for them to avoid using methods that help students perform well on the test (Ahmad et al., 2025). Therefore, it is important for research to provide deeper insights into the extent to which a test induces washback effects on teaching methods. In the worst-case scenario, the teachers teach specific test items and dedicate class time to boost high test scores (Belkbir, 2023). Teachers might heavily use drilling, rote memorization, and decontextualization for test preparation. Teachers focus on a teacher-centered approach, so students have restricted opportunities to engage in class activities. This limits students' learning experience. In contrast, a test might motivate teachers to learn and apply more effective instructional approaches to promote students' language learning.

Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions

Teacher beliefs and perceptions refer to an individual's attitudes, assumptions, and judgements towards teaching and test preparation. In recent years, washback studies have focused on how teachers' beliefs and perceptions play a role in inducing washback effects (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2024; Wang, 2010).

Research has investigated various aspects of teacher beliefs and perceptions that contribute to washback on teaching, such as attitudes toward the test (Imsa-ard, 2020; Rahman et al., 2021), educational policies (Polpo, 2021), and effective teaching and test preparation practices (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2024). In addition, it also reveals that teacher beliefs function as a mediator to induce positive washback effects on teaching and avoid negative washback effects. Research also shows that teachers who perceive tests as misaligned with the curriculum may focus their teaching solely on test demands (Rahman et al., 2021). Teachers upholding test ethics are likely to be concerned about test fairness. They prioritize fair assessment and strive to ensure students are evaluated equitably when administering a test. They also aim to maintain a balance between teaching and testing, rather than teaching to the test (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2024). Therefore, it is evident

that teachers' beliefs and perceptions play a crucial role in understanding the washback effects on teaching.

Assessment Literacy

Assessment literacy involves the range of skills and knowledge required of teachers and other stakeholders to handle language assessment and use assessment information to support teaching and learning (Fulcher, 2012). It is closely associated with washback since teachers' assessment literacy can determine their interpretation of test demands and ability to translate them into meaningful classroom practices. Teachers' better understanding of tests is likely to produce more positive washback. With stronger assessment literacy, teachers tend to regard tests as tools that support rather than evaluate teaching and learning. However, it is worth noting that assessment literacy does not directly shape their instructional decision-making, as teachers' beliefs and perceptions mediate actual classroom practices (Liang et al., 2025).

Research Methodology

The study implemented an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach where quantitative data were first collected and examined, and then qualitative data were collected and examined based on the quantitative results. This method cross-checks the overall findings in light of the connections among teaching, TGAT1, and its washback effects.

Participants

Based on stratified random sampling from approximately a total of 600-700 secondary school English teachers in Bangkok's two service areas, the participants constituted 100 English teachers from secondary schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office Bangkok 1 and Secondary Educational Service Area Office Bangkok 2. These regional offices, under Thailand's Ministry of Education, administer secondary education within specific districts of Bangkok, including Thonburi, Phasicharoen, Bangkok Noi, Bangkok Yai, Phrakhanong, among others. Randomly selected from both private and public schools, the participants joined the study voluntarily and completed a questionnaire. From this sample, 17 teachers were purposively selected for interviews and classroom observations based on two criteria: (1) having at least five years of teaching experience at the Grade 12 level, and (2) demonstrating familiarity with TGAT1, allowing them to share insights on how they implemented test

results in planning their instruction. Table 1 presents demographic information about the survey participants:

Table 1

Profile of the Survey Participants

Characteristics		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	42	42
	Female	52	52
	Prefer not to say	6	6
Age	20 - 30	45	45
	31- 40	35	35
	41 - 50	12	12
	51 - 60	8	8
Educational level	Bachelor's degree	61	61
	Master's degree	33	33
	Doctoral degree	6	6
Bachelor's degree major	English	33	33
	Education	8	8
	English education	53	53
	Others	6	6
Master's degree specialization	English	12	30.77
	Teaching English, English education	14	35.90
	Curriculum and instruction	4	10.26
	Educational administration	4	10.26
	Others	5	12.81
Doctoral degree specialization	English Education, English as an International Language, or Teaching English	4	66.67
	English or English Language Studies	1	16.67
	Non-formal Education	1	16.67
Level of language assessment literacy (as rated by the participant)	High	13	13
	Moderate	56	56
	Low	31	31
Experience in teaching English at upper secondary school level	Less than 5 years	40	40
	Between 5 and 10 years	32	32
	More than 10 years	28	28

As illustrated in Table 1, the teachers had diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from a bachelor's degree to a doctoral degree. Among those with bachelor's degrees, 53% specialized in English education and 33% in English. For teachers with master's degrees, 35.9% specialized in teaching English or English education, and 30.77% specialized in English. Among doctoral degree holders, 66.64% specialized in English education, English as an International Language, or teaching English. Only 13% of teachers self-reported a high level of understanding of assessment literacy, while 53% and 31% reported moderate and low levels, respectively. More than half of the teachers had over five years of experience teaching English at the upper secondary school level.

Research Instruments

The following research instruments were implemented to investigate the washback effects of TGAT1 on teaching: a questionnaire, an interview, and classroom observations.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was implemented to elicit Grade 12 teachers' awareness of the washback effects of TGAT1 on teaching, using a 5-point Likert Scale. The questionnaire items were developed from Shih's washback model of teaching (2009) and research findings from Cheng (1997), Lunrasri (2014), Phadyen (2020), and Polpo (2021). The questionnaire comprised two parts. The first part included 12 items collecting teachers' demographic information. The second part had 34 items measuring teachers' awareness of washback effects of TGAT1 on teaching. This part was divided into 3 subsections: content of teaching (17 items), teaching methods (8 items), and perceptions and beliefs (8 items). To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items, the researchers asked three language testing and assessment experts to validate the questionnaire using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, based on a sample of 30 participants with characteristics similar to those of the study sample ($\alpha = 0.93$). The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the study.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were implemented to elicit in-depth information into washback effects and how the teachers TGAT1 affected their teaching. The interview guide had 11 items that were developed from

Shih's washback model of teaching (2009) and research findings from Cheng (1997), Lunrasri (2014), Phadyen (2020), and Polpo (2021). Using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), the interview questions were validated by three language testing and assessment experts. The interviews took place immediately after the participants had completed the questionnaires.

Classroom Observation

A classroom observation design was implemented over three rounds to investigate the washback effects of the TGAT1 test. Four observers were trained before the actual observations and provided with a list of observation guidelines. The observation timeline was strategically structured around the TGAT1 administration on December 10, 2023: Round 1 occurred prior to the test (November–December 2023), Round 2 took place immediately after (January 2024), and Round 3 was conducted in the following semester (June 2024). Each observation session lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes, during which the researchers took detailed field notes on classroom activities, classroom atmosphere, instructional content, and teaching approaches. To mitigate the Hawthorne effect, the observations were conducted repeatedly over an extended period, allowing teachers to become more accustomed to the researchers' presence. In addition, to examine changes within the same classroom over time, each researcher was assigned to observe the same teacher on each occasion. The researchers also maintained a non-participatory, unobtrusive role in the classroom to minimize disruption to normal teaching practices. This design enabled the researchers to capture potential washback effects of TGAT1 on classroom instruction. The researchers planned to observe six teachers on three occasions; however, only three teachers granted permission to observe all three rounds of observation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was divided into two parts. The quantitative data were analyzed and presented in the form of means and standard deviations to illustrate connections between the test and teaching. The questionnaire data were analyzed to elicit teachers' awareness of washback effects of TGAT1 on teaching content, teaching methods, as well as perceptions and beliefs of TGAT1. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024). We familiarized ourselves with the transcripts of the interviews and classroom observations, and field notes by reading them multiple times until we internalized the essence of the transcripts. Then, we developed themes through several rounds of discussion on their connections. We asked two university lecturers, both expert in

language teaching and testing to validate the coding. They were asked to attend training on the coding system and subsequently code 10% of the entire transcripts independently. Next, the coded data from the two coders and the first author were analyzed using Fleiss' kappa. There was an almost perfect agreement between the coders' judgment, with a kappa value of 0.833.

Findings

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data addresses the following research question: Does TGAT1 (English Communication) have washback effects on teaching, and if so, to what extent? The findings reveal that TGAT1 influences English teaching at the upper secondary level (Grade 12), particularly in terms of teaching content, instructional methods, and teachers' perceptions and beliefs.

Content of Teaching

Content of teaching refers to the subject matter, lessons, or skills that teachers plan and deliver to help students achieve the learning goals outlined in the curriculum and prepare for TGAT1. Teaching content includes a variety of competencies that students need to learn and master, along with the instructional materials that teachers use to support their learning.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviation, and Level of Agreement Regarding Teachers' Awareness of Washback Effects of TGAT1 on Content of Teaching

Teachers' Awareness of Washback Effects of TGAT1	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level*
Content of Teaching			
1. The lessons in grade 12 (Mathayom 6) mostly aim at preparing students for taking TGAT1 (English subject).	3.33	1.03	Moderate
2. The tested content in TGAT1 (English subject) is relevant to the curriculum of the upper secondary school designated by the Ministry of Education.	3.13	0.95	Moderate
3. I include the content expected to be tested on TGAT1 into my lessons.	3.91	0.83	High
4. My lessons are consistent with the scope and sequence of the textbooks that have been used for teaching the 12th grade students.	3.69	1.00	High
5. The content of TGAT1 is consistent with that in the English textbooks that you have been using for teaching the 12th grade students.	3.18	1.04	Moderate
6. My English lessons follow the contents and skills tested	3.57	0.91	High

Teachers' Awareness of Washback Effects of TGAT1	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level*
in TGAT1.			
7. My lessons aim to help my students increase their scores on TGAT1.	3.74	0.91	High
8. In my English classes, I focus on contents and skills tested in TGAT1 i.e., vocabulary, grammar, speaking and reading skills.	3.58	1.06	High
9. I understand the underlying concepts of TGAT1.	3.52	0.93	High
10. I need to understand the test specifications of TGAT1 in order to plan my lessons and instruction.	4.04	0.83	High
11. Teaching test-taking strategies in classrooms can increase test scores on TGAT1.	4.13	0.77	High
12. I create supplementary learning material to help my students develop skills tested in TGAT1 (speaking and reading skills).	3.81	0.80	High
13. I create supplementary learning materials to help my students learn grammatical knowledge that could be tested in TGAT1.	3.75	0.90	High
14. I create supplementary learning materials to help my students improve their reading skills.	3.85	0.78	High
15. I create supplementary learning materials to help my students improve their speaking skills.	3.45	1.07	High
16. TGAT1 affects my instructional plan and lessons, which need to cover all contents prescribed in the Basic Educational Core Curriculum B.E. 2551.	3.53	0.89	High
17. I need to provide my students with tutorial courses for TGAT1.	3.67	0.94	High

* The means were interpreted as follows: very low in the point range of 1.00 – 1.80, low 1.81 – 2.60, moderate 2.61 – 3.40, high 3.41 – 4.20, and very high 4.21 – 5.00.

As shown in Table 2, the teachers had a high level of agreement with most statements regarding the washback effects of TGAT1 on the content of teaching. Most teachers reported being aware of test-taking strategies ($\bar{x}$ = 4.13, SD = 0.77), understanding the TGAT1 test specifications ($\bar{x}$ = 4.04, SD = 0.83), and being familiar with the expected content of TGAT1 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.91, SD = 0.83). Indeed, the teachers were aware of the selection and use of supplementary learning materials in classrooms to enhance students' English proficiency. They created supplementary learning materials to develop skills tested in the test ($\bar{x}$ = 3.81, SD = 0.80), especially reading ($\bar{x}$ = 3.85, SD = 0.78), speaking ($\bar{x}$ = 3.45, SD = 1.07), and grammatical knowledge ($\bar{x}$ = 3.75, SD = 0.90). The teachers also followed the scope and sequence of textbooks being used for teaching Grade 12 students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.69, SD = 1.00) in accordance with the basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008).

Excerpt 1

The problem was that students couldn't remember vocabulary in TGAT1... That's why I would add vocabulary taken from the previous papers of TGAT1 for students.

(T2, interview, 23 November 2023)

As indicated by Excerpt 1, the interviews and classroom observations reveal the intended washback of TGAT1 on teaching, particularly the teaching content. 13 out of 17 teachers (76.47%) reported they mainly emphasized grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension lessons in the Grade 12 curriculum because these would be tested in TGAT1. They would also focus on teaching test-taking strategies such as allocating time effectively, using context clues, and skimming/scanning. Observations indicated that teachers created supplementary learning materials by integrating reading passages and vocabulary lists from previous test papers, while embedding grammar points within the readings to enhance students' chances of achieving high scores on TGAT1. In interviews, the teachers also reported developing learning materials aligned with the test format to familiarize students with it. For instance, these materials included test-like questions such as text completion and multiple-choice items to support the learning of grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, they noted that their lessons primarily focused on developing students' grammatical knowledge and reading skills. These practices clearly reflect strategic efforts to maximize students' performance on the test.

Furthermore, 5 out of 17 interviewees (29.41%) reported that Thai and foreign teachers were assigned different English teaching roles: Thai teachers focused on teaching grammar and reading skills, whereas foreign teachers taught speaking and listening skills. The analysis reveals that the Thai teachers prioritized teaching receptive skills over the development of speaking and writing skills in classrooms (See Excerpt 2). They also reported that emphasizing teaching productive skills would prevent them from covering all planned content within the available timeframe.

Excerpt 2

...I was responsible for teaching grammar and vocabulary... Foreign teachers would teach listening and speaking skills. The reason why we did this because it was easy for lesson planning in one semester. Otherwise, students would learn the same lessons twice.

(T15, interview, 7 December 2023)

Teaching Methods

Teaching methods refer to the instructional techniques, strategies, and approaches that teachers use to help students achieve their learning outcomes and prepare for TGAT1.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviation, and Level of Agreement Regarding Teachers' Awareness of Washback Effects of TGAT1 on Teaching Methods

Teachers' Awareness of Washback Effects of TGAT1	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level
Teaching Methods			
18. In my English classes, I use previous TGAT1 test papers to help my students perform well and get familiar with the test.	3.67	1.07	High
19. TGAT1 significantly impacts my instruction more than the curriculum or textbooks.	3.55	0.98	High
20. I adapt or change my pedagogical practices in my English class to help my students succeed in TGAT1.	3.62	0.81	High
21. In my English classes, I need to adjust or change my pedagogical practices because my students have to take TGAT1.	3.75	0.76	High
22. TGAT1 makes me apply new teaching approaches to help my students achieve their learning goals.	3.78	0.87	High
23. I set aside time for preparing my students for TGAT1.	3.65	0.93	High
24. In my English classes, I spend time reviewing the contents and skills that are more likely to appear on TGAT1.	3.39	0.94	Moderate
25. In my English classes, I spend time on classroom activities that help my students improve their English proficiency such as listening and speaking activities and reading activities.	3.64	0.97	High

Table 3 shows that teachers were highly aware of the washback effects of TGAT1 on teaching methods. While they devoted time to classroom activities aimed at improving students' English proficiency ($\bar{x} = 3.64$, $SD = 0.97$), they allocated time to preparing students for TGAT1 ($\bar{x} = 3.65$, $SD = 0.93$). More importantly, they highlighted the significance of aligning their instruction with the assessment demands. They prioritized applying new teaching methods ($\bar{x} = 3.78$, $SD = 0.87$) and adjusting their practices ($\bar{x} = 3.75$, $SD = 0.76$) to help students succeed in TGAT1. They agreed that their pedagogical practices were developed to prepare students for TGAT1 ($\bar{x} =$

3.62, SD = 0.81). They also used previous TGAT1 test papers to familiarize the students with the test ($\bar{x}$ = 3.67, SD = 1.07).

Excerpt 3

When I prepared students for TGAT1, I gave lectures and introduced games in relation to particular lessons. During lecture, I would show students examples of sentences and explain how to use them. I used games after that as an exercise, so they would think that it was a game, not a lesson.

(T12, interview 1, 29 November 2023)

The analysis of the interview and classroom observations shows that the teachers developed their teaching methods to prepare students for TGAT1. Of the 17 teachers, 12 (70.58%) applied new teaching approaches (e.g., gamification, vocabulary notebooks), adapted their practices (e.g., using group work, turning practice tests into games, and using quizzes), and incorporated previous TGAT1 test papers to enhance student learning and help them achieve their goals. The main reason for adjusting their teaching practices was that they wanted to reinforce test content in an engaging way. For example, a classroom observation noted a teacher not just administering a multiple-choice vocabulary quiz, but also engaging with students and asking them to reflect on their choices. The findings further reveal that the frequency of test paper usage increased in the period leading up to the test. Therefore, the teachers appeared to design classroom activities that reflected the test tasks. Notably, these methods were both creative and pedagogically sound adaptations aimed at enhancing student learning within the TGAT1 framework. Furthermore, such approaches motivated students to commit more to their learning, as revealed by their engagement with the simulated test items.

Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs

Teachers' perceptions and beliefs refer to their orientation, and stances towards students' learning in the curriculum and test preparation.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviation, and Level Agreement Regarding Teachers' Awareness of Washback Effects of TGAT1 on Perceptions and Beliefs

Teachers' Awareness of Washback Effects of TGAT1	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level
Perceptions and Beliefs			
26. I am aware of the importance of TGAT1 on students'	3.87	0.93	High

Teachers' Awareness of Washback Effects of TGAT1	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level
university admission.			
27. One of the teaching goals is to help my students obtain high scores on TGAT1.	3.68	0.95	High
28. I feel happy when preparing my students for TGAT1.	3.67	0.99	High
29. I have been pressured by school administrators, parents, or my students to increase their TGAT1 test scores.	3.05	1.12	Moderate
30. TGAT1 makes me nervous since the TGAT1 scores affect my promotion.	2.49	1.21	Moderate
31. TGAT1 makes me nervous since the TGAT1 scores affect my survival in the profession.	2.43	1.23	Moderate
32. I think that the underlying concepts of TGAT1 is aligned with those of the national curriculum.	3.17	0.82	Moderate
33. I believe that TGAT1 would motivate my students to learn English.	3.41	0.88	High

As shown in Table 4, the teachers were aware of the importance of TGAT1 and its relation to instructional practices. They were aware of the importance of TGAT1 for students' university admission ($\bar{x}$ = 3.87, SD = 0.93), the connection between teaching goals and test scores ($\bar{x}$ = 3.68, SD = 0.95), their willingness when preparing students for TGAT1 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.67, SD = 0.99), and motivating role of TGAT1 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.41, SD. =0.88). Surprisingly, the teachers only reported moderate levels of pressure $\bar{x}$ = 3.05, SD = 1.12) and nervousness from the TGAT1 scores on their professional survival ($\bar{x}$ = 2.43, SD = 1.23) and promotion chances ($\bar{x}$ = 2.49, SD = 1.21). At this point, teacher beliefs are crucial in determining their teaching and test preparation.

Excerpt 4

I thought that there was little pressure from school these days. I never received any comments or punishment when the TGAT1 scores were released. Personally, I felt encouraging when students got high TGAT1 scores. That reflected a lot on my teaching that I was on the right track. But when students received low scores, I would consider adjusting my teaching for the following year.

(T11, interview, 1 December 2023)

Excerpt 5

From my perspective, TGAT1 could be beneficial for students because they needed to use the test scores for university admission at higher education level.

(T6, interview, 30 November 2023)

As illustrated in Excerpts 4-5, teachers' perceptions and beliefs towards TGAT1 mediated between the test and teaching, producing positive washback effects on teaching. Eight out of 17 teachers (47.05%) believed that

the test was important for students' university admission and for promoting their English proficiency. The teachers were aware that many students would use their TGAT1 scores for university admission. Moreover, they felt little pressure from administrators to ensure high test scores, which strengthened their motivation and allowed them to focus on helping students improve their English proficiency to perform better on the test.

Moreover, 13% and 56% of the teachers believed they had a high and moderate level of assessment literacy, respectively. The analysis of the interviews and the classroom observations revealed that 11 out of 17 teachers (64.70%) believed that understanding the test blueprint of TGAT1, knowledge of language assessment, and training in language assessment contribute to their teaching. These beliefs influenced how teachers interpreted information about assessment (e.g., various types of assessment, the use of different assessment methods, and the use of test results) and how they aligned their instruction to create positive washback effects. Specifically, training in language assessment allowed the teachers to see the connections between curriculum and test objectives, leading them to focus on developing students' competency. Therefore, they used information about the test to plan lessons, prepare instructional materials, and design classroom tasks as shown in Excerpts 6-7.

Excerpt 6

In my opinion, I needed to understand the test blueprint of TGAT1. It focused more on communication.

(T1, interview, 9 January 2024)

Excerpt 7

I remembered that I joined a training session in developing an English test. In the training, they described how to align the test objectives to the curricular objectives. Later, they described how to align the content of teaching with the test construct, so I learned what students would learn. That was how I could prepare my teaching to meet the expectations of the test.

(T13, interview, 1 December 2023)

Discussion

Since its introduction in 2022, TGAT1 has served as a gatekeeper for university admission within the Thai educational context. The findings of this study suggest that TGAT1 directly influences teaching at the upper secondary level (Grade 12). Interestingly, several key points highlight how TGAT1 has shaped teaching practices.

Content of Teaching

The findings have revealed that TGAT1 induces positive washback effects on the content of teaching. Teachers are aware of the relationships between the national curriculum and TGAT1; the test content as reflected in the test specifications is relevant to what is expected in the curriculum. In other words, they align their instructional focus with the syllabus specifications and integrate important language skills to ensure that classroom practices reflect the goals of both the examination and the curriculum (Muhamad & Kiely, 2018). The teachers plan their lessons and instruction, and design supplementary materials to follow the skills and the content tested in TGAT1 (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and test-taking strategies), to help their students develop their English proficiency. By aligning the teaching materials with examination questions, teachers can ensure that all essential components of the English language are effectively addressed during the teaching–learning process (Alebachew & Minda, 2019). Therefore, exact knowledge of the test specifications would help them plan their lessons to serve the students’ need and help them achieve the test more effectively.

It is interesting to discuss how productive and receptive skills are emphasized. There were two assumptions linked to this point. Firstly, TGAT1 measures productive skills indirectly. English speaking and writing abilities are assessed using a multiple-choice format. This may explain why the teaching of productive skills was not observed as expected. Secondly, the information about the test construct is relatively limited. Although the teachers were aware that TGAT1 would test speaking skills, including question-response, short conversations, and long conversations, they still needed more information about what they were expected to teach students to promote students’ speaking competency. With sufficient information about the test, they could incorporate adequate content using appropriate criteria into their lessons effectively (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2024).

In addition, this study reveals that TGAT1 drives the teachers to teach particular content and skills, but not critical thinking skills. Studies have long indicated that tests tend to emphasize factual content and basic skills rather than critical thinking skills (Wen & Chano, 2025). Teaching critical thinking skills to students encourages teachers to move beyond traditional grammar lessons and vocabulary lists, fostering deeper engagement with the content. If critical thinking skills were included in the test specifications, English teachers might change their beliefs and teaching practices such as integrating critical thinking into their lessons and placing greater emphasis on active learning (Panich, 2025).

Teaching Methods

The findings indicate that TGAT1 leads teachers to adapt classroom pedagogy to better support students' learning. Interestingly, as TGAT1 aimed to measure English for communication, the teachers integrated student-centered approaches such as pair work and group discussion with the class activities to prepare students for the test. Teachers adopted new teaching methods to engage students in learning English and enhance their language proficiency (Thu, 2020). This shift may be influenced by teachers' expectations of TGAT1, as they aim to improve students' learning opportunities. The test also motivates teachers to employ a variety of instructional approaches to teach English more effectively. TGAT1 consequently drives the teachers to reshape their teaching practices and classroom interactions. If teachers only used a teacher-centered approach, students would have little engagement in the classroom. Therefore, the integration of methodological diversity and pedagogical creativity with student-centered approaches, when aligned with the test, constitutes a critical factor in inducing the positive washback effect.

Another important finding was the lack of evidence of teachers teaching to the test. The teachers in this study were obviously aware that teaching to the test alone was neither effective nor meaningful for students. Instead, they strategically designed their instruction by incorporating test items into class activities. The teachers utilized games, quizzes, and past test papers to familiarize students with the test format and enhance student engagement in classroom. When a test motivates teachers to employ innovative teaching strategies which improve student engagement and learning, it promotes positive washback effects (Hughes, 2021).

Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs

The findings in this study demonstrate that teacher beliefs play an important mediating role in promoting positive washback effects on teaching. Favorable beliefs about the test can motivate teachers to support students in learning English and performing well on the test (Ali & Hamid, 2023). However, it is important to note that belief alone is insufficient to ensure success. Teachers also need proper training in language assessment literacy (Fulcher, 2012), sufficient teaching experience, and positive perspectives towards language testing (Khan et al., 2025). These factors help shape how teachers interpret test results and use them to plan instructional content and strategies (Liang et al., 2025). Assessment literacy enables teachers to adopt flexible teaching practices (Djoub, 2017) and prevents them from relying exclusively on the test as the basis for instruction (Rahman et al., 2021).

Notably, 56% of the teachers in this study reported a moderate understanding of assessment literacy. Had more teachers demonstrated a higher level of assessment literacy, the findings might have differed. For example, teachers with high assessment literacy can identify learning gaps, thereby enhancing overall student performance effectively.

According to the findings, teacher beliefs play an important role as mediators that help students learn and improve their English proficiency under certain conditions. The first condition is that teachers need to have favorable beliefs and attitudes toward the test and the use of the test for learning. Teachers' stances towards students' learning are likely to have impacts on pedagogical practices (Ali & Hamid, 2023). As shown in Table 1, approximately 60% of the teachers had extensive experience in teaching English, and the majority (69%) were quite familiar with assessment literacy. These teachers are likely to regard the test as an effective tool for motivating students to learn and improve their English.

The next favorable condition is the absence of pressure from administrators and parents to achieve a specific score on TGAT1. Pressure on teachers can have a direct impact on how teachers changed their teaching practices (Tóth & Csapó, 2022). However, it appears that TGAT1 has little impact on teachers' career and survival in the profession, leading them to prioritize students' language development. Without this pressure, they could make decisions about the content and methods of teaching by incorporating the test information into their teaching to achieve their teaching goals more efficiently. In particular, the findings reveal that the teachers planned to achieve the objectives of TGAT1 after they finished the course objectives in the curriculum. They could therefore balance teaching and test preparation.

Implications

Our findings have several implications for stakeholders of TGAT1 and future research.

Teachers need to understand information about test constructs of the target test. Without sufficient information, teachers might misalign the test construct with their content of teaching such as relying on grammar drills and practice gaps (Ali & Hamid, 2023). TGAT1 should be regarded not only as a gatekeeper for university admission but also as a mechanism for systematically driving the educational system. To promote positive washback effects, policy makers and test developers should clearly communicate the test purpose, test construct, and test tasks. Teachers' understanding of TGAT1 empowers them to develop effective content, maximize lesson planning, and design class activities to help students to achieve the test and learning goals.

To promote beneficial washback effects on teaching productive skills, test developers should include productive components in the test. Testing functions as an indicator for how well teaching and learning are working (Wen & Chano, 2025). The findings suggest that the remaining myths are relevant to how students are assessed in their productive skills. Since TGAT1 focuses on communication, the absence of productive components such as the actual speaking and writing tasks encourages teachers to skip teaching real-life communication tasks. Therefore, test developers should consider incorporating productive tasks to encourage teachers to adopt a communicative language teaching approach and to integrate communicative activities that promote skill development.

To encourage English teachers to integrate critical thinking with communication skills, critical thinking should be included in the TGAT1 test specifications. The findings suggest that teachers primarily focused on developing communication skills, as emphasized by TGAT1; however, this alone may not be sufficient to enhance students' overall learning abilities. Teachers can design lessons that progress from lower-order thinking skills (remembering and understanding) to higher-order thinking skills (analyzing, evaluating, and creating) to broaden learning opportunities (Anderson et al., 2001). Embedding critical thinking into English language lessons and activities not only increases learning opportunities but also enables teachers to deliver more comprehensive instruction and class activities beyond language development. This approach may help prevent potential negative washback effects, such as excessive drilling, rote memorization, and repetitive practice of past examination papers, which can lead to reduced motivation for learning.

Providing upper secondary school teachers with opportunities to participate in assessment literacy training to foster favorable attitudes toward the test is essential. The findings indicate that most teachers possessed assessment literacy and tended to have positive attitudes and beliefs toward the test; consequently, they were able to connect their teaching with TGAT1. This connection enabled them to better understand appropriate assessments that align with curricular goals, learning outcomes, and instructional practices, thereby supporting effective decisions on curriculum emphasis and innovative teaching methods. Teachers' beliefs in effective teaching and test preparation, combined with their knowledge of assessment literacy, were fundamental in inducing positive washback effects on teaching (Athiworakun & Adunyarittagun, 2024). These factors influence not only the intensity but also the direction of washback effects.

Limitations

The researchers acknowledge that the following limitations influence the interpretation of the research findings.

The Data Collection Period

The proximity of the test date can influence the intensity of its washback effects on teaching. With this in mind, the researchers are aware of the duration of the data collection, especially for the classroom observations. As TGAT1 was administered in the beginning of December each year, we found that the three rounds of classroom observations captured only one point in time, not the dynamic process of how the intensity of washback was developed. To minimize it, we suggest that other researchers conduct classroom observations before the test date as many times as possible and also immediately after to see the shift in intensity of washback.

The Sample Size

The small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. The initial plan was to collect quantitative data from 200 teachers across both private and public secondary schools within the Secondary Educational Service Areas in Bangkok. Unfortunately, only 100 teachers voluntarily participated in the study. Therefore, the sample may not fully represent the target population as originally planned.

The Understanding of the Relationships Between the Test Specifications and the Teaching Content

These teachers seem aware of the relationships between the test specifications and what needs to be taught in classroom. Unfortunately, we have limited knowledge about how much they know and understand about such test's specifications. It is very important for further studies to investigate how much they know about the test specifications. It is also possible to investigate this issue from students' perspectives.

Conclusion

The current study shows that TGAT1 has induced positive washback on teaching, including effects on teaching content, instructional methods, and teachers' beliefs and perceptions. Provided that teachers have sufficient

information about TGAT1 (for example, test constructs, detailed specifications, and task types), they are able to plan lessons, develop supplementary materials, and adapt instructional approaches to support students' skill development and enhance their readiness for TGAT1. The highlight of this study is that teachers who are aware of the importance of the test and assessment literacy have more positive attitudes towards the test. This attitude leads them to align the curriculum objectives and the test objectives in their teaching. Therefore, teachers should have opportunities to participate in assessment literacy training sessions to induce beneficial washback and prevent harmful washback on teaching.

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