



วารสารอิเล็กทรอนิกส์  
ทางการศึกษา

ผลกระทบของการทดสอบทางการศึกษาระดับชาติด้านพื้นฐานที่มีต่อการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษตามการรับรู้ของ  
นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3

WASHBACK EFFECTS OF THE ORDINARY NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TEST ON  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AS PERCEIVED BY GRADE 9 STUDENTS

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ (1) ศึกษาผลกระทบของการทดสอบทางการศึกษาระดับชาติด้านพื้นฐานที่มีต่อการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษตามการรับรู้ของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 (2) ศึกษาความคิดเห็นของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 ที่มีต่อการทดสอบทางการศึกษาระดับชาติด้านพื้นฐาน กลุ่มประชากรคือ นักเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 สังกัดสำนักงานเขตพื้นที่การศึกษามัธยมศึกษา เขต 6 จังหวัดฉะเชิงเทรา ในปีการศึกษา 2556 กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ นักเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 จำนวน 400 คนในงานวิจัยเชิงปริมาณ และนักเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 จำนวน 60 คนในงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย ได้แก่ แบบสอบถามและแบบสัมภาษณ์แบบมีโครงสร้าง สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลคือ สถิติเชิงบรรยายและการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า (1) ในด้านเนื้อหาที่เรียน เวลาที่ใช้ในการเรียนและแรงจูงใจในการเรียน นักเรียนสนใจเรียนทักษะการสื่อสารเป็นประจำและใช้เวลาส่วนใหญ่เพื่อฝึกทักษะการสื่อสารในชั้นเรียนเป็นบางครั้ง นอกจากนี้นักเรียนเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเพิ่มขึ้นเพื่อพัฒนาความสามารถในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นบางครั้ง ในด้านกลยุทธ์ที่ใช้ในการเรียนและความรู้สึกวิตกกังวลในการสอบ นักเรียนส่วนใหญ่ใช้ทักษะการจำเป็นกลยุทธ์ที่ใช้ในการเรียนเป็นบางครั้งและรู้สึกกลัวว่าจะได้คะแนนสอบโอเน็ตต่ำเป็นประจำ (2) นักเรียนส่วนใหญ่เห็นด้วยกับการสอบโอเน็ตที่ใช้วัดความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษและเนื้อหาในข้อสอบเน้นทักษะการคิดวิเคราะห์ อย่างไรก็ตามนักเรียนส่วนใหญ่ไม่แน่ใจว่าเนื้อหาในข้อสอบออกตรงตามเนื้อหาในหนังสือเรียน

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## Abstract

The study aimed (1) to investigate the extent to which the O-NET have any washback effects on English language learning as perceived by Grade 9 students and (2) to explore students' opinions towards the O-NET. The population was Grade 9 students in the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 6 in Chachoengsao province in the academic year 2013. The samples were 400 Grade 9 students for quantitative research and 60 Grade 9 students for qualitative research. The instruments used in this study were questionnaire and structured interview. Data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics and content analysis.

The findings revealed that: (1) In terms of contents of learning, total time of learning, and learning motivation. Grade 9 students often focused learning on communicative skills and spent their time practicing communicative skills in classrooms sometimes. Moreover, they sometimes studied English harder in order to develop their ability to use language. In terms of learning strategies and test anxiety, most of them sometimes used rote-memorization as their learning strategies and often feared for the low O-NET scores. (2) Most of Grade 9 students agreed that the test was used to check their English proficiency, and critical thinking skills were emphasized on the test. However, they were undecided whether the contents of the test were related to the contents of textbooks.

**คำสำคัญ:** ผลกระทบของการสอบ/การทดสอบทางการศึกษาระดับชาติด้านพื้นฐาน /การเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ

**KEYWORDS:** WASHBACK / THE O-NET / ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

## Introduction

Test is a method used to assess students' learning achievement. High-stake tests are widely used to improve the quality of education in many countries. Popham (1987) defined high-stake test as a tool to reflect test-takers' abilities as well as the quality of education. Chapman and Sydner (2000) stated that high-stake tests directly affect classroom practices. They determine what and how to learn in classrooms. In Thailand, high-stake tests also play an important role to determine the qualities of students, teachers, and schools. According to Bailey (1996), the stake of the test is important to determine the degree of washback effects on learning.

### The Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET)

The Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) can be considered as high-stake test in Thai educational system. It is used to assess knowledge and thinking ability of all students at Grade 6, Grade 9, and Grade 12 in accordance with the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (The National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2013). English is one of the eight learning areas that students are assessed. Pukmai (2009) said that English section in the

O-NET is used to measure students' English proficiency in order to examine the quality of English language teaching and learning in classrooms.

### **The Importance of the O-NET scores**

The O-NET scores are very important especially to Grade 9 students because this is the last stage of compulsory education. It is necessary for Grade 9 students to gain foundation knowledge to further their higher studies or use in their future careers (Ministry of Education, 2009). The O-NET test is an important tool used to assess students' knowledge and skills in accordance with the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551. However, the O-NET mean scores in English of Grade 9 students were lower than 50% in every year from Academic Years 2008-2012 (The National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2013).

In order to increase the O-NET scores, the Office of Basic Education Commission has promoted the importance of O-NET scores such as using scores for admission to Grade 10, using 20% of the O-NET scores as part of students' grade point averages (GPAs), or using the scores to assess the quality assurance of schools (Ministry of Education, 2012). The increasing importance of the O-NET can have both positive or negative impacts towards the quality of education. The impact can be considered as washback effects in English language learning.

### **Washback Effects**

Washback or backwash is the term used in applied linguistics. There are several definitions of washback. Some scholars have defined washback at micro level as the influence of a test on teaching and learning in classrooms which can affect the perceptions and reactions of students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996). However, other scholars have defined washback at macro level which affects the educational systems and society. For instance, Andrews (2004, p.37) defined washback as "the effects of tests on teaching and learning, the educational system and the various stakeholders in the education process."

### **Types of Washback**

There are two types of washback: positive and negative washback. Cheng and Curtis (2004) pointed out that positive washback happens when the test encourages teachers and learners to work towards the test voluntarily and collaboratively. Positive washback on learning can help students to work harder to achieve their learning (Pan, 2009). For negative washback, in contrast, it focuses mainly on passing the exam more than language learning in classrooms (Cheng & Curtis, 2004). Negative washback on learning can lead students to learn

knowledge that is tested which does not promote general understanding, but it promotes memorization instead (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Pan, 2009).

### **Washback on learning**

According to Chin-Min (2007), there are five areas of learning that will be affected by the test. The washback model of students' learning is as follows:

1. Content of learning – it can be contents, skills, or materials for learning. Bailey (1996) said that students will be affected by the test if they study more on vocabulary and grammar rules or contents that are likely to be tested in the test.

2. Total time of learning – it is the amount of time students spend on language learning or prepare for the test in class as well as extra time they spend on test preparation in extra courses or in tutorial schools (Ferman, 2004).

3. Learning strategies – it is the techniques students use to promote their learning or to prepare for the test such as rote-memorization, studying test-taking strategies, self-learning, or tutor employment (Bailey, 1996).

4. Learning motivation – it is the desire to learn foreign language and the effort students put into their learning (Ortega, 2009). According to Ozmen (2011), students will be negatively affected by the test if it leads to lower level of motivation to learn foreign language.

5. Test anxiety – it can affect learner's performance as follows: (1) difficulty when taking a test: learners may not understand the questions, may not organize the ideas, and may not do well in the test; (2) mental blocking: learners may know the answer after they finish the exam; and (3) worries: learners may be worried about their performances, their failure, and how others are doing a test (Birjandi & Alemi, 2010).

In this study, washback effects referred to the influence of the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) on English language learning in Grade 9. There were 5 learning areas which were affected by washback of the O-NET from Chin-Min (2007): 1) content of learning, 2) total time on learning, 3) learning strategies, 4) learning motivation, and 5) test anxiety. Positive washback leads students to study language in class and develop their language proficiencies. However, Negative washback leads students to focus on the tested skills, spend time on test-related activities or test preparation in tutorial schools, and learn test-taking strategies.

Washback is an interesting issue in the field of language testing. There are some studies that investigate washback effects of national test on English language learning in other countries such as the study of Gashaya (2012) about the washback effects of the University Entrance English Exam (UEEE) on students' learning in Ethiopia. In Thailand, there were several studies about washback effects on the national test. Most of them were conducted with Grade 12 students. None of them have paid attention to Grade 9, which is the last stage of compulsory education. Therefore, the present study investigated the washback effects of the national test on students' learning in Grade 9. In Chachoengsao province, there have been 19 schools out of 28 secondary schools that have not passed the third rounds of external quality assessment from the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment 2011-2015. All of 19 schools have not passed the indicator 5 (i.e. students demonstrate essential knowledge and skills of the curricula) that used the O-NET scores as the criterion (the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, 2012). The challenge of those schools to increase the O-NET scores and to improve their quality of education may lead to either positive or negative washback effects on their students' learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether the O-NET had any washback effects on English language learning in Grade 9 as well as to explore students' opinions towards the O-NET in the secondary schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 6 in Chachoengsao province.

### **Objectives**

1. To investigate the washback effects of the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) on English language learning as perceived by Grade 9 students.
2. To explore students' opinions towards the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET).

### **Methodology**

#### ***Participants***

The study was mixed methods research aimed to investigate the washback effects on English language learning as perceived by Grade 9 students. The target population in this study was Grade 9 students at secondary schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 6 in Chachoengsao province in the academic year 2013. For quantitative research, Yamane's sample size formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% of precision level was used to select the participants. There were 400 Grade 9 students who were

chosen by using stratified random sampling. For qualitative research, the interviewees were 60 students among 400 students who answered the questionnaires. They were selected for group interviews to gain further and in-depth information to support the quantitative data. They were interviewed in group of 5 students. The totals were 12 group interviews including 6 groups of high-achieving students and 6 groups of low-achieving students.

### ***Instruments***

There were two research instruments in this study: a questionnaire and structured interview for Grade 9 students. Chin-Min's washback model of learning (2007) was used to construct both instruments. It was chosen because Chin-Min investigated the effects of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) in Taiwan which had EFL context similar to Thailand. The areas of learning in this model consisted of content of learning, total time on learning, learning strategies, learning motivation, and test anxiety.

#### **1. Questionnaire for Grade 9 Students**

The aims of this questionnaire were to find out the washback effects on English language teaching and learning as well as students' opinions towards the test. It was adapted from several washback studies (Chin-Min, 2007; Gashaya, 2012) and some questions were developed by reviewing literature from some scholars (Bailey, 1996; Pan, 2009). There were four parts with the total of 55 questions: (1) the first section consisted of 4 questions to elicit background information of participants; (2) the second section consisted of 13 items to investigate washback effects of the O-NET on English language learning; (3) the third section consisted of 28 items to investigate students' perceptions towards the O-NET on English language teaching; and (4) the last section consisted of 10 items to explore students' opinions towards the O-NET. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the degree of frequency in the second and third sections of the questionnaire as follows: 5=always, 4=often, 3=sometimes, 2=seldom, and 1=never. Moreover, a five-point Likert scale was used to measure the degree of agreement in the last section as follows: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=undecided, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree. These items were validated by five experts in the field of English language teaching using the index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC). All items had the index of IOC higher than 0.5. The items were tried out to check its reliability with 30 Grade 9 students. The reliability of these items using Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .947.

#### **2. Structured Interview**

The aims of structured interview was to gain more in-depth understandings about the washback effects of the O-NET on English language learning as well as students' opinions towards a test. It was adapted from several washback studies (Chin-Min, 2007; Gashaya, 2012; Pan, 2009). The interview questions were developed based on areas of washback on learning from Chin-Min (2007). It consisted of 15 questions to ask about students' learning in classrooms and the preparation for the O-NET as well as their opinions towards the O-NET. These items were validated by five experts in the field of English language teaching using the index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC). All items had the index of IOC higher than 0.5.

### ***Data Collection***

Data collection was carried out in the second semester in the academic year 2013. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time. For quantitative data, 400 questionnaires in Thai version were distributed to 400 Grade 9 students in 12 secondary schools. For qualitative data, structured interview was collected from 12 groups of students. Each group consisted of 5 students. There were 6 groups of high-achieving students and 6 groups of low-achieving students. The interview was conducted in Thai and lasted 30-40 minutes per group. It was recorded for transcription and further analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data obtained from student questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program to calculate percentages, frequencies, arithmetic means and standard deviation.

The interpretation of mean scores to analyze the washback effects on learning were as follows:

- 4.21 – 5.00 means students “always” do it.
- 3.41 – 4.20 means students “often” do it.
- 2.61 – 3.40 means students do it “sometimes”.
- 1.81 – 2.60 means students “seldom” do it.
- 1.00 – 1.80 means students “never” do it.

The interpretation of mean scores to analyze students' opinions towards the O-NET were as follows:

- 4.21 – 5.00 means students “strongly agree” with the statement.
- 3.41 – 4.20 means students “agree” with the statement.
- 2.61 – 3.40 means students are “undecided” with the statement.

1.81 – 2.60 means students “disagree” with the statement.

1.00 – 1.80 means students “strongly disagree” with the statement.

The data obtained from structured interview was analyzed by using content analysis.

## Results

The data were analyzed into 2 areas: (1) the washback effects of the O-NET on English language learning as perceived by grade 9 students and (2) the opinions of Grade 9 students towards the Ordinary National Educational Test.

### 1. The Washback Effects of the O-NET on English Language Learning as Perceived by Grade 9 Students

#### 1.1 The results from student questionnaire

**Table 1:** *Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Grade 9 Students’ Perceptions towards the Effects of the O-NET on English Language Learning*

English language learning	Grade 9 student (n=400)		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of frequency
Content of learning			
● I focus learning on the contents and skills of English that are likely to appear in the O-NET.	3.34	1.06	Sometimes
● I focus learning on communicative English language skills.	3.47	0.90	Often
● I focus learning on some parts in the English textbook even though they are not likely to appear in the O-NET.	3.31	1.03	Sometimes
Total time of learning			
● I spend my time in the evenings or weekends for the O-NET preparation in tutorial schools.	2.60	1.31	Seldom



English language learning	Grade 9 student (n=400)		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of frequency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I spend my time in the evenings or weekends to improve my English proficiency e.g. watching English movies, listening to English songs and reading English books.</li> </ul>	2.96	1.11	Sometimes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I spend my time practicing previous O-NET exams or reviewing grammar and vocabulary in classrooms.</li> </ul>	2.88	1.12	Sometimes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I spend my time practicing communicative English language skills in classrooms.</li> </ul>	3.05	1.07	Sometimes
Learning strategies			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I learn test-taking strategies for English language tests.</li> </ul>	3.04	1.11	Sometimes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I use rote-memorization skills to prepare for the O-NET.</li> </ul>	3.19	1.04	Sometimes
Learning motivation			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I study harder in English in order to develop my ability to use language.</li> </ul>	3.13	1.12	Sometimes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I study harder in English to get high O-NET scores.</li> </ul>	3.09	1.13	Sometimes
Test anxiety			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feel anxious to prepare for the O-NET.</li> </ul>	3.65	1.12	Often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feared for the poor O-NET test results in English.</li> </ul>	3.77	1.09	Often

Table 1 reported the washback effects of the test on English language learning. In terms of content of learning, Grade 9 students often focused learning on communicative English language skills ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.47, S.D.= 0.90), and sometimes focused learning on contents and skills related to the O-NET ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.34, S.D.= 1.06). With regards to the time of learning, they sometimes practiced communicative English language skills in classrooms ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.05, S.D.= 1.07). On the other hand, they seldom spent time on the O-NET preparation in tutorial schools ( $\bar{x}$ = 2.60, S.D.= 1.31). In term of learning strategies, students sometimes used rote-memorization to prepare for the O-NET, followed by learning test-taking strategies ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.19, S.D.= 1.04;  $\bar{x}$ = 3.04, S.D.= 1.11, respectively). When considering the aspect of learning motivation, Grade 9 students sometimes studied harder in order to develop their abilities to

use language and to get high O-NET scores ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.13, S.D. = 1.12;  $\bar{x}$  = 3.09, S.D. = 1.13, respectively). For test anxiety, it was found that Grade 9 students often feared for the poor test results and felt anxious while preparing for the O-NET ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.77, S.D. = 1.09;  $\bar{x}$  = 3.65, S.D. = 1.12, respectively).

## **1.2 The results from structured interview**

The structured interview from 12 groups of Grade 9 students could be summarized into 5 learning aspects as follows: contents of learning, total time of learning, learning strategies, learning motivation, and test anxiety.

### **1.2.1 Content of learning**

The findings showed that most students focused learning more on communicative English language skills because of enjoyable and interesting lessons and activities. However, some of them were interested in learning contents relevant to the O-NET.

### **1.2.2 Total time of learning**

Most of them said that they spend their time practicing communicative English language skills in classrooms and improving their English proficiency such as watching movies, listening to music, and reading books. However, they didn't spend their time on test-preparation at tutorial schools. There were few high-achieving students who attended tutorial schools and reviewed contents related to the O-NET at home.

### **1.2.3 Learning strategies**

High-achieving students had their own learning strategies for test-preparation such as using rote-memorization, doing previous O-NET exams, reviewing grammar and vocabulary, using test-taking strategies, and tutoring with peers. However, some of low-achieving students did not have any learning strategies.

### **1.2.4 Learning motivation**

The majority of high-achieving students were interested in learning English in order to develop their abilities to use language in real life situations. On the other hand, most low-achieving students had low motivation in learning English because they believed that this subject was hard for them. Some of them were interested in learning English because they wanted to develop their language abilities as well as high-achieving students.

### **1.2.5 Test anxiety**

The majority of high-achieving students was anxious about test-preparation and feared of the poor test results. On the other hand, most low-achieving students were worried and also feared of the poor results.

In conclusion, the results of questionnaire and structured interview were quite similar. In term of contents of learning, most students were often interested in learning contents about communicative skills and contents and skills related to the O-NET sometimes. For total time of learning, they spend their time practicing communicative English language skills in classrooms and improving their English proficiency sometimes. They seldom spent their times on test preparation at tutorial schools. When considering the learning motivation, the majority of students were interested in learning English in order to develop their English proficiency to use language in their real lives sometimes. Some of low-achieving students had low motivation in learning English. In terms of learning strategies, they sometimes used rote memorization and test-taking strategies. From the structured interview results, high-achieving students used learning strategies more than low-achieving students. For the area of test anxiety, most of them often feared for the poor test-results.

## 2. The Opinions of Grade 9 Students towards the Ordinary National Educational Test

### 2.1 The results from student questionnaire

**Table 2:** Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Grade 9 Students' Opinions towards the O-NET

Statement	Grade 9 students (n=400)		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of opinions
● The contents of the O-NET cover the main indicators of the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E.2551.	3.62	0.85	Agree
● The contents of the O-NET are relevant to the contents on English textbooks.	3.40	1.08	Undecided
● The O-NET emphasizes English reading comprehension.	3.65	1.04	Agree
● The O-NET emphasizes critical thinking skills.	3.74	0.99	Agree
● The O-NET is used to check students' language proficiency.	3.76	1.00	Agree
● I think it is a good idea to use the O-NET scores as the	3.56	1.04	Agree

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criterion for exit examination.				
●	A student's score on the O-NET is an indication of how well she or he has learned English in classrooms.	3.63	1.04	Agree
●	Goal of teaching English is to help students obtain high scores on the O-NET.	3.58	1.00	Agree
●	The O-NET preparation has influence on teachers' English language teaching in classrooms.	3.68	0.96	Agree
●	The O-NET preparation has influence on students' English language learning in classrooms.	3.67	0.99	Agree

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As shown in Table 2, the majority of Grade 9 students agreed that the purpose of the O-NET was used to check their language proficiency and the scores of the test could be used as the indication of how well they learned English in classrooms ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.76, S.D.= 1.00;  $\bar{x}$  = 3.63, S.D.= 1.04, respectively). Moreover, they agreed that the test emphasized critical thinking skills and reading comprehension ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.74, S.D.= 0.99;  $\bar{x}$  = 3.65, S.D.= 1.04, respectively). They also agreed that the O-NET preparation had influence on their English learning in classrooms ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.67, S.D.= 0.99). In contrast, they were undecided whether the contents of the test were related to the contents in the textbooks ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.40, S.D.= 1.08).

## 2.2 The results from structured interview

The structured interview from 12 groups of Grade 9 students showed that students thought the test emphasized critical thinking and reading comprehension skills. On the other hand, the majority believed that the contents of the test were not relevant to what they had learned in textbooks. They also believed the O-NET scores could reflect their performances in learning English in classrooms. Moreover, they thought that the O-NET preparation affected on their learning in both positive and negative ways. It helped them to review contents of what they had learned for 3 years, but they sometimes could not catch up with the regular lessons because their teachers stopped teaching regular classes in order to prepare them for the test.

In conclusion, the results from questionnaire and structured interview showed that the majority of students agreed that the contents of the O-NET focused on critical thinking skills and reading comprehension. It could reflect their English proficiency and their performances in classrooms. Moreover, most of them agreed that the test preparation had

influence on their learning in classrooms. In contrast, they were undecided whether the contents of the test were relevant to the contents on textbooks.

## **Discussion**

The findings are discussed on two aspects which are 1) washback effects of the O-NET on English language learning from Grade 9 students' perceptions and 2) Grade 9 students' opinions towards the O-NET.

### **1. Washback Effects of the O-NET on English language learning from Grade 9 students' perceptions**

1.1 Grade 9 students often focused their learning on communicative English language skills and devoted sometimes on learning contents and skills that were likely to appear in the O-NET. According to Bailey (1996), the influence of the high-stake test could negatively lead students to study more on vocabulary and grammatical rules. The study of Ferman (2004) on EFL National Oral Matriculation Test on learning found that students paid more attention to learn contents and skills that were likely to be tested in the test. However, the present study showed the different findings. This may be because the Ministry of Education has increased the importance of the communication in the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 due to the globalization. Language for Communication is one of the Learning Areas of Foreign Language in the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2009). Thai teachers may change their teaching methods to focus more on communicative language approach in regular classes. Furthermore, some schools especially large and medium schools had employed foreign teachers to teach English for communication in classrooms at least 1-2 hours per week. Therefore, students might have a lot of opportunities to practice communicative skills with their teachers and their peers in classrooms. According to Deenamor, Udom, and Sinprajakpol (2010), they used communicative approach to teach Grade 7 students' listening and speaking abilities. The findings showed that Grade 7 students improved their listening and speaking abilities after being trained. They said that Grade 7 students enjoyed themselves when they were taught by communicative approach. For teaching listening, after students listened, they spoke or wrote to answer the questions. Sometimes, they read texts before or after listening. For teaching speaking, they were taught by using the PPP (Presentation, Practice and Production) teaching method. In production stage, students had opportunities to participate in several activities such as role-play, drama, singing, or games. For example, in role-play activities, students wrote and read the scripts,

then they practiced and acted out by using speaking skill. While their friends listened to them. Therefore, communicative approach could help them to improve not only listening and speaking skills, but also reading and writing skills. They could develop the ability to use language all four skills. Furthermore, they could enhance their interpersonal skills from participating speaking activities in pairs or in groups.

1.2 Students had motivation to study harder in order to develop their ability to use language and to get high O-NET scores sometimes. Alderson and Wall (1993) stated that the high-stake test affected motivation in both positive and negative ways. The study of Ozmen (2011) about the washback effects of the Inter-university Foreign Language Examination showed that the test led students to study harder to achieve the high scores instead of achieving their English proficiency. However, the present study showed the different findings. This can be because Thailand will be part of the ASEAN community in 2015 and English is the means for communication. According to the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 6 (2013), they had encouraged students to be ready to join the ASEAN community and arranged training for students to practice English communicative skills, which can motivate students to learn these skills in classrooms. Students may see the importance of communication, which can be used in their real life situations such as talking with friends from other countries. Also, the ability to communicate can provide good opportunity for better education and better jobs in the future. The study of Noom-ura (2013) about the problems of English language teaching in Thailand showed that teachers perceived that their students realized the importance of English communication when the nation nearly enters the ASEAN community. However, teachers were worried that their students still lacked communicative skills and may face challenges to compete with other countries in this region such as Singapore and Malaysia.

1.3 Most students often feared for the poor O-NET test results. Ferman (2004) mentioned that the fear of test results is one factor causing washback effects of the test on students' learning. This may be because the increasing importance of the O-NET. The O-NET scores were used as part of students' GPA and admission to Grade 10 at highly competitive schools. Students may think that O-NET scores directly impacted on their lives and their future education especially students at the small schools. If they got low O-NET scores, they couldn't enroll at the highly competitive schools. Some students may compare their scores with their peers which can lead them to lose their self-confidence. This study was consistent

with Xiao, Sharpling, and Liu (2011) who studied the impact of National Matriculation English test on Chinese students' learning. The finding showed that the participants were stressful, feared low scores, and complained of anxiety. The study of Ferman (2004) showed that students had high level of test anxiety and fear of the failure in the test. Therefore, the area of test anxiety in the present study may negatively affect by the washback of the test.

## **2. Grade 9 students' opinions towards the O-NET**

2.1 Most Grade 9 students agreed that the O-NET scores reflected their performances in classrooms. According to Chin-Min (2007), washback of the test was caused by the attitude of students towards the test. In the present study, it showed that students had positive attitude towards the test. This may be because the O-NET is the standardized test which used to assess students' academic achievement for three years from Grade 7 to Grade 9. Students may think that the O-NET can reflect their real English proficiency whether they meet the standard of the curriculum. They might think about the fairness of grading in schools. This is because teachers in different schools may have different ways to assess students' performances. Sometimes, they might have bias when they assigned students' grades. According to the study of Pukmai (2009), she studied the relationship between Grade 12 students' achievement on teacher-made tests and the O-NET test in Thailand, it was found that the O-NET test and teacher-made test had differences in terms of reliability of the test because teachers graded their students by judging students' performances in classrooms rather than testing students' academic knowledge.

2.2 Most students were undecided whether the content of the O-NET were relevant to the contents on textbooks. This is because the contents of textbooks might not be tested in the O-NET. Therefore, what students had learned was not on the test. The interview of Grade 9 students in this study found that teachers were assigned to choose the textbooks by themselves. Each school had different textbooks to teach their students. Teachers might teach the content and skills that didn't achieve the standard of the Basic Core Curriculum. Some students might be taught contents that were easier than the contents of the test. According to Pukmai (2009), she found that students complained about the difficulty of the exam because there were differences between the content of the O-NET and what students had learned in schools. She claimed that students learned less complex contents and skills in their schools. Also, the study of Gashaya (2012) found that the content of the test were not related to the textbooks, which negatively affected students' learning.

## Recommendation for Future Research

There are few studies about washback effects of test in Thailand. There should be further studies on teachers and students at other provinces and on other levels of education such as Grade 6 or Grade 12. Also, the study about the factors related to washback should be employed such as age, language proficiency level, or gender, in order to investigate whether these factors influence the washback of the test.

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