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May, 2021

## EUROPEAN SURVEY OF HSK/HSKK TEST IMPLEMENTATION DURING THE PAN- DEMIC: PRELIMINARY BRIEFING

### 汉语水平考试调查

This briefing is compiled by Julie Yu-Wen Chen, Professor of Chinese Studies at University of Helsinki. It aims to explore European test centers' practices in carrying out HSK/HSKK tests during the pandemic. The survey was distributed to responsible staff of 198 HSK test centers in European countries (both EU and non-EU states) in April and May, 2021. 87 test centers responded to our survey until 27 May, 2021. Response rate is 43.9 percent.

The author acknowledges the research assistance offered by Niina Saaranen to facilitate the distribution of the survey.

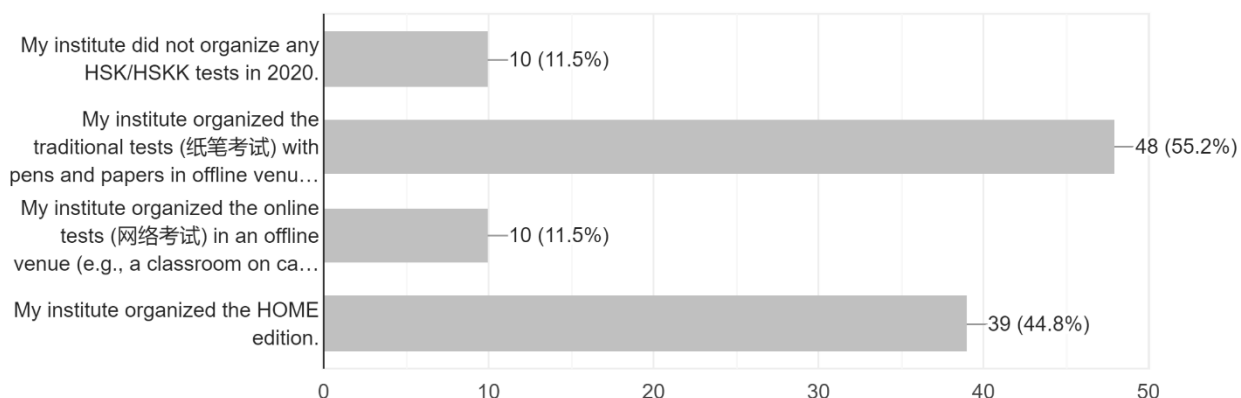
### Summarized Results Question by Question

Below shows summarized results of the survey. In some cases, basic statistical figure is presented. In other cases where we believe statistical figures are not that easy to read and interpret, thus we opt for showing written description of the result.

### PART I: FORMAT OF HSK/HSKK TESTS 組織 HSK/HSKK 测试的经验

#### Q1 How did your institute organized HSK and/or HSKK tests in 2020? (Multiple choices possible) 您所在机构在 2020 年如何组织 HSK/HSKK 测试?

In 2020, the first year of the pandemic, more than half (48 test centers, 55.2 %) of European test centers that responded to our survey still organized traditional tests in offline venue in 2020. From an open-ended question in the survey, some respondents explained that they do have the proper condition to continue the traditional tests during the pandemic. However, it is vital to note that considerably large number (39 test centers, 44.8 %) of European test centers also organized the Home Edition. Organizing online test in offline venue was not popular approach, only 10 test centers (11.5 %) organized it. Another 10 test centers (11.5 %) did not organize any test at all in 2020.



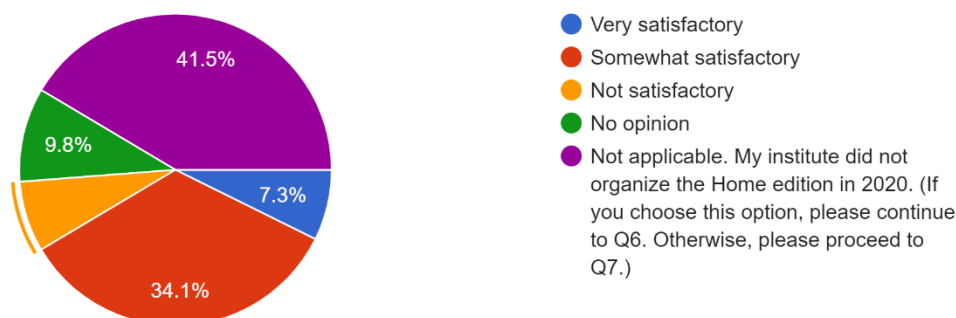
**Q2.1-Q4.2 Basically ask a series of questions comparing number of tests organized by each test center in 2019, 2020 and 2021. In addition, we asked the estimated numbers of test-takers in 2019, 2020 and 2021.**

It is pointless to show simply individual numbers here. Rather, it is better to re-organize the data and see the general changes over the years. In general, we find out most test centers have decreased numbers of tests from 2019 to 2020, but then from 2020 to 2021, most test centers have increased numbers of tests. There are also significant proportions of test centers that have remained similar numbers of tests over the years. There are exceptions, though. Some centers seem to have more tests organized and test-takers in 2020 than in 2019! From the survey, we cannot explore why this is the case though.

In addition, we asked the numbers of test-takers in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The result is easy to grasp. A large majority of test centers have decreased number of test-takers from 2019 to 2020 and then increase of participants from 2020 to 2021.

**Q5 If your institution organized the HOME edition in 2020, what is your impression of this experience? 如果您所在机构在 2020 年举办了居家版考试，您对这体验的印象如何？**

Among those who did organize the Home Edition in 2020, most of them are somewhat satisfactory of the experience (red). Very few are very satisfactory (blue) or not satisfactory (orange).



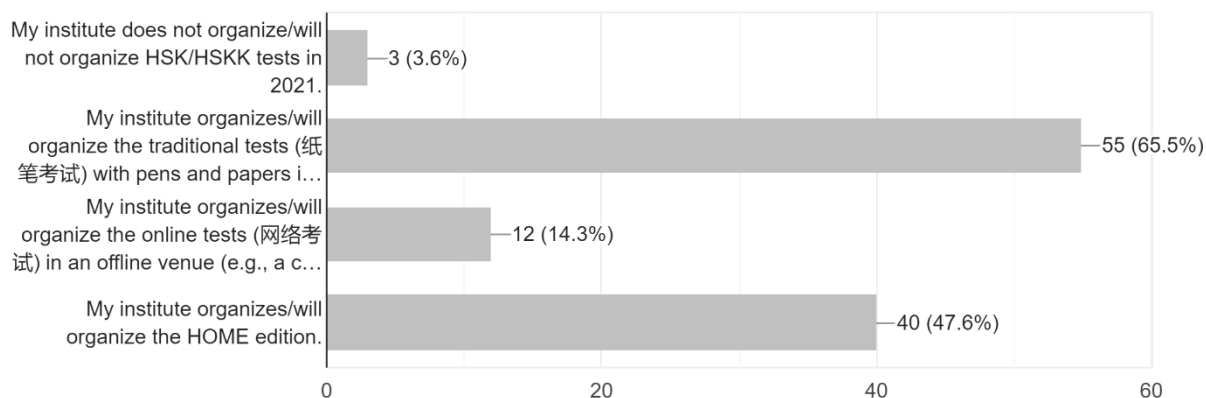
**Q6 Could you write down the reasons why your institution did not organize the Home edition in 2020? 您能写下您所在机构为何未在 2020 年组织居家版考试的原因吗?**

This is an open question and respondents gave many kinds of answers. Below are just some examples for your kind information.

- It is too complicated.
- Not enough staff to support
- Safety reasons and internet connection reliability errors
- Students prefer to do the test physically.
- It requires good internet quality, two devices and private enclosed test environment which are hard for students. Very likely to have technical problems that affect students answering.
- We had the conditions to organize HSK and HSKK testing in the classroom.
- It is technically not satisfying. We experienced multiple breakdowns and other problems while testing. Besides we have had serious concerns about the protection of data-privacy which seems not to be properly ensured.
- Technically it is very complicated. Some conditions are impossible to meet, for example, participants must have a PC but 90% of our students use a Mac.
- Participants must be domiciled in country A while many of our candidates live in country B or elsewhere.

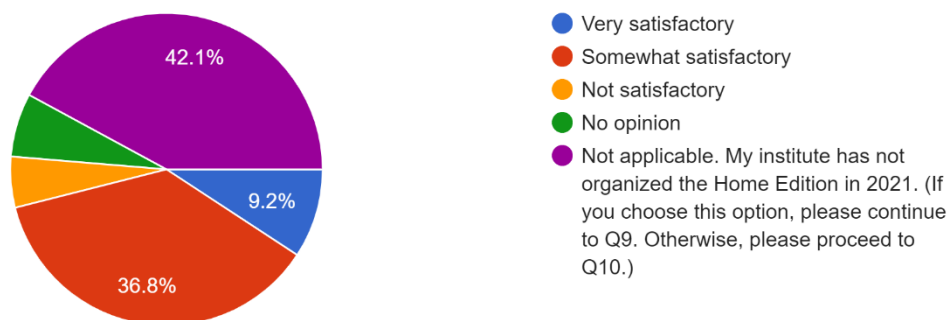
**Q7 How does/will your institute organize HSK and/or HSKK tests in 2021? (Multiple choices possible) 您所在机构在 2021 年如何组织 HSK 和/或 HSKK 测试?**

In 2021, similarly, more than half (55 test centers, 65.5 %) of European test centers that have responded to our survey have used the traditional tests in offline venue. There is even a slight increase of test centers using traditional test in 2021, from 48 to 55 test centers. In an open-ended question in the survey, we receive some clarification from test centers, indicating that the situation with covid-19 has lessened or been under control in some countries and that test centers are more prepared than in 2020 to use traditional paper test. Like with 2020, there is still considerable number of test centers (40 test centers, 47.6%) using Home Edition and this is the second popular approach among test centers. Adopting online tests in offline venue is not that popular (12 test centers, 14.3 %). And only 3 institutions do not organize any test at all (3.6 %).



**Q8 If your institution has organized the Home Edition in 2021, what is your impression of this experience? 如果您所在机构在 2021 年组织了居家版考试，那么您的体验如何？**

Like with the situation in 2020, among those that have adopted the Home Edition, most are somewhat satisfactory. Very few are either very satisfactory or not satisfactory. Summarizing the results in 2020 and 2021, one can conclude that in general, institutions that have adopted the Home Edition are somewhat satisfactory.



**Q9 Could you write down the reasons why your institution does not or will not organize the HOME Edition in 2021? 您能写下所在机构为什么不在 2021 年举办居家版考试的原因吗？**

This is an open question and respondents gave many kinds of answers. Below are just some examples for your kind information.

- Many difficulties, not enough teachers.
- Too much trouble but too few participants
- Open to fraud.
- Too complicated and high technical requests from the candidates
- Because the pandemic situation in my country is getting better
- New mobile phone monitoring rules, more complicated test setting

**Q10 If your institution has organized the HOME EDITION in both 2020 and 2021, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 如果您所在机构在 2020 年和 2021 年都组织了居家版考试，那么您在多大程度上同意或不同意以下陈述？**

In general, institutions that have carried out the Home Edition either believe 1) the tests were organized successfully in both 2020 and 2021 or believe 2) that 2021's experience was more successful than the one in 2020. This result is understandable as institutions are more likely to get more experience from the first (2020) try and then implement it in a better way in the following year (2021).

**Q10.4 Any thoughts you wish to share concerning both experiences? 关于这两种经验，您想分享什么想法？**

This is an open question and respondents gave many kinds of answers. Below are just some examples for your kind information.

- While the Home edition test is essential during this particular time due to the pandemic, the students encountered many problems during the exam (problems with the system, their internet, the program that sometimes just stopped working in the middle of the exam, etc.). So it took a lot of effort to make sure that all the students were able to do the exam (they did the mock test before the exam and everything was fine, but during the real test, we always have students encountering these problems)
- The software used should be more compatible, for example, many students have Mac-Book which could not be used for the exam. In addition, sometimes the software will be recognized as a virus, the Chinese test center just asked us to tell the students to shut down the antivirus software. For some students, that is unacceptable.
- We had positive experience, but we recognised that lots of staff training was required to ensure the smooth running of the exams as well as increased volume of candidates' communications.
- The information flow and communication between the central organizers and local test centers was a bit problematic at first. It got much better with time, but one has to read thousands of WeChat posts daily to keep up to date with all the news, innovations and problem solutions. The instructions were only in Chinese at the beginning so as a test center contact person and local organizer I had to spend many hours to prepare instructions and translations for local participants and to inform about technical issues and look for solutions. What is more, the HSK Client program sometimes has some flaws that we cannot control or see and participants get a bit stressed during the test, but fortunately we can adjust it after the test for the participants in need.
- Many candidates worry about the leakage of their personal information.
- The ExamClient tends to be unstable, which causes some problems. Moreover, we experienced many problems with the operation of chinesetest.cn website, which was challenging at times. Nevertheless, I see a significant progress.
- We would very much like to try the home edition if we could get more information about it.
- CTI should provide a detailed instruction of HOME edition tests to both test-takers and organizers.

## **PART II: OPINION ON THE HOME EDITION 对居家版考试的想法**

**Q11 It does not matter if you have implemented the Home edition or not, please share your general opinion of Home Edition. 请分享您对居家版考试的一般看法。即使您的组织尚未组织居家版考试，也欢迎您分享意见。**

- Most test centers believe it is not easy to organize Home Edition.
- There seems to be two kind of different opinions on whether the instruction from “Chinese Testing International” about Home Edition was easy to follow or not. There are slightly more test centers that believe that the instruction was easy to follow. But there is also quite sizeable number of test centers that believe the instruction was not easy to follow.
- Most test centers agree that when they need further information of the Home Edition, they can find the information easily by contacting “Chinese Testing International”.
- Most test centers believe they will not adopt the Home edition after the pandemic, even this is given as an option.

- In 2021, Chinese Testing International asked test takers to download the so-called Invigilation software on their phone, this is generally a problem for test takers. Most agree that Chinese Testing International should give test-takers more information on the so-called Invigilation software that is required to install on their phone.
- More test centers believe that it is reasonable to ask test takers to enter the designated meeting room one hour before the Home Edition test. This is probably due to the fact that it indeed takes time to properly set up the test environment and feel ready to start the exam.

**Q12 Even your institute does not/has not implemented the Home Edition, please offer your view. What kind of challenges do you see when implementing Home Edition? Could you write down your thoughts?** 即使您所在机构尚未实施居家版考试，请提供您的观点。实施居家版考试时会遇到什么样的挑战？您能写下您的想法吗？

This is an open question and respondents gave many kinds of answers. Below are just some examples for your kind information.

- The biggest challenge is the failure of the software. In some cases, the test takers have problems with entering the test, although during the practice test there was no problems. Before the exam, it was necessary to organize a QA session, because the test takers had many questions (especially HSK 1/2).
- We found the pre-exam environment check is necessary (to avoid issues and stress on the day), but indeed time-consuming to coordinate. Despite of the support we provided to candidates before the exams, on the exam days, there were unexpected technical issues, causing stress to candidates and sometimes to invigilators. CTI colleagues were brilliant in supporting us. They were very responsive when we required support. Other challenges include data protection, underage candidates and plagiarism. When running the Home Edition, our Institute also needs to comply with data protection policy in this country. And when we have underage candidates, their guardians/carers are required to be present. Plagiarism cannot be 100% prevented. The overall experience of running the Home Edition has been positive, however, we would return to regular exam offers as soon as possible.
- We need more information about the ExamClient, which is mistaken for the virus by the test-takers' antivirus software. It is troublesome to ask the test-takers to turn off their anti-virus software because it makes them feel unsafe as their computer is unprotected. Moreover, the exam software is unstable, which is very stressful both to the test-takers and the organisers.
- The home edition was fine; the student did not have any issues or complaints
- Home Edition poses a challenge to those who are not tech-savvy, especially the elders, and those who are poorly equipped with internet connection and computer hardware. Complaint about privacy intrusion could also be an issue, raised by the so-called Invigilation software.
- Writing the Chinese characters on the computer is different from writing on paper
- TestExamClient can be downloaded onto a Mac. Built-in Chinese input method. Drafting answers for HSKK can be flexible to use English or Pinyin.
- Too complicated. It would be better to have webpage test for all levels. Downloading and installing an app is too complex.