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Impact of a high-stakes English exam on teachers and students' perceptions, attitudes and practices

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High-stakes language examinations have important consequences on the curriculum, teaching and learning. They are often used as instruments that can leverage educational change. The First Certificate in English (FCE by Cambridge ESOL) is a well-known language exam that is administered widely in private language institutions in Greece. Its designers are interested in strengthening the relationship between teaching and testing by attempting to bring FCE in line with recent developments in the fields of linguistics and applied linguistics so as to have a positive influence on what happens in the classroom.

This paper explores the relationship between the intentions of the FCE exam designers and the teachers and students who are preparing for the exam. It presents findings of teachers and students' perceptions and attitudes in relation to the exam itself, their teaching situations and classroom practices. The paper will report findings that show that the relationship is not a strong one and what exam designers expected did not actually take place in the classroom. During the presentation, detailed reference will be made to the innovative research data collection process that was employed to investigate this relationship in the present educational context. Finally, the paper will identify areas in which the exam has the strongest impact on and the outside factors that intervene in the process. It will conclude by making recommendations to exam designers and teachers who are preparing for high-stakes language exams.