

An Investigation Into IELTS Test Takers' Attitudes Towards IELTS Reading Tasks

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Abstract-

The purpose of this study is to investigate test takers' perceptions toward the IELTS reading tasks. As a result, 30 IELTS test takers in a Vietnamese private center were given a questionnaire, and then five of them were interviewed. According to the findings, the majority of participants have a positive attitude towards taking IELTS reading text although they have faced a lot of challenges in doing this kind of test in terms of their lack of vocabulary, strategies for learning, and time management. The findings also suggest some recommendations when taking reading tests, especially the IELTS reading test, to improve their proficiency in reading comprehension skills.

Index Terms- IELTS, Reading skills, Performance, Attitudes, Difficulties.

Date of Submission: 03-05-2024

Date of Acceptance: 13-05-2024

I. Introduction

More than 10,000 colleges and organizations worldwide recognize the English Language Proficiency Test (IELTS). The IELTS consists of four sections: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. There are specific talents that must be learned for each of these sections.

The International English Language Testing System, or IELTS, is one of the competency examinations that British and Australian institutions typically use to choose and evaluate international applicants. In response to advancements in applied linguistics, the tasks and texts of the IELTS Reading test have been updated. The validity, reliability, fairness, and impact of the test are among the many factors that producers, like the British Council, should take into account when building the IELTS reading module. This is crucial in order for test takers to receive more fair, genuine, and consistent band scores on this section of the test. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the IELTS's evolution and language test performance, with an emphasis on the reading test portion.

Reading is the IELTS module that non-native speakers find most challenging, according to a number of research studies. The explanation for this, according to academics, is that "a very large proportion of test takers are only unable to structure the text in desired format; they do not find the text hard to understand." To put it simply, the large range of vocabulary and complicated phrases make it difficult for test takers to identify the right answers. This indicates that practicing paraphrasing current text is recommended if students wish to improve their score on the test. In addition, it's been noted that a lot of students struggle with time management. Effective time management is essential for all reading examinations, not just the IELTS. This study aimed to investigate IELTS Test Takers' Attitudes towards IELTS Reading Tasks. The research questions investigated in this study are presented here: 1) *What are the difficulties that the IELTS test takers have faced in performing the IELTS reading test?* 2) *What are the IELTS test takers' attitudes towards performing the IELTS reading test?*

II. Literature Review

An overview of an IELTS reading test

Reading comprehension is assessed on the reading test in addition to reading comprehension itself. As a result, the test score won't be good if students only read rapidly and do not retain enough knowledge to apply to the question.

All three of the IELTS reading passages have, on average, forty questions totaling over 3,000 words. Students simply need to read at a speed of 50 words per minute if they wish to read the entire book. The speed might vary from 150 to 350 words per minute, but in actuality, students still need time to comprehend the content and questions in the article through analysis and reasoning.

The goal of the IELTS Reading test is to assess academic reading abilities, which is distinct from reading books, stories, or other comparable texts for pleasure. The goal of academic reading is to discover new views on a certain issue or to get a fundamental and advanced grasp of a new topic, which will aid in future study (Mar & Moore, 2010).

Students can be instructed to focus on reading and refrain from rereading sentences that students have already read once in order to maximize their reading speed. This is because rereading sentences is a time-consuming practice. Nonetheless, the reading sections in the IELTS Reading test have lengthy sentences and specialist terminology written in academic jargon. As a result, reading it just once will frequently leave students confused. Reading a sentence or paragraph aloud several times is a perfectly natural way to comprehend, evaluate, and reason. The most crucial thing is to decide which sections can be skipped after reading once without understanding (the information is not necessary), and which portions must be properly studied to be read again (the answer is in the text).

The three reading speeds and their respective IELTS reading purposes are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Different types of reading speeds and the purpose of each type in IELTS Reading

<i>Different types of reading speeds</i>	<i>The purpose of each type</i>	<i>Examples</i>
READ FOR DETAILED INFORMATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is the IELTS Reading exam reading speed that is fastest. - This reading skill's goal is to locate specific information, including names, figures, or direct quotes enclosed in quotation marks, rather than to comprehend what you read. - Scanning is a typical term for this reading ability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additionally, students frequently need to read at this pace when taking various kinds of exams: 1. Multiple choice – choose options A, B, C, D 2. True/False/Not given or Yes/No/Not given 3. Matching Information, matching features – matching information, characteristics 4. Completion – fill in words 5. Diagram Labeling – diagram
READ FOR THE MAIN IDEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidates will read very quickly while maintaining comprehension of the book's structure and core ideas when they use this reading pace. - This is a skill that is sometimes referred to as speed reading, but in IELTS exam prep, it is called skimming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding titles for paragraphs and matching headings are common uses of this rapid reading speed because the goal is to comprehend the primary idea. - In order to understand the subject of the reading before taking the test, skimming is also frequently employed when reading subtitles, which are the reading's introductions, or the first few phrases.
READ FOR CLEAR UNDERSTANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a typical reading pace; however, it may vary slightly based on the IELTS test taker. - Students can read slowly and highlight important words to help them retain and comprehend the material. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All kinds of articles are frequently read at a slow speed: Upon perusing the inquiry. - When comparing informational fragments with queries and replies (after applying scanning skills).

Difficulties faced by test-takers in performing IELTS reading tests

Students' vocabulary is not large enough

Both *Reading word-by-word* and *Skimming/Scanning* methods require candidates to have a large vocabulary. In fact, for *Read word-by-word*, students must translate each word from Vietnamese into English to understand the meaning of the sentence, so candidates need to know a lot of vocabulary. In the second place, for *Skimming/Scanning*, this method is very suitable for native speakers because they have good knowledge of vocabulary and synonyms. Therefore, no matter how the information is paraphrased, they can still easily identify the information between the question and the reading.

Students lack knowledge of structure and grammar

First, for *Read word-by-word*, there are many cases where even when students know all the vocabulary in a sentence, they still cannot understand the meaning of the sentence because they do not grasp the grammatical structure of that sentence.

Second, for *Skimming/Scanning*, when skimming a sentence, knowing what information to pay attention to and what information to read quickly requires students to have very strong knowledge of sentence structure.

III. Methodology

This study aimed at investigating the IELTS test takers' difficulties as well as attitudes toward performance in the IELTS reading section. The research design in this study followed a mixed method in terms of quantitative and qualitative study. The researchers worked with 30 IELTS test takers in a private center in Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam through a questionnaire and a semi face-to-face interview with 5 test takers.

IV. Findings And Discussions

The difficulties that the IELTS test takers have faced in performing the IELTS reading texts

This section answers research question one where the researchers examined what difficulties the IELTS candidates have faced in performing the IELTS reading texts. Below is a table of candidates participating in the interview.

Table 2. Test takers' profile in the interview

<i>IELTS test takers</i>	<i>English proficiency level</i>	<i>Years of learning English</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
Test taker 1	A1	7 years	T1
Test taker 2	A1	7 years	T2
Test taker 3	A1	8 years	T3
Test taker 4	A2	7 years	T4
Test taker 5	A2	8 years	T5

When asked about the most difficult things about the IELTS reading tests, 100% of the interviewees (10/10) cited lack of vocabulary and time constraints. IELTS vocabulary was described as sophisticated, advanced, specialized, foreign, novel, or academic. Reading and comprehension issues have also been linked to text complexity and length. Excerpts from the pupils' answers are transcribed here.

In this regard, T1 has mentioned that

It's challenging to get a good score on the reading portion of the IELTS exam; I found reading to be particularly challenging.

In the same vein, t2 has mentioned that

Reading required a lot of work because it requires time management, critical thinking, vocabulary, and all other aspects of one's abilities.

In order to learn more about this topic, the researchers questioned the participants about any difficulties they had reading texts, and one of them stated that

The reading portion was challenging since there was a lot of material to read in a short period of time.

Another participant has stated that.,

The reading portion was challenging since there was a lot of material to read in a short period of time.

Participants' comments make it clear that three main issues test-takers had during the exam were anxiety of redoing the test, lack of time management skills, and test continuity. However, due to a lack of time management skills, test takers occasionally are unable to answer every question. This occurs as a result of examinees occasionally devoting a sizable amount of time to a single question. Thus, in order to receive a high band score on the IELTS exam, test takers must exercise caution when managing their time. Furthermore, it is imperative that participants possess confidence in all circumstances, since individuals who exhibit nervousness are less likely to achieve a high band score (Hartono, 2019; Golchi, 2012).

The IELTS test takers' attitudes towards performing the IELTS reading texts

Table 3 below shows the test takers' responses to 10 item questions given in order to find out their attitudes towards the IELTS reading test. From the data shown in the following table, it is obvious that most of the test takers have positive attitudes towards the IELTS test in which more than 69 percent of the test takers positively responded to 10 questions and more than 90 percent of them agreed upon 4 statements confirming that they believed that learning to the test helped raise their test score and that there was a reasonable correspondence between the skills needed for the IELTS reading test and the reading requirements at university level, perceived the test as compatible in terms of difficulty level to the Indonesian test takers' language ability, and believed that IELTS reading test helped them express their critical and logical thinking.

However, it was also very obvious that only very few of the students considered the test for not giving them pressure during the preparation until getting the score as shown on the table that almost 70 percent of them approved the statement demanding that the IELTS test caused unhelpful stress for them. This kind of test-taking anxiety was a very common feeling as Estaji, M. & Tajeddin, Z. (2012) found that all IELTS test takers, regardless of their level of English proficiency and motivation to sit the test, had anxiety and around 37 % of their research participants felt worried about not being able to get good scores on the test. There was also another interesting finding in which the test takers equally responded positively and negatively to the question asking their opinion about whether a person with good English proficiency would do well on the IELTS test without any preparation before sitting the test.

Table 3. The IELTS test takers' attitudes towards the IELTS test

<i>The IELTS test takers' attitudes towards the IELTS test</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1. The test provides positive motivation for me to learn.	69%	1%	30%	
2. The test brings about fear of the test results for me.		3%	25%	72%
3. The test causes unhelpful stress for me.			10%	90%
4. I believe that the test improve my test taking strategies rather than my language proficiency.	89%	10%	1%	

5. I believe learning to the test helps to raise my test score.	95%	5%		
6. The test motivates me through its international credibility.	80%	13%	7%	
7. I think that the test measures my language proficiency effectively.	81%	12%	7%	
8. The IELTS reading test helps me express my critical and logical thinking.	88%	8%	4%	
9. I perceive the test as compatible in terms of difficulty level to the Vietnamese test takers' language ability.		56%	44%	
10. I think if a student has high proficiency of English, he or she will be able to get high score without a test preparation course.	88%	8%	4%	

V. Conclusions & Recommendations

In summary, reading is a crucial language ability, and EFL students should be taught it, made acutely aware of it, and encouraged to use various learning tactics. The participants in this study stated that in the IELTS Academic reading test, they find it difficult to handle the existing time limits, that task instructions may be difficult for them to understand, that they may find topics “distant” from them in some sense, and that they had problems with the perceived need to use advanced vocabulary and grammar. What can be concluded from the results of the present study is that regardless of how good and fair a test such as IELTS, and in particular its Academic reading test, may seem to its owners and developers and the receiving institutions, candidates may think and feel differently and may have a number of problems with the test, preventing them from seeing it as a fair means of assessing their language proficiency.

The researchers provide the following advice to IELTS test-takers in light of the study's findings:

First, time management skills should be given more attention by facilitators and test-takers, who should also embrace the method of having test-takers take practice tests before taking the actual IELTS exam. A mock exam helps test-takers not only develop time management skills but also lessen test anxiety. Second, 2. Since strategies and tactics are the focus of the IELTS exam, candidates should practice a lot to increase their understanding of these concepts. Test-takers also need to practice a lot in order to adopt tactics and techniques that will help them achieve a decent band score on the IELTS exam, as the test's question format differs from high-stakes exams in our educational system. Last but not least, to help test-takers improve their critical thinking and fast reading skills, IELTS test-related courses like critical thinking and speed reading should be introduced early and run concurrently with degree programs.

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