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**Pedagogical Strategies for Mastering All Four Academic IELTS
Skills**

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Abstract

This dissertation describes a variety of pedagogical strategies for the development of all four skills in IELTS Academic test-takers. In contrast to the prevailing view among many IELTS teachers that IELTS preparation involves nothing more than repeated practice tests and familiarization with test formats and strategies, the study takes the view that IELTS preparation is best viewed as a form of academic English instruction with the dual aim of helping test-takers acquire the skills required to perform well in the test and to cope in English-medium academic situations after testing. After an introductory overview of IELTS Academic, including a description of its purpose, an explanation of its format, a discussion of how it is scored and an examination of its growing global popularity, as well as an explanation of the role which it is playing in higher education entrance and professional mobility around the world, the main body of the study describes a range of general and more specific methodological principles underlying effective IELTS teaching, including needs analysis, diagnostic assessment, target-band selection and achievement, lesson planning and design, material selection and use, assessment and feedback, learner autonomy and teacher competence. The four skills are dealt with individually in turn, with a description of a range of strategies which are shown to be of potential value to teachers in their attempts to help their students improve in each. The skills are discussed in the following order: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. In each case, after outlining the key difficulties which test-takers are known to experience, examples of lessons and/or teaching ideas which are intended to help students to develop the necessary skills are provided. A final section examines the IELTS assessment criteria and describes how teachers can make use of the band descriptors which are used to determine scores in order to provide feedback to students, as well as to aid test-takers' own assessment of their work and that of their peers, and to monitor their own and their students' progress over time.

Keywords: Academic IELTS, English for Academic Purposes, IELTS pedagogy, language assessment, test preparation, listening, reading, writing, speaking

Introduction

The language of academic communication in the world today is English (Crystal, 2003; Jordan, 1997). For students of higher education English is not only a study subject; it is also the medium or means by which students access or make use of lectures, printed or online academic articles and research publications, seminars and conferences and join or participate in and communicate with members of the international academic community. Many students who are studying in English speaking countries or English medium programs in their own countries need to establish their academic English proficiency to continue their studies in other countries or to be accepted into English medium programs in their own countries. Thus, there is a great need for the valid measurement of students' English academic proficiency (Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is one of the widely recognized, international tests to evaluate the language abilities of non-native English speakers (IDP IELTS, 2024). Like TOEFL, IELTS also measures the English language abilities of candidates who wish to study or work where English is the primary language of communication. IELTS Academic or General Test is accepted by universities, Employers, Professional bodies, Licensing bodies, Immigration departments, etc. For many, the IELTS test score is a deciding factor for admission to universities, postgraduate studies, professional registration, exchange programs and later for career opportunities. Therefore, IELTS plays a significant and determinant role in the English language learning process of students and in the instructional strategies that teachers use to teach English to students.

The test seeks to assess the candidate's ability to manage a variety of tasks that involve the four language skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) that s/he will need to use when participating in academic situations and environments. Test-takers are expected to perform a variety of tasks including listening to lectures and to various interactions, reading a variety of texts (which may include academic articles and others), writing essays, reports and other academic pieces, and engaging in interactive discussions

with others. To achieve Band 7 or higher in each section of the test, the candidates must demonstrate an ability to use English to communicate academically in more than one way. As such, test-takers will be required to draw upon an array of enabling skills, including but not limited to language proficiency in using English grammar and vocabulary in order to achieve desired ends, and also literacy, task awareness, and sufficient time management in order to successfully complete each of the four sections of the test.

Preparation for Academic IELTS must move beyond simple test practice (Green, 2007). Familiarity with the test format is a start but it is not enough. What is needed is sufficient practice in reading, writing, listening and speaking within an Academic IELTS context. Learners with good general English but little practice of IELTS type tasks are likely to struggle to achieve a satisfactory band score. The teacher has a crucial role to play here. The teacher must design lessons that aim to develop the four skills as well as to prepare learners for the test. The teacher must also find ways to provide learners with feedback on their performance and to help them to understand the demands of each of the test sections. The aim of this dissertation is to outline ways in which the four skills for IELTS can be developed through a range of pedagogic strategies within the classroom.

This dissertation examines ways in which teachers can support learners in developing the four skills of Academic IELTS using a range of systematic pedagogical strategies within English language lessons. IELTS is presented as an important aspect of English language teaching and as a means by which learners can develop important aspects of academic English. The dissertation focuses on how lessons may be designed and managed to support learners to practice the four skills in a way which will assist them to gain an acceptable band score in each component of Academic IELTS. It will be of relevance to IELTS candidates, English language teachers and teacher trainers, and researchers interested in issues associated with English for Academic Purposes, language testing, and the provision of effective exam-oriented English language instruction.

The need for a pedagogical approach to IELTS preparation is based on the fact that the test is more than a series of tasks that can be practised through fixed techniques or short-term strategies. The Academic versions of IELTS Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking

require a specific set of language skills to be used for a variety of purposes within several different tasks. In addition to using English to communicate in different ways, candidates need to be aware of how the test is structured and how each task should be tackled to obtain the best possible score. Each skill requires different strategies to be employed to access and use the language within the time available. Therefore, effective IELTS preparation cannot rely on language knowledge alone; it also requires the systematic development of test-taking strategies.

One of the major problems in IELTS preparation is that students look upon the test as a sum of tricks and ways to achieve a high score quickly. Many students rely on memorizing templates for essay writing, memorizing fixed answers for speaking section, and completing as many IELTS tests as possible without improving their English skills. However, while having strategies to complete tasks efficiently is important, relying too much on memorized language can be a limitation, especially in writing and speaking sections. In these sections, candidates are judged on their ability to complete tasks in a unique and creative way, using language flexibly and producing work that is original. For this reason, students and teachers need to move away from a mechanical approach to IELTS preparation, and focus on learning language, developing strategies, and improving academic skills in general.

At the same time, if IELTS is taught as only general English, students may not fully grasp the specifics of the Academic IELTS test, such as its format, timing, tasks and assessment criteria. For them to achieve good results, students must also learn how to manage their time effectively and how to answer tasks in the required format. For example, a student may be able to understand a reading passage well enough to answer questions about it but fail to complete the reading section within the time allowed. Alternatively, a student may have plenty of good ideas for an essay but not be able to organize them in a way that fully meets the task requirements. A student may also have enough vocabulary to answer questions in speaking but fail to develop their answers in sufficient depth for Part 2 or Part 3.

The teacher plays a critical role in IELTS preparation (Burgess & Head, 2005). His/her main function is to transform IELTS preparation into academic language development by helping students to identify their areas of strength and weakness, select

appropriate study materials, familiarize themselves with the different task types, provide models for students to imitate, and provide feedback which is related to the IELTS assessment criteria. In addition, the teacher has a very important role in helping students to build up their confidence in using English and to maintain their interest in studying for IELTS, since many students study for IELTS under duress and are under a lot of pressure to achieve a certain band score.

The pedagogical approaches to IELTS can be understood through two complementary orientations: skill-based instruction and learner-centered instruction (Brown & Lee, 2015; Harmer, 2007). Skill-based instruction focuses on the four skills of Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking and teaches them in a manner that is relevant to the IELTS exam. Learner-centered instruction focuses on learners' academic language needs and helps them work toward their target band score.

The lessons are designed around the learners' current language levels, their academic language needs, learning difficulties, educational backgrounds and the amount of time that they have available to complete their IELTS preparation. Some learners may require more support with academic vocabulary while others may require support with essay organization, pronunciation, listening to main ideas, reading for specific information and reading for detail. As a result, the teacher needs to design lessons that are relevant to the learners and their needs to ensure that they gain the most from their IELTS classes.

The dissertation focuses on the practical pedagogical decisions teachers make when teaching IELTS in the classroom. These decisions include how to present individual skills, how to choose suitable tasks, how to balance explanations with practice, how to make use of IELTS materials in lessons, how to give feedback in writing and speaking, and how to promote independent learning. In terms of preparation for Academic IELTS, there is a limited time in which to develop students' skills, therefore, the teacher must work efficiently in the classroom to achieve a high level of learning. Therefore, it is essential that teachers adopt a clear pedagogical framework for the lessons to teach in a purposeful, coherent, and academic manner.

The primary objective of this research-oriented study is to investigate and to suggest effective pedagogical strategies for teaching Academic IELTS to learners who require English for academic purposes. The focus of the study is to explore ways and means how teachers can help their students to develop all four basic language skills i.e. listening, reading, writing and speaking necessary for IELTS test while at the same time preparing them for the test. Thus, the study would not only explain the test but also help the readers to know how to teach and learn each component of the test in a systematic and practical manner. In short, the study attempts to treat IELTS academic test preparation as both test preparation and academic language learning.

The scope of this study is confined to the Academic IELTS module, as it is more relevant to academic studies and to academic communication. The study is intended for teachers, IELTS instructors, teacher trainees, and researchers who are involved in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and exam-oriented language teaching. The study focuses on teaching IELTS, and on how lessons can be planned and delivered to help students develop the four skills required for the test, and to provide them with feedback on their performance to help them improve and achieve better results.

The dissertation will be introduced and a background about IELTS will be given in the first section of the dissertation. In the second section, methodology for teaching IELTS will be explained. After that, each of the four skills of IELTS will be discussed in separate chapters. In these chapters, requirements of each of the skills will be explained, and ways of teaching and difficulties which students encounter during taking IELTS will be discussed.

The final part of the study includes an assessment of the criteria that the examiner uses to assess a student's performance, a discussion of the key aspects of IELTS that teachers of English for Academic Purposes should be aware of and a conclusion. In the assessment criteria section, the Band Descriptors for IELTS are described and the reasons for teachers and students to know the Band Descriptors are also presented. In the discussion section, the major aspects of IELTS that are related to pedagogy of the test are discussed. In the conclusion section, the findings of the study are summarized. Recommendations for teaching IELTS are also presented. The main thrust of the study is that teaching IELTS is not only

preparing the students to take the test but also teaching them in a very systematic way to help improve their ability to use English for Academic Purposes so that they can achieve their goals in academic and/or professional contexts.

CHAPTER ONE

The Role and Structure of Academic IELTS

As a more globalized society begins to take shape, English continues to emerge as the primary language used in cross-cultural communication in the following fields: international communication, higher education, research dissemination, and professional mobility (Crystal, 2003; Jordan, 1997). It is imperative that standardized methods of measuring students' competence in the English language are integrated into the process, especially as the number of international students entering higher learning institutions increases and the degree of international academic collaboration increases (Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Weir, 2005). IELTS is one of the most widely used measures of English-language proficiency for international study and professional purposes (IDP IELTS, 2024). For proper guidance of students regarding the Academic component of the IELTS examination, it is imperative that the teacher is aware of the examination (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023). This section of the dissertation presents comprehensive details regarding the Academic component of the IELTS examination. All these details are essential in developing effective pedagogical methods on the Academic component of the IELTS examination.

The English Language Testing Service (ELTS) was introduced in 1980 and was substantially revised and relaunched as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in 1989 (Davies, 2008). This is a standardized test of language proficiency that is meant to assess language proficiency in individuals intending to work, study, or move to an English-speaking country. The British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge Assessment English are the three major collaborative associations that administer this test, which is co-developed. The IELTS is offered in two main forms: General Training and Academic. The Academic version of the test is specifically tailored for applications to professional registration bodies or universities whose primary language of instruction is English. Academic IELTS is used to measure the candidate's ability in the English language to assess whether they qualify for higher education.

The importance of IELTS, especially the Academic version, can be understood in terms of its function as a 'gatekeeper' in international education centers around the globe. Education centers in English-speaking countries use IELTS as a means of evaluating whether international students possess appropriate language skills to cope with academic pressures. Besides speaking fluently, academic success requires strong reading comprehension, academic writing skills, accurate listening skills to lectures, and the ability to participate in formal arguments. IELTS attempts to simulate real-life academic assignments and requirements. Therefore, the scope of further education, scholarships, and career success is often heavily linked to a high IELTS score. It often determines the course of one's career and visa or admission chances.

Academic IELTS is taken by individuals for their own reasons. The most common reason for taking this test is to gain admission to any university overseas. If students are interested in pursuing any course in undergraduate, graduate, or doctorate programs, they need to prove their proficiency in the English language according to the requirements of the school. IELTS results are also required by professional organizations, such as medical, nursing, and engineering, for professional purposes. For example, IELTS results may be needed to prove the proficiency in the English language for healthcare professionals who want to obtain a license in countries such as the UK and Australia. IELTS results may also be needed for scholarship programs, exchange programs, and research opportunities in foreign countries.

The test is quite widespread in many nations and is recognized in over 140 countries (IDP IELTS, 2024). It is highly regarded in various countries, especially in the English-speaking world such as the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. IELTS scores are frequently needed in these nations for both university entrance and, occasionally, immigration. Additionally, IELTS is very well-liked in nations like China, India, and other Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries with significant numbers of international students, where studying overseas offers a route to better employment opportunities and socioeconomic mobility.

There are a few requirements that must be fulfilled for one to be eligible for the Academic IELTS exam. The exam is recommended for anyone aged 16 and above, as per the rules and regulations set by the conducting bodies, the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge Assessment English. The exam is not recommended for younger students as the academic level and intellectual requirements of the exam match the academic requirements of the secondary and post-secondary education sector, though there is no upper age limit specified. The candidate must have a valid passport as identification at the time of registration and while taking the exam, apart from the recommended age limit. For the confirmation of the candidate's identity and the genuineness and security of the exam procedure, the passport must be valid and recognized by law. International students cannot use any other kind of identification for the exam in most countries. The requirements for exam eligibility have been set for the sake of international uniformity, to stop the crime of identity theft, and for the genuineness and reliability of the results at academic institutions all over the world.

Although IELTS is mainly designed to be taken by non-native English-speaking people, there are instances when L1 users of English are required to sit the test as well (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). This requirement mainly takes place when they have completed their previous education in a country that does not have English as the dominant medium of instruction or when they cannot provide official documentation that confirms their medium of instruction to their mode of education. To uphold justice and equality, there are some institutions and professional regulating bodies that have uniform admission policies that apply to all candidates, irrespective of their country of origin. Hence, in cases when the candidate's previous academic record does not clearly point to English medium education, even people from English speaking countries may be asked to provide an IELTS score. There may be instances where evidence of proficiency in academic English is necessary for dual citizens or long-term residents of the country, especially for those who attended a multilingual or non-English speaking educational facility. This method is predicated upon the objective nature of the IELTS, focusing on the academic English ability of the student rather than their ethnicity.

The Academic IELTS test aims to assess candidates' ability in four essential language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The whole test session is supposed to be completed within approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes. Four audio recordings of real-life situations in academic or social contexts are used in the 30-minute test for listening. Three long academic passages with different types of questions are used in the 60-minute test for reading. Two writing tasks must be completed by candidates within a total period of 60 minutes in the test for writing. In Task 1, candidates are expected to write a description of visual details such as graphs, charts, diagrams, tables or maps, whilst in Task 2, they must write an essay based on an argumentative or discursive piece in response to a task. The Speaking test lasts about 11-14 minutes and is made of three parts. Part 1 includes personal questions about candidates themselves. Test takers are given a card that asks them to talk about a particular topic for 1-2 minutes in Part 2, whereas in Part 3, they are asked further questions connected to the topic in Part 2. The test is held in person or online with an expert examiner (IDP IELTS, 2024).

The band score ranges from 0 to 9, and this is used to score each of the four sections, and the total band score is the average of the four sections, rounded to the nearest half or whole band (Davies, 2008). The band description is carefully designed so that it does not only assess grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, but also coherence, cohesion, fluency, pronunciation, task achievement, and lexical resource. Communicative competence in academic contexts is emphasized by the assessment criteria (IDP IELTS, 2024). Therefore, the strategies adopted to teach must include the correctness of the words, along with the strategic skill of task analysis and time management.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a widely accepted language skill level framework around the world and is often used as a framework of interpretation of the IELTS band scale. Despite being two different systems, educational institutions often use a rough equivalence between the two systems as a measure of assessment of IELTS results (Council of Europe, 2020). Bands 9 and 8.5 of IELTS are generally at CEFR Level C2, which is at the stage of mastery or near-native fluency. At this stage of language proficiency, it is expected that the user of language will show complete

and thorough mastery of language use, with accurate and subtle use of vocabulary and grammatical structures in complex situations in academia or professional life. Bands 7.0 and 7.5 correspond to CEFR Level C1, whilst Band 8 is at the higher end of CEFR Level C1. The C1 level of learners of language is at the advanced level of language proficiency, as it is expected that learners at this level will be able to comprehend complex language, produce coherent and well-structured academic essays, and be able to communicate spontaneously in speaking situations. Bands 6.0 and 6.5 are generally at CEFR Level B2, which is at the upper-intermediate level of language proficiency. At this stage of language proficiency, although the user of language can successfully engage in academic discussions, there are constraints of error and complexity for the user of language (IDP IELTS, 2024). By making admission requirements consistent with more general international language norms, these equivalences assist educators and institutions in better understanding the language abilities implied by each IELTS band score (Taylor & Weir, 2012).

The students are given an opportunity to retake the IELTS test if they are not able to meet the minimum band requirement for the overall test or if they are not able to meet the minimum requirements set by different sectors of institutions. Candidates can retake the test as many times as they want, but the total test fee must be paid each time candidates take the test. In some cases, test-takers must attain a minimum band for the test. This minimum band is often set at 6.5 or 7.0 for postgraduate studies and 6.0 or 6.5 for undergraduate studies. However, it should be noted that some institutions have a minimum band for some parts of the test, especially the speaking and writing parts of the test. This minimum band is often set at 6.0. This implies that the student may not be admitted to the course if he/she does poorly in one part of the test. Therefore, it has been found that students who perform poorly in one area of the test choose to retake the area where they have performed poorly with the hope of performing better (IDP IELTS, 2024). The importance of the need for the student to develop the right techniques for the exam can be seen from this.

The way by which the IELTS is conducted has also been modified in recent times according to the changing needs and preferences of the candidates, as well as advances in technology. For example, in the case where the IELTS is conducted in a traditional paper

format, the candidate is required to take the speaking section in person, whereas the listening, reading, and writing sections are conducted in a traditional paper format (IDP IELTS, 2024). It is, however, important to note that the computer-based version of the IELTS is becoming very popular around the globe. For example, whereas the speaking section in the computer-based version is conducted in person by a certified examiner to ensure authenticity and accuracy in assessing the speaking skills of the candidate, the candidate is required to take the computer-based version of the listening, reading, and writing sections at an official test center. The content, level, assessment, and duration of the tests are the same in both cases. Another major advantage of the computer-delivered version of the test is the quick availability of results, which take only a few days to be released, as opposed to the longer waiting period for the paper-delivered version. Another factor that has influenced the move towards the computer-based version of the test is the increasing demand for the digital version of the test and the elimination of the paper-based version of the test, which has been discontinued or reduced significantly in various countries, especially where the digital infrastructure is well developed. The elimination of the paper-based version of the test has been influenced by the trends and requirements for computer-based tests and the overall principles and criteria set by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge Assessment English.

Preparation for the Academic IELTS test can be done both independently and with the supervision of an experienced IELTS instructor, each with its own advantages and disadvantages (Green, 2007). The most obvious advantage of independent study is the freedom to arrange the study time according to the student's own convenience, which may vary depending on the individual's needs and the time available to study (O'Sullivan & Weir, 2011). Furthermore, with the help of authentic study material such as *the Cambridge IELTS series*, the student can prepare adequately to become familiar with the IELTS test format and practice the test extensively. However, the disadvantage of self-study is that the student may find it difficult to evaluate their own band score, which is vital to improving their Writing and Speaking skills, as these sections need to be evaluated with the utmost care and feedback to show improvement in the student's response (Hyland, 2019). On the other hand, with the

supervision and guidance of an experienced IELTS trainer, the student may be able to prepare adequately to show improvement in their test scores (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023), though this may demand higher financial investment from the student. Although financial investment in instructor-led preparation may be higher, this can result in more efficient progress and a better understanding of the assessment criteria. However, the choice between studying on one's own and with instructor-led support will depend on the candidate's language level, discipline, target band score, and availability of good instructor support.

Preparation for Academic IELTS is a structured and multi-faceted process. It requires preparation in terms of language development and test familiarization. Preparation for IELTS, unlike other language courses, requires students to be aware of the specific skills required for the test. Students must be familiar with the types of questions and distractors, essay writing based on the scores, common topics in speaking and strategies for the answers in the reading and listening sections. Preparation for IELTS requires students to enhance their language skills while focusing on test-taking skills. Students need to improve their language skills by learning new words, grammatical structures, and developing note-taking skills during the listening test and fostering essay writing skills. Furthermore, students must be prepared by taking mock tests, which are very crucial for building confidence and overcoming exam anxiety during the actual test.

The ideal time for students to begin their preparation for the Academic IELTS examination depends on a variety of factors, including their recent level of proficiency and desired band score. It is recommended that before embarking on their IELTS preparation, candidates should have at least an intermediate level of competence in the English language, which is at B1/B2 level in accordance with the CEFR scale. Before beginning IELTS preparation classes, students whose competence is below that level should be taught basic English language lessons. Early IELTS preparation without sufficient competence can only lead to confusion and disappointing results since students must have sufficient competency before focusing on higher academic abilities and IELTS strategies.

The duration required for IELTS preparation can vary greatly depending on the student's initial proficiency level, the pace of learning, and the desired score. On average,

students can take anywhere from three to six months of preparation time to enhance their score by one band. Preparation courses can extend anywhere from eight to twelve weeks with constant sessions and practice. However, it should be noted that it can take a lot more time for the pupils to study and learn the academic language if they want to achieve high band scores, such as 7.5 and above. It should be mentioned that while being aware of the templates and strategies is important in preparing for the IELTS, there is a need to improve speaking, writing, listening, and reading comprehension as well.

The availability of high-quality study resources is one of the key advantages of Academic IELTS preparation. A variety of textbooks, practice materials, online resources, and other supplementary materials can be found to assist both the instructor and the student in reaching the target band score. Among all the available materials, the most authentic and acceptable practice materials are in the form of Cambridge practice test books, also known as the *Cambridge IELTS* series of books. These are test practice materials from Cambridge University Press in association with Cambridge Assessment English, which are available from *Cambridge IELTS 1* to *Cambridge IELTS 20*. These are real examination papers, which provide learners with experience in the Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking tests. There are answer keys, listening test transcription, and writing samples in these books, which help learners become familiar with the examination papers themselves. The books are also deemed the most authentic source of study material for the examination, as they include real test standards. Apart from the Cambridge books, teachers can also use other study materials such as skill-based study books, vocabulary improvement books, essay writing books, and online test simulation tools. Of all these study materials, the most prominent position in teaching the IELTS test is held by the Cambridge test series, as it enables teachers and students to track their performance in terms of real difficulty level questions.

Test-takers typically take the Listening, Reading, and Writing tests on the same day without any breaks in between the tests. There is a specific order in which the three written tests are conducted. First comes the listening test, followed by the reading test and then the writing test. It demands from the test-taker the ability to focus and make the best use of the time available for the test, which is two hours and forty-five minutes (Cambridge Assessment

English, 2023). In contrast, the Speaking test is normally scheduled on a different date, usually a few days before or after the written tests, depending on the test center's schedule and availability. It is worth noting that, although there might be instances where the test is given on the same date, it is normally scheduled on a different date for the sake of logistical convenience and the availability of examiners (British Council, 2023). The test is conducted in a face-to-face setting with a qualified test examiner in a personal setting, providing a controlled and standard test environment. The test is separated from the written tests to provide a focused assessment of the candidate's ability in speaking, while at the same time providing a standard test environment for all the academic skills (Taylor & Weir, 2012).

After the completion of the examination, the students are provided with an official Test Report Form indicating their band scores. The validity period of the IELTS certification is two years (IDP IELTS, 2024). The two-year validity of the IELTS certification is based on the premise that the proficiency in the language might vary with time if it is not enhanced and developed continuously. After two years of passing the exam, it is assumed that the students need to take the exam once more to prove that they have updated their English language proficiency to meet the requirements of their academic or professional pursuits. In addition to the exam, the two-year validity period of the exam results highlights the importance of the growth of the language skills of the students, apart from the exam results.

In case candidates are not satisfied with the results of the IELTS exam, they can apply for an enquiry into the results of the exam, which is a formal re-marking facility. This process allows the candidates to apply for the re-marking of their exam mainly in Writing or Speaking section. The application should be submitted to the original exam center where candidates took their exam. Candidates are given six weeks to apply for the service starting from the original date of the exam. During this time, the examiners will re-mark the exam in the chosen section using the official IELTS criteria to ensure that the original marking was accurate. There is a fee to apply for this service; however, the fee will be refunded to the candidate in case the obtained marks are higher in the re-marked section. This service is an assurance that the IELTS exam is committed to maintaining the highest standards of fairness, transparency,

and quality in the exam, giving the candidates the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their exam results when needed (IDP IELTS, 2024).

Teaching Academic IELTS provides a wide range of professional, pedagogical, and economic benefits for language teachers. As IELTS is one of the most widely accepted tests of English proficiency around the world, language teachers specializing in IELTS preparation can consider themselves part of a highly lucrative field of work. The international acceptance of IELTS, conducted by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge Assessment English, ensures that language teachers involved in IELTS teaching become part of a well-established and respected system of language testing (Weir, 2005). This association may open opportunities for cooperation with language centers, universities and international institutions.

One of the greatest advantages of teaching IELTS lies in the professional specialization that it enables for language teachers. IELTS teaching requires a thorough understanding of the test criteria, band descriptors, task structures, and grading systems. As a result, language teachers become highly adept in the teaching of academic writing, discourse structure, lexical resource development, and communication skills. IELTS teaching also enables language teachers to become highly adept in the analysis of student performance, as the test criteria allow for the application of well-defined rubrics in the evaluation of student performance. Consequently, IELTS teaching enables language teachers to become highly adept in the identification of student needs, thus greatly improving teaching effectiveness.

Moreover, teaching IELTS can contribute to personal growth. Unlike English for General Purposes classes, IELTS is a specific skill where teachers must combine language acquisition with test strategies and techniques for success. Such a multidisciplinary approach can prompt teachers to use evidence-based instruction (Brown & Lee, 2015). Additionally, since IELTS tests all four skills in a truly academic setting, teachers can refine their skill in teaching integrated skills rather than isolated language items. Therefore, teaching IELTS can contribute to increased precision in instruction.

Another significant advantage is related to the ability to measure students' improvement. IELTS uses a band scale to rate students' performances. Such an approach can

prompt teachers to measure their students' improvement quantitatively. Observing a student's improvement from Band 5.5 to Band 6.5 can give a teacher a sense of fulfillment. Such an experience can boost a teacher's motivation and job satisfaction since their success is related to their students' success in their fields of study (Alderson, Clapham, & Wall, 1995). Moreover, since IELTS is a high-stakes test for students, both parties can engage in a meaningful relationship since both have a common objective.

From an economic standpoint, the teaching of IELTS can result in better job prospects and financial benefits. Because of the need for English medium education in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the United States, the demand for IELTS tutors is constant (Chapelle & Douglas, 2006). Language centers, individual coaching centers, and online platforms often require IELTS tutors. This may result in higher financial gains for experienced IELTS instructors who have assisted hundreds of students in scoring the desired grades. Additionally, the emergence of online learning has provided IELTS instructors with further opportunities to interact with students across the world.

Lastly, IELTS teaching can result in career advancement. The teaching of IELTS can be a bridge to other career paths in the field of academic English teaching, curriculum development, teacher training, and test development. As IELTS is closely linked to academic English proficiency, it can also contribute to the development of teaching skills in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in higher education institutions (Jordan, 1997). Some teachers may also consider obtaining the qualification of an IELTS examiner through the official IELTS-related training programs.

In summary, Academic IELTS is an essential tool in the world of international education and professional movement. It is a test of overall academic language ability in four basic skills, accepted worldwide as a valid test of entry-level ability in higher education institutions. The acceptance of IELTS in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States of America is a strong indicator of the significance of Academic IELTS in the world of education. The IELTS preparation process is a complex one that requires strategic teaching, adequate linguistic foundations, and practice. The importance of IELTS in the world of language teaching lies in the high stakes

of IELTS performance, thus the significance of developing strategies to effectively teach Academic IELTS. A basic understanding of the test, the world of IELTS, and the global acceptance of IELTS as a requirement for higher education is the fundamental groundwork that needs to be covered before exploring strategies to effectively teach Academic IELTS.

CHAPTER TWO

Pedagogical Foundations for Academic IELTS Preparation

The teaching of Academic IELTS must begin with an awareness of learners' needs prior to any systematic instruction. Academic IELTS preparation is designed for learners who need a specified test result for admission to academic study or for professional purposes. It is therefore common for learners to enter IELTS preparation with a specific target band score that they need to achieve (Burgess & Head, 2005; Bachman & Palmer, 2010). As a result, it is inappropriate for teachers of Academic IELTS to treat all learners as if they have identical abilities, weaknesses, and academic goals. In practice, learners are preparing to take the exam for very different purposes. Some are preparing to take the exam for undergraduate study, while others are preparing to take the exam for postgraduate study, professional registration, or scholarship applications. These very different purposes determine the score that the learners need to achieve, how long they must prepare for the exam, and the extent to which they require support for individual skills. As a result, the first stage of the teaching of Academic IELTS must be based on needs analysis and diagnostic assessment (Brown & Lee, 2015).

Needs analysis and diagnostic assessment enable the teacher to establish an appropriate starting point for instruction. It is important for a teacher to identify learners' present level, previous learning experience, academic background, and main areas of difficulty. In an IELTS classroom, learners are often uneven across the four skills. For example, a learner may be strong in Reading but weak in Writing Task 2. Another learner may know grammar rules and use them in writing but be unable to speak fluently in an exam. A learner with good general English may still lack IELTS-specific vocabulary, understand how to paraphrase in writing, but fail to manage time during the exam. For this reason, the teacher should gather information about learners' language ability and previous IELTS

experience at the very beginning of the course (Brown & Lee, 2015; Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

Another element of the first stage of the methodology of teaching Academic IELTS is diagnostic testing. The teacher or trainer can use a number of different tools to test a learner's current level in each of the skills and to find out what he or she does not know yet and what he or she needs to do to reach the target band. These tools can include short listening tests; reading tests with IELTS-style questions on IELTS-style passages; writing tests, including sample questions for Writing Task 1 and Writing Task 2; and speaking tests, which can be in the form of informal interviews. The results of these tests are not intended to provide the teacher with a score for each skill (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Instead, they provide the teacher with information about the learner, information that can be used to create a teaching or learning profile. This profile outlines the learner's strengths and highlights those areas where he or she needs most help, and those areas where he or she needs a little less help.

A further consideration is target band planning. For example, a student aiming for a Band 6.0 would require a lot of support to achieve this score in comparison to a student studying for a Band 7.5 and above. These students would require more advanced training in the writing of arguments, the use of a wider range of lexical items, an increase in cohesion and work on pronunciation and the use of more flexible language in oral communication. In terms of lesson planning, effective lessons are those that have been well planned with clear learning outcomes (Harmer, 2007). In the context of IELTS, the teacher has the student's target band score in mind, therefore the learning outcomes for lessons for IELTS are clearly defined for the teacher and the student prior to the commencement of study for the test.

In summary, the methodology for teaching IELTS Academic should begin with a diagnosis of learners' needs, followed by setting of learning goals, and rational planning of lessons and activities. With a clear understanding of learners' starting points and the required IELTS score, effective lessons can be designed to help learners acquire Academic English skills through systematic study, constant practice, and appropriate feedback (Burgess & Head, 2005).

In Academic IELTS methodology, the focus on language development and on test techniques or strategies is often found to be in conflict. IELTS preparation is often thought of in terms of techniques, or of completing IELTS practice tests. However, the IELTS test itself is designed to test a candidate's ability to use English for a variety of purposes in academic situations. Thus, IELTS preparation should focus on helping test-takers develop their English language abilities, but at the same time, preparation for IELTS cannot be reduced to a general English course, because the test has a very specific format.

Language development is a gradual process, and the focus of IELTS preparation is not solely confined to exam techniques. As learners progress through their study of IELTS, the focus shifts from simple test taking to the development of the language needed to complete the test to adequate levels. Thus, lessons need to include focused work on the language which will aid performance in each of the test skills. In writing, for example, learners need to improve their ability to write essays of adequate length and in a clear and organized manner by developing their ability to construct effective paragraphs and to present coherent arguments. If students only complete essays in class without being taught these skills, then the same errors are likely to appear in their attempts to complete IELTS writing tasks.

The other key aspect of the IELTS methodology which is central to the IELTS academic preparation is the relationship between language development and test-taking strategy (Green, 2007; Burgess & Head, 2005). While it is possible to teach IELTS as a general English course, Academic IELTS as a test has a specific format and the student must learn not only to use English but also to be able to use English effectively in a test situation. This means that as well as developing his/her academic language ability, the student must also learn how to approach each part of the test in an effective way. He/she must understand the instructions for each task, learn how to manage his/her time for each task, recognize the type of question that he/she is being asked to answer, avoid common pitfalls for each task, and use his/her preparation time effectively for each task of the Writing section. As noted by Burgess and Head (2005), the teacher of an exam class must pay attention to two aspects: the content of the course and the characteristics of the test. Thus, the teacher not only teaches

English to his/her students but also teaches them how to take the test in which they are being assessed using English (Burgess & Head, 2005).

This balance between language development and test strategy is evident across all four skills (Grabe, 2009; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Hyland, 2019; Luoma, 2004). In Reading, students are developing their vocabulary and comprehension skills and learning strategies such as skimming and scanning for main ideas, as well as identifying information that has been paraphrased. In Listening, students are developing their ability to use English in spoken form, and learning to follow for question types, and following the questions while listening to the audio while hearing the recording only once. In Writing, students are developing their grammar and vocabulary, and learning how to respond to tasks, to create coherent answers, and to distinguish between Task 1 and Task 2 styles. In Speaking, students are developing their fluency and pronunciation and learning how to expand on answers in all three parts of the interview.

A balanced IELTS lesson, therefore, will involve the learners doing certain amount of practice of a language or skill, followed by feedback on both the use of language and test-taking. It is also important for the teacher and students to reflect on what has been learned, with a view to applying it in future lessons.

Thus, Academic IELTS is effectively taught by relating test strategies to further develop the student's academic language ability. The ultimate aim of test strategies is to support students' acquisition of sufficient ability to use English for communication in academic settings, thereby helping students obtain desired results in IELTS as well as to cope with subsequent academic studies utilizing English. In this sense, while helpful, test strategies should not be allowed to supersede students' development of practical communicative ability in English.

There are four main skills that are tested through IELTS: listening, reading, writing and speaking. In the main, each of the skills should be taught as separate entities. Lessons should focus on specific aspects of the skills that are required for each of the corresponding parts of the test. Each part of the test requires specific types of tasks and specific aspects of each skill to be assessed. The four skills are also practiced in practical terms often used in

combination in situations in which students of English, as speakers of other languages, use English for study. For example, a student might listen to part of a lecture and then go on to discuss the same material with other students, read several different sources on a topic and then write an essay on the topic, or write down notes on several different sources and then go on to use the material from those sources when speaking on the topic in class. All in all, therefore, IELTS lessons should include a mixture of practice of the individual skills, and practice of using English for study in a more integrated way.

To familiarize students with the test features of the individual skills, teaching of the individual skills should be skill-based. In order to train students' ability to complete the Listening task, for example, they should practice prediction, note-taking, identifying positive and negative features, and completion of a spoken discourse. In Reading, students should practice skimming and scanning, identifying paraphrases in questions, and identifying the main idea of a number of texts. In Writing, students should practice analysis of task, organization of ideas, use of a range of vocabulary, and writing of clear and fully developed paragraphs. In Speaking, students should practice increasing fluency, pronunciation, grammatical range and completeness, and ability to extend an answer (Field, 2008; Grabe, 2009; Hyland, 2019; Luoma, 2004).

The skills are also often practiced in an integrated fashion, which is to say that improving one skill can aid in the improvement of another. For example, a learner can read academic texts to acquire vocabulary and ideas to use in Writing Task 2. He or she can listen to academic talks to acquire an awareness of the discourse markers and spoken organization that he or she can then use in Speaking Part 3. Speaking can be used as a means of rehearsing ideas that the learner will later use in essays. Writing can be used to organize arguments that the learner will later use in discussions. In this way, IELTS preparation is more meaningful than it would be if a learner were simply practicing the various sections of the test in isolation. Instead, the learner is practicing using academic English as it is used in a variety of circumstances in real academic contexts (Jordan, 1997; Green, 2007).

A typical IELTS lesson should start with an engaging task, then move on to study and, finally, to activation. Harmer (2007) considers these three elements to be the major

components of any successful lesson. This approach can easily be applied to IELTS lessons as well. For example, a lesson may begin with a short class discussion of a recent IELTS Writing Task 2 topic. The main part of the lesson was then spent studying thesis statements and different paragraph structures. For the activation part of the lesson, students planned and then wrote their own essays in response to one of the test questions. This approach to IELTS lessons, which moves from engaging the students in tasks to helping them study and then applying what they have learned in more practice, prevents lessons from becoming repetitive or being reduced to the completion of practice tests. Lessons will also not be limited to studying only grammar or vocabulary and how it is used in writing IELTS tests, because all the IELTS skills are used in a variety of different academic situations. Students also will be better able to apply what they learn in lessons to their actual test (Harmer, 2007; Burgess & Head, 2005).

A balanced approach that includes the study of language, IELTS test features and IELTS tasks can prevent lessons becoming too repetitive and prevent students who are studying grammar/vocabulary in isolation from not being able to apply what they have learned in IELTS tasks (Burgess & Head, 2005; Green, 2007). When a lesson is structured in the following way it helps the students see the connection between the academic language they are studying, the IELTS test and the real academic situation in which they will use English (e.g. lectures, discussion groups, written assignments, etc.).

Therefore, the most effective methodology for teaching Academic IELTS is one which moves between teaching individual skills (as found in the various test components; (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023; Jordan, 1997). and providing learners with the opportunity to use these skills in a more integrated, academic setting. Academic English is used as a vehicle for communication in a variety of contexts and, therefore, it is not enough for a learner to be able to complete effectively a variety of individual test components. Rather, he or she needs to be able to use all four skills to communicate effectively in a variety of purposes in academic contexts (Jordan, 1997; Green, 2007).

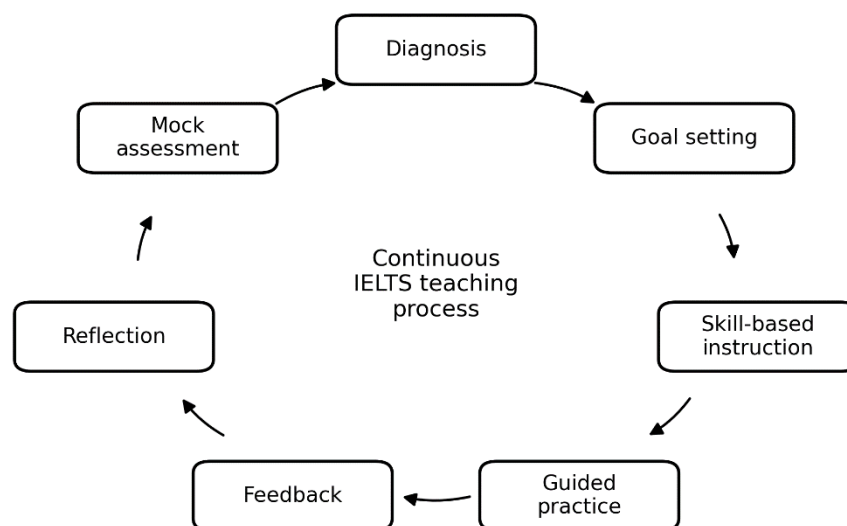


Figure 1. Pedagogical cycle for Academic IELTS teaching

Source: Prepared by the author based on Brown and Lee (2015), Harmer (2007), and Bachman and Palmer (2010).

Figure 1 illustrates a cyclical model of Academic IELTS instruction in which diagnosis, goal setting, skills teaching, guided practice, feedback, reflection, and mock assessment inform one another (Brown & Lee, 2015; Bachman & Palmer, 2010). First the teacher diagnoses the students' current abilities, their strengths and weaknesses, and the target band that they require. Then the teacher sets learning objectives which are realistic for the students in the time available for study. After that the teacher delivers skill teaching to equip students with the necessary skills for Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking in IELTS.

This is followed by the learners applying the newly taught skills to IELTS-style tasks in a controlled environment with teacher support. These skills are reinforced through feedback given to students on errors they made. The students are told why they got the answer wrong and what they can do to improve in that area. Students also reflect on their learning. They look at their own progress, identify difficulties for themselves and discuss strategies

for overcoming them in the classroom. This is followed by mock assessment of all IELTS sub-tests under test conditions. The results from these mock tests will lead to further diagnosis and so IELTS preparation is a continuous process of teaching, practice, evaluation and improvement.

The final area of concern within Academic IELTS methodology is that of the Academic IELTS teacher's use of materials, the teacher's lesson planning, the teacher and student's use of feedback and the student's use of autonomy. IELTS materials should be carefully selected to enable learners to prepare for the test whilst also engaging in study that will aid them in becoming more competent users of English for academic purposes. High-quality materials can be used for test practice, but the teacher must also utilize these materials to analyze task types with students, to identify frequent errors made by learners and to provide students with practice of strategies as well as academic language use (Burgess & Head, 2005; Cambridge University Press, 2017).

In test preparation lessons, learning objectives should be clearly related to the abilities that are being tested in the IELTS assessment. As in language assessment, materials and lessons should be purposeful rather than merely providing learners with opportunities to practice a range of tasks, teachers must plan lessons that have a clear focus and provide learners with the opportunity to reach their target band score. For example, a Reading lesson might focus on improving the ability to recognize paraphrased versions of a sentence, while a Writing lesson might focus on writing effective overview statements for Task 1, or organizing and supporting an argument for Task 2. Speaking lessons might focus on extending answers in Part 3 to reach Band 7 or above (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023; Burgess & Head, 2005).

Feedback is also a key consideration for Academic IELTS. Although students are primarily concerned with finding out whether their answers are right or wrong, they also need to know why they made mistakes and how they can improve in the future. Teachers of IELTS Writing and Speaking need to provide feedback on task response, coherence and other criteria in relation to the band descriptors to help students understand how they are being assessed. Such feedback can be particularly powerful when it guides students through the process of

revision, helping them to rewrite or reformulate parts of their work and to compare their improved work with their original attempts (Hyland, 2019; Luoma, 2004; Hughes, 2003)

Learner autonomy is the fourth key methodological concern in the delivery of Academic IELTS. Clearly, students are not going to make sufficient progress in the classroom on their own, but they can and should continue to learn outside of lessons. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs seek to help learners of English acquire the ability to read, write and make use of vocabulary and communicate orally within an academic environment. Academic IELTS is one of the forms of English assessment that reflect many of the language features of studies at tertiary level. To acquire the necessary ability to achieve a suitable band score in IELTS, students must acquire sufficient ability in reading, writing, using vocabulary in context and speaking within an academic environment. Students can continue to learn outside of the classroom by keeping a record of the vocabulary they encounter, reviewing mistakes, completing as many timed tests as possible, listening to and watching academic materials on DVD or online, reading as well as reading as widely as possible and reflecting on progress after each mock test (Brown & Lee, 2015; Burgess & Head, 2005) .

Academic IELTS methodology, therefore, should aim to create a relationship between studying in the classroom and studying outside the classroom. Teachers can provide learners with the structure, with explanations, with guided practice of different language skills, and with feedback on their mistakes. But learners themselves must take responsibility for their own study. Effective IELTS preparation, therefore, is not just about helping Test-takers to achieve the band scores they require to gain entry to academic courses. Rather, it is also about helping them to develop the ability to use English for a wide variety of other purposes to participate successfully in academic studies (Jordan, 1997; Green, 2007).

In addition to several methodological issues in teaching IELTS, issues related to teacher competence and management of the IELTS classroom also need to be addressed (Richards, 2008; Brown & Lee, 2015). Academic IELTS is a unique form of English teaching in that it is both a language learning program and a test preparation course. For this reason, the IELTS teacher must possess not only the general English teaching skills that most

language teachers acquire during their pre-service and in-service education but also specific knowledge and skills that enable the teacher to adequately interpret the IELTS test for the learner. The teacher must have a thorough understanding of the IELTS test format, the band descriptors for each of the four skills, timing for each section, typical question types and major learner errors. Also, the teacher must possess the skills to teach English for academic purposes as a native language speaker would, and use a variety of methodologies, including both traditional, and more contemporary approaches (Richards, 2008; Jordan, 1997).

Teacher competence is particularly important because IELTS candidates often depend on teachers to interpret the test for them. Many learners have access to practice tests and online materials, but they may not know how to use these materials effectively. They may complete test after test without understanding why their score does not improve. The teacher's responsibility is to turn materials into learning opportunities. A listening transcript, for example, can be used to teach paraphrase, distractors, connected speech, and note-taking. A reading passage can be used to teach text organization, inference, and vocabulary in context. A writing sample can be used to teach task response, paragraphing, cohesion, and grammatical control. In this way, the teacher transforms test material into a source of systematic language development (Burgess & Head, 2005; Richards, 2008).

As Green (2007) notes, IELTS test-takers study under considerable pressure. They are expected to sit the test in a relatively short period of time and achieve a specific score to be granted entry to academic courses, gain employment, or be registered for a specific professional qualification. Therefore, it is not uncommon for test-takers to be anxious and to have unrealistically high expectations. This is why it is so important for the IELTS teacher to manage the classroom in a way that is structured, supportive and focused on a range of clearly defined learning objectives. As Brown and Lee (2015) point out, in effective language teaching, learners engage in purposeful interaction, and learners engage in meaningful practice in the classroom. As is the case with other skills, for IELTS test-takers to get the most out of class, the tasks that they are set must be relevant to the test. In addition, students must understand the purpose of the task and how it will help them to achieve their learning objectives.

Also critical to IELTS teaching is the effective management of class time. As each of the skills requires very different types of practice, lessons must include a mix of explanations, guided practice, free practice, feedback and review. It is not sufficient for a teacher to explain all the rules of English, or to complete a full practice test with a class. In many cases, lessons that consist only of grammar or vocabulary practice will fail to help students to apply what they learn to complete IELTS tasks. A lesson, therefore, should have a clear purpose for each section, for example beginning with task analysis and then moving on to skill practice, followed by feedback (Harmer, 2007; Burgess & Head, 2005).

The teacher must also create a positive atmosphere in class so that the students feel safe to make mistakes. The students, particularly those studying for IELTS who may be older, need to feel that they can take risks and try out new language without fearing being criticized. This is particularly important when students are studying for Writing and Speaking exams as these exams involve a high degree of self-presentation and students fear being evaluated negatively. Negative feedback, even when meant to be helpful, can be damaging to a student's confidence. On the other hand, feedback that is too general is of little use to students as they will be unsure of how to go about to improve (Hyland, 2019; Hughes, 2003). The teacher must therefore provide feedback that is specific, constructive and related to the criteria that the test is being assessed against. For example, instead of simply saying that an essay is weak, the teacher could say that the main problem with the essay is the task response, the coherence, the vocabulary or the grammar. The teacher giving feedback on a student's Speaking test could say that the main problem is with the student's fluency, pronunciation, answer development or grammatical control.

For example, to practice their writing skills, learners could set a few different tasks and be given the opportunity to practice individually as well as in pairs and small groups. In addition to engaging learners in several different ways to aid their understanding and use of English for a variety of different purposes, it is also very important to enable them to reflect on their own learning. By setting various writing tasks and then having them review one another's work, learners can obtain a great deal of help in addition to that provided by their teacher. As a result of reviewing a number of different pieces of work, learners are not only

able to gain a great deal of aid from their peers but also, to practice using English for a variety of different purposes as well as analyzing not only their own strengths and weaknesses with English but also that of their fellow learners. This type of interactive approach to teaching English for specific purposes is seen by many to be far more effective than the more teacher-centered approach to teaching that has characterized much language teaching in the past. Richards (2008, p. 27) notes that ‘Attention to processes of learning as well as learning outcomes is now generally accepted as being central to effective language teaching’. Given the high-stakes nature of IELTS, in addition to becoming familiar with the various types of tasks set in the test, learners also require a great deal of practice in using English both to complete such test questions as well as to communicate in academic settings. A well-managed IELTS classroom therefore can provide learners with a number of different opportunities to not only develop their ability to complete IELTS-style tasks but also to engage in academic communication.

Another part of teacher competence is the ability to adapt instruction to different learner profiles. IELTS classes often include students with different educational backgrounds, target scores, and learning habits. Some learners may need more support with basic grammar, while others may need advanced academic vocabulary or essay argumentation. Some may be strong in receptive skills but weak in productive skills. Others may be fluent speakers but inaccurate writers. The teacher should be able to adjust tasks, group students effectively, provide individualized feedback, and recommend suitable independent study activities. This flexibility makes IELTS teaching more responsive and more effective (Richards, 2008; Brown & Lee, 2015).

Teachers also need to be aware of the ethical responsibilities that they have as test takers prepare for Academic IELTS. There are many test takers who are looking for a way to gain band scores quickly. Many commercial test preparation centers and individuals offer IELTS preparation services, and in some instances, they make exaggerated claims regarding the results that test takers can achieve. Such test takers often fall prey to promises of instant results or guaranteed band scores or techniques for memorizing answers. As educators, it is the responsibility of teachers to make sure that their test takers have realistic goals for the

results that they can achieve. The teacher should help test takers to understand the amount of time required to achieve improvement in test scores and to work towards acquiring English for purposes of academic communication as well as gaining ability to take the test effectively (Burgess & Head, 2005; Jordan, 1997).

In conclusion, teacher competence and the management of the IELTS classroom are key methodological issues which must be addressed by teachers of IELTS. When teachers of IELTS are competent and effectively manage their classrooms, IELTS preparation can be more than simply helping students to achieve a band score in a variety of skills in the test. It can be a structured learning process during which students acquire language, test taking strategies, increased confidence in using English for academic purposes and a better understanding of study at higher levels of education.

CHAPTER THREE

Developing Academic Listening Competence

One of the most important objectives for most English language learners is to develop an ability to understand English in its spoken form in a range of different communicative contexts, from informal face-to-face communication to more formal contexts like lectures, seminars, and academic discussions. Any attempt to achieve this objective is automatically valuable. This objective is particularly important considering the already established differences between written and spoken forms of English. While written English follows set rules in grammar and vocabulary, spoken language in any form, including formal contexts like lectures and seminars in an academic setting, possesses special prosodic features, discourse markers, and information structures that make it fundamentally different from written language (Harmer, 2007). In the context of learners who are attempting to take an Academic IELTS exam, this difference is particularly important because the Listening part of the exam attempts to simulate spoken language in formal contexts like higher education and professional training settings rather than in more informal face-to-face environments.

This academic orientation is obviously reflected in the structure of the IELTS Listening test. While Section 1 consists of a transactional conversation between two speakers in a daily life situation such as making an inquiry or arranging an appointment, from Section 2 onwards, there is a decisive move towards academic and training-related discourse. Section 2 features of a monologue in a social or professional context such as a talk about facilities or a training introduction. Section 3 consists of a discussion between two to four speakers in an academic or educational context such as a tutorial or a meeting about a group project. Finally, Section 4, which is the most difficult, involves an academic lecture or talk on a topic of general academic interest given by a single speaker with little opportunity for interaction. This progression in complexity and formality reflects the kinds of listening demands faced

by university students in real-life academic situations, which has obvious implications for teaching IELTS Listening (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Apart from the improvement of learners' comprehension skills, there is another significant influence that learners may gain from their exposure to academic spoken language. As learners are exposed to more academic listening input, they will develop their awareness of significant features of academic spoken language, including topic-specific vocabulary, logical connectors, hedging language, and discourse markers. In other words, learners will benefit from their exposure to listening input not only in terms of their comprehension skills but also in terms of their academic spoken language skills. The more learners are subjected to academic listening input, the more they will be able to comprehend and appreciate the significant features of formal spoken language and hence will be able to score well not only in the Listening section but also in all four sections of the IELTS test (Field, 2008).

At the same time, it must be noted that effective academic listening does not simply entail vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. Rather, the ability to listen strategically, in other words to make predictions, identify key information, make inferences, and monitor one's understanding in real time, is also important in this respect (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). This metacognitive aspect of listening seems to be particularly important in the context of IELTS, as the ability to process information in real time without the opportunity to review the recordings again is critical. In an academic context, the amount of information that is normally presented in lectures, the use of technical vocabulary, and the need for the listeners to take notes at the same time as attempting to process the information are also important considerations. This requires learners to be exposed to strategies for listening, as opposed to merely listening to a text repeatedly.

In the classroom setting, the teacher's voice is usually the most constant form of spoken language that learners encounter. Nevertheless, the sole reliance on a single form of speech is pedagogically inadequate, especially in the context of Academic IELTS preparation. The test has been structured in a way that includes speakers of various national and regional backgrounds, thereby representing the globalized academic setting in which

learners are accustomed to encountering lecturers and fellow students from various linguistic backgrounds. Excessive exposure to a single form of speech might limit the learner's capacity to decipher unfamiliar accents and speech patterns in a test setting. The use of a wide range of academic listening materials in teaching English has been deemed the best practice in ELT today (Richards, 2008).

The extent of accent and dialectal variation in English is considerable. In fact, such variation is also seen in formal academic English. The accent and phonological variations in academic English spoken by native English speakers can be British, Australian, American, Canadian, and so on. Each of these accents have different vowel sounds, intonation patterns, and rhythm. In the case of British English alone, there is considerable regional variation. For instance, the vowel sounds in words such as 'bath' differ in the north and south of England. In the context of English pronunciation and accent, such variations may prove to be problematic for learners. In the context of grammatical and lexical variations, it is true that such variations are less common in formal academic English. Though grammatical and lexical differences are less significant in formal academic speech, phonological differences are an undeniable challenge for IELTS test-takers (Crystal, 2003). Teachers should make deliberate decisions about learners' exposure to various varieties of English, balancing such exposure in accordance with learners' current level of proficiency.

Apart from accent familiarization, effective instruction in IELTS listening should also focus on helping the student master the discourse patterns of the spoken genres of academic discourse. Take, for example, the discourse pattern of a lecture. It is expected that the lecture will be organized in such a way that it will include an introduction in which the topic and organization of the lecture are explained, a main body in which information is given in some sort of sequential or thematic order, and finally, a conclusion that summarizes the main points of the lecture. Gaining an awareness of such discourse patterns enables the student to listen more effectively and allocate their attention more appropriately (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). In addition to the general discourse features found in spoken language, tutorial discussions and lectures have their own characteristic discourse features. For example, speakers take turns to speak and students express agreement and disagreement with what others have said.

In addition, speakers frequently hedge and qualify what they say. Therefore, IELTS listening instruction should also be diverse to cater for extensive listening as well as for intensive listening.

First, a general outline of the four sections of the Academic IELTS Listening test will be provided. After that, each section will be presented in detail, beginning with Section 1. As discussed earlier in Chapter One, each section becomes progressively more challenging, and the language in the later sections is more formal and less commonly encountered in everyday situations. Therefore, it is also necessary for teachers of IELTS listening to understand the progressive nature of the four sections and to know how to teach each part differently. The four sections of the test are therefore first outlined in general terms and then presented in order from Section 1 to Section 4.

Of the four sections of the Academic IELTS Listening exam, Section 1 is the least challenging in terms of linguistic and contextual difficulty. In contrast to the other sections, which are designed to mimic academic or professional training settings and therefore involve much more formal varieties of spoken English, Section 1 of the exam is characterized by a conversation between two people in which they are having a transactional conversation in an informal social context. This could be anything ranging from booking accommodation, making travel inquiries, registering for something, or making appointments, which are all transactional dialogues that the student is likely to be exposed to in their daily lives in an English-speaking country (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023). This section is therefore considered the most accessible in the sense that the language is not complex and is spoken clearly, with no need to possess the required level of academic language competence that is required in the remaining sections. Nonetheless, Section 1 must not be overlooked from a pedagogical perspective, where the student is expected to listen attentively to particular facts and figures, e.g., names, dates, prices, addresses, and phone numbers, and record the facts accurately within a limited time frame. This ability to locate and retain precise facts and figures is a distinct skill that must be given appropriate emphasis in the context of effective IELTS preparation (Field, 2008; Cambridge Assessment English, 2023).

The IELTS Listening Test for Academic contains several different question types in the four sections (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023). These include multiple choice questions, matching, plan, map and diagram labelling, form completion, note completion, and short answer questions. Because there are many different question types, candidates may need different skills to answer them. For example, note completion and short answer questions require candidates to listen carefully to information and then write it down in their own words, whilst form completion and map and diagram labelling require candidates to complete specific formats with information they have heard. The audio is played only once; therefore, candidates will not be able to replay the audio if they have missed a piece of information. Before candidates begin Section 1 of the test, they are provided with some general test instructions. However, candidates who have taken practice tests before will be familiar with the test format and therefore can ignore these instructions to read through the questions before the test begins. It is a good idea for candidates to go through the questions to get an idea of the types of information they will need to listen to in the recording (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023; Field, 2008).

However, it appears that a range of errors occur in Section 1 and it would be useful for teachers to draw these to candidates' attention as part of their general test preparation (Field, 2008). For example, the number of errors caused by mishearing or not understanding numbers is high, whether the numbers are referred to provide a price, a phone number, a date or other details by reference to a number. For many questions in Section 1 candidates are required to record precise information and it is therefore easy to lose a mark because of a minor error with numbers. This is, of course, in addition to candidates failing to adhere to the word limit indicated for answers to individual questions (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023).

In the IELTS Listening test, candidates are informed of the maximum number of words and/or numbers that they are allowed to use for answers to individual questions, and it is therefore very important that candidates adhere to these strict limits. The errors caused by candidates' spelling mistakes, particularly in relation to accurate spelling of personal names of places and streets of, are also often serious and could be avoided if candidates were

more accurate in their transcription of audio they have heard, since such words are usually specifically mentioned in the audio and cannot be inferred from the surrounding context. Other very common errors include small grammatical mistakes, for example using plural form of words when singular is required or using incorrect hyphenated words. Again, such mistakes appear to be trivial, but they can have serious effects on the band scores that the candidates receive (Field, 2008).

To better understand the various features and requirements of Section 1, as discussed above, it would be pertinent here to present a relevant example from authentic IELTS test material. For this purpose, the following example has been extracted from an actual IELTS material provided in Cambridge IELTS 12, which is one of the official IELTS practice tests provided by Cambridge University Press in collaboration with the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia, joint owners of the IELTS examination. As discussed in Chapter one, the Cambridge IELTS series of practice tests has been found to represent the most authentic and reliable source of IELTS material currently available, as the tests provided in this series have been directly extracted from actual past examination papers (Cambridge University Press, 2017). This makes this series highly valuable not only for IELTS candidates but also for teachers and researchers interested in academically analyzing the actual linguistic features of the IELTS tests. The specific example in question is the note completion task consisting of ten questions in the scenario of an inquiry call about the position as a cycle tour leader. This scenario is entirely typical of Section 1 because it involves two participants in a transactional conversation with the sole purpose of exchanging specific information in an everyday social context. A detailed analysis of this specific example in terms of the nature of the questions asked, the language required in the scenario, and the specific listening skill required will be provided in the following paragraph.

A useful example of Section 1 work is to be found in the IELTS Sample Questions listening test for Section 1. In Task 1, the student hears a short transactional conversation between a woman called Elena from IELTS Sample Questions listening test for Section 1 and a man called Andrei. Elena asks for information, and then Andrei supplies the necessary

details for her to complete her notes. The student's task is to fill in notes or complete a form or table in exactly the right way on the basis of what he or she hears.

The Section 1 example highlights for teachers the fact that although Section 1 is an 'easy' section of the Listening test for IELTS candidates, it should by no means be underestimated. Its 'easy' nature belies the fact that although the language used is less complex than in the other sections, candidates will need to listen to specific information, complete notes, forms, etc. It is not uncommon for students to know what is happening in a general sense in a conversation and still make mistakes because of misspelling of names, wrong use of singular or plural forms, mishearing of numbers and the like. Moreover, the way that they approach a task will affect their scores, not just their ability to arrive at the correct answer. They need to be able to listen, note, and complete a task accurately and, in Section 1, predict what information they will need to complete a task before they listen. The nature of Section 1 also means that Field (2008) comments on listening, that is, that instruction on listening should focus on the processes that underpin what students do when they listen, not just on getting the final answer right, are particularly relevant.

Reading the questions before listening is another critical element of Section 1. Candidates need to read each question carefully before the recording begins to get a sense of what they are looking for. For example, a candidate may know that a date is required to complete a specific gap. Similarly, a candidate may realize that a job title, location, number, or even an adjective is required to complete another. Teachers can also use this element to train their learners by asking them to underline key words and phrases in the questions and to identify the grammatical form that the missing word will take. Candidates can also be trained to predict the type of answer that a specific question will require before the recording begins (REF).

Learners also need to become aware of potential distractors or 'red herrings' in Listening. In IELTS, there are instances where the speaker corrects himself/herself or changes information previously given. There are also cases where more than one piece of information is given before the final answer is provided. This is typical of many spoken interactions where a speaker sets out to arrange or complete a transaction. For example, a

student booking a place on a course might say that the course starts on a particular date but then go on to say that it starts on another date before finally confirming the correct start date. Students must therefore be cautioned against writing down the first piece of information they hear without checking to see whether the speaker confirms or amends it later. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) explain that effective listeners monitor comprehension and adjust their strategy when uncertainty occurs. In an IELTS classroom, this involves learners monitoring the development of a spoken interaction to make necessary amendments to their answers as clarification or correction is provided by the speaker.

Section 1 is the first section where the learners need to develop careful listening habits and begin to prepare themselves for the IELTS Listening exam. They will benefit from a number of carefully planned listening activities, for example, recognizing numbers, writing names, copying in dates, distinguishing between sounds which are very similar and so on. Short dialogues in class could be used to practice learners' following for corrections and reformulations of information. After completing the task for Section 1, candidates should not only check their scores on the answer sheet and go on to Section 2 but also study the transcript of Section 1 to find out why they were given the score they received for that Section. While studying the transcript, they should pay close attention to why they were not credited for certain words and phrases that they had heard. This section of IELTS Listening is one of the easiest parts of the test for students and so should not be underestimated. The purpose of Section 1 is to develop all the skills that students need for Section 2, 3 and 4 of the tests, i.e. careful listening, making predictions, accurate spelling, and following the instructions for each task (Field, 2008; Cambridge Assessment English, 2023).

After Section 1, the level of difficulty increases in terms of language, context, number of speakers, and the listener's cognitive load. Section 2 of the test consists of a monologue in a social setting, such as in public or during a training program, which may not be entirely academic in nature. The listener is expected to follow a longer speech as the speaker is speaking on his or her own and the candidate must pick up main ideas, follow the structure of the talk and identify important information. The tasks in this section include a few map labeling exercises as well as other tasks such as matching information, multiple choice

questions and filling in missing notes from a spoken passage (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023; Field, 2008).

In Section 2 of the IELTS Listening test learners are introduced to more organized, monologic speech in social, public or training contexts. The test-taker must follow a longer speech and identify the organization of the talk and note down important information in the required format. The key for teachers is to draw their learners' attention to signposting expressions (such as first, next, after that, on the left, the main purpose, another important point, and finally) which provide clues for the listener on how the talk is organized and what information to expect next (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Field, 2008).

As already outlined Section 3 of the IELTS test is more academic as it is divided into a number of excerpts of conversation between two to four speakers. These are typically presented within an educational setting and consist of either students discussing a project or tutorial with a tutor or a group of students discussing and planning an academic assignment. Once again learners are faced with the challenge of not only following several speakers but also distinguishing between their individual opinions and identifying points where speakers agree and those where they are differing and even altering their opinion on a point. Learners will also be exposed to a variety of vocabulary items such as general academic language, hedging and suggestions as well as evaluative comments. For many test-takers this section of the test is more challenging than Section 2, not only are there more speakers, but also the sections are longer, and learners are required to understand a greater amount of detail. As stated by Flowerdew and Miller (2005) listening to academic speech requires test-takers to attend not only to the content of what is being said but also to the organization of that spoken discourse and the interactional features of that spoken discourse. As such in IELTS test-takers are required to listen for and attempt to understand how individual speakers are creating meaning and how those meanings are being affected by and developed because of the interaction with the other speakers in the conversation. The test-taker must be able to identify who has said what, outline and define the respective role of individual speakers and then attempt to follow the way in which their opinions are expressed and changed during the conversation. The test-taker must also recognize the points at which individual speakers

accept ideas, reject them, modify them or even present an alternative perspective to that which has been outlined by another speaker.

Teaching Section 3 should therefore include practice with interactional listening. Students should be trained to identify who says what, what each speaker's role is, and how opinions change during the discussion. For example, one student in the recording may first suggest a topic, another may disagree, and the tutor may then guide them towards a better academic focus. If candidates only listen to individual words, they may miss the speaker's intention or choose an option that was mentioned but later rejected. Teachers can help students by using transcripts after listening to activities and asking them to underline expressions of agreement, disagreement, uncertainty, and recommendation (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Section 4 consists of a longer monologue by one speaker on topics of general interest. The language used is more academic and is often used in lectures. The speaker may explain and define terms and concepts and go on to classify, describe causes and effects and present the results of studies and experiments. The speaker may also use examples to support the main points of the talk and refer to other sources of information. The tasks are typically note completion, sentence completion and summary completion. This section of the test is most like the beginning of a university lecture and requires the test-taker to process information quickly and accurately (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Field, 2008).

The significance of Section 4 for the teacher of IELTS listening lies in the test's correlation with academic study. For many students entering English-medium universities, Section 4 is the first of four sections of an IELTS listening test and represents the beginning of academic study by means of listening to lectures and taking notes on them to identify the main points and provide supporting details. Field (2008) stressed that listening should be taught as a process not just as a product and this is particularly so for Section 4 of IELTS listening test. The teacher of IELTS listening should go beyond playing a recording to the test taker and checking the answers for them. Rather the teacher needs to teach the test taker how lectures are organized and how examples are used to support the main idea of a lecture. The test taker also needs to be taught how speakers signal transitions between different parts

of a talk. In essence, listening to a lecture involves a number of processes including predicting, selecting, organizing and reviewing information.

Table 1 summarizes how the four Listening sections progress from everyday transactional discourse to extended academic discourse and identifies the corresponding teaching focus for each section (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023; Field, 2008).

IELTS Listening section	Main discourse type	Typical context	Main listening demand	Teaching focus
Section 1	Conversation between two speakers	Everyday transactional situation	Listening to accurate factual details	Names, numbers, spelling, dates, word limits, corrections
Section 2	Monologue	Social, public, or training-related context	Following organized speech by one speaker	Signposting, map language, sequence, purpose, specific information
Section 3	Discussion between two to four speakers	Educational or academic context	Following interaction, opinions, and speaker roles	Agreement, disagreement, attitude, paraphrase, distractors
Section 4	Academic monologue or lecture	General academic topic	Understanding extended academic discourse	Note-taking, lecture structure, definitions, examples, main ideas

Table 1. IELTS Listening sections, discourse type, and teaching focus

Source: Prepared by the author based on Cambridge Assessment English (2023) and Field (2008).

While listening to information in IELTS Listening (section 1), candidates are required to listen to detailed information and to listen to precise information. For sections 3 and 4, candidates are required to follow a speaker in a more formal situation including lectures and discussions. Sections 2 and 3 aim to develop learners' ability to listen to information in more formal situations than those of everyday life where purely transactional situations of other kinds take place. Thus, IELTS Listening should not be taught as a single unit. Each section should be dealt with in accordance with the type of discourse, the questions, and the cognitive processes required by them.

An effective approach to IELTS Listening instruction should include explicit strategy training (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). One of the most important strategies is prediction. Before the recording begins, learners should examine the questions and predict what kind of information is missing. They should consider whether the answer is likely to be a noun, adjective, number, date, place, or verb form. This does not mean guessing the answer before listening; rather, it prepares the learner's attention and reduces the amount of information that must be processed during the recording. Prediction is particularly useful because IELTS candidates hear the recording only once, so they need to use the preparation time efficiently.

Another important strategy that should be taught to learners is that of recognizing paraphrase. It is typical of IELTS Listening that the recording does not rephrase word for word the question that has been read out to the test-taker. Instead, the speaker may use different words and structures to express the same ideas. For example, a question that contains the main reason may be answered by reference to the most important factor. Teachers should help learners to become familiar with a range of different synonyms, reformulations and equivalent expressions. After completing a listening task, learners can compare their answers with the questions that were read out to them. They can also listen to the recording again to find out how the answer to a particular question was introduced in the recording.

Distractors, information that appears plausible, but is not in fact correct in the end, are another problem for the IELTS listener (Field, 2008; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). A speaker may change his/her mind while speaking. A number may be corrected. A particular idea or solution may be ruled out by the speaker. Many alternatives may be presented before the listener hears the speaker's final decision. To cope with such instances, learners need to monitor while listening to several aspects. The listener needs to plan, monitor and evaluate his/her comprehension during the listening task. For this reason, learners should be taught to wait for confirmation; listen for corrections; and identify how the speaker finally makes his/her decision regarding the choices that have been presented to him/her.

In Sections 3 and 4 of IELTS Listening, students are required to take notes during the listening test to complete the questions afterwards. This does not mean that they must write down absolutely everything the speaker says. Instead, they need to take notes in a very concise and organized way, using a range of different methods including abbreviations, symbols, arrows and very short sentences. Depending on the lecture-style recording they are listening to, students should try to take notes on the main points, examples, definitions, dates, causes and effects and contrasts. Note-taking in this way will assist students not only in their IELTS test but also in their future academic studies where they will need to listen to and take notes from lectures (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Jordan, 1997).

It is also necessary for students to become familiar with different English accents to prepare for the possible variety of accents used by speakers of English in the IELTS test. The author of this dissertation is aware that there are many varieties of English and that in spoken form there can be large differences in pronunciation and intonation between different English speakers, even between native speakers of English. Indeed, Crystal (2003) noted that there are over 100 different English-speaking communities around the world. In terms of IELTS test preparation, it is therefore necessary for teachers to expose their students to different accents of English to help them become used to the phonological differences of different English speakers use when speaking. It is not expected that students will be able to identify all accents of English; rather, they should become able to understand a speaker of English

even when that speaker uses an accent of English that students have not previously encountered.

Intensive vs. Extensive Listening: A Classroom Approach. Listening for short periods of time and concentrating on every word is called intensive listening (Field, 2008). It can be used in the classroom to help students realize what they have done wrong and to improve their ability to process information quickly. Teachers can use short excerpts of recordings and ask students to complete similar tasks to those found in IELTS. Students can work in pairs or small groups and teachers can replay parts of recordings to highlight errors made by students while completing tasks. The teacher can also compare students' answers with transcripts of recordings to focus on specific features of spoken language such as connected speech, or to highlight examples of distractors to help students to recognize them. In contrast, extensive listening involves students listening to longer recordings such as podcasts, radio programs, videos, interviews, lectures, and talks. This type of listening helps to improve students' ability to process information in real time as well as to increase their exposure to a wider range of spoken language to help improve overall academic language ability (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Jordan, 1997).

The lessons should generally follow the three-stage model of pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening (Richards, 2008). In the pre-listening stage, learners are introduced to the topic of the recording, and they complete questions which they listen to find the correct answers. In the while-listening stage, learners are given some recordings to listen to, and they complete the given questions to the best of their ability in the time allowed. In the post-listening stage, the answers are checked and any particularly difficult items are explained. The transcript of the recording is analyzed to provide learners with a more detailed understanding of how the recording was organized and how the answers to the questions were obtained. Learners are also given the opportunity to reflect on the mistakes that they have made. Richards (2008, p. 284) states that 'effective listening instruction should include both comprehension activities, to enable learners to get meaning from what they hear, and listening process activities, to help them realize how they process what they hear'. Therefore, post-listening activities are as important as the listening part of the IELTS test.

As has been mentioned earlier, feedback on IELTS Listening is more important than in other parts of the IELTS exam. This is because the test taker cannot be expected to know the reasons for the mistakes he/she makes. In other words, the test taker cannot be expected to know whether he/she has made a mistake or not. The teacher's feedback should help the test-taker to understand the reasons for his/her mistakes. In other words, instead of saying that an answer is incorrect, the teacher should explain the reasons for the mistake. For instance, the teacher may say that the test-taker heard the correct word but wrote it in the wrong grammatical form. This kind of feedback is very important for the test-taker as it will help him/her to develop accurate listening habits in the long run.

Practice mock tests have a significant and useful role to play in the learning of the IELTS Listening test, but again they must be used thoughtfully. Completing the full Listening test on several occasions enables the student to familiarize himself or herself with the test, he or she can get a feel for what is required in terms of concentration, for how long he or she is able to maintain a consistent level of performance, for how he or she transfers his or her answers and for how long he or she is able to sustain his or her performance over time. Furthermore, it provides the teacher with data about the student's progress as well as about areas of weakness. However, if mock tests are to be of any use, then they must be used as more than as ends in themselves; rather they should be followed by a very detailed review of the student's work as well as by a study of the transcript as well as by focused practice at particular areas of difficulty that have been revealed in the student's performance (Burgess & Head, 2005; Field, 2008).

Recording of learners' comments on their own mistakes and the reasons behind these can be a valuable component of listening lessons. Students can categorize errors into different types, e.g. spelling mistakes, problems with paraphrasing, the presence of distractors, wrong word form, loss of focus, or insufficient vocabulary. Students can use this to monitor their own learning, and gain from their mistakes. Also, this process of recording and reviewing mistakes will help learners to become more autonomous in planning and implementing their own learning, as they will take responsibility for improving in areas where they need to do so.

In addition to helping learners establish realistic listening habits outside of the classroom, such as listening to academic and semi-academic materials, (podcasts, university lectures, news reports, interviews and documentaries), students can listen for general understanding and later for details and then summarize what they have heard orally or in writing. This will help them develop listening skills and enhance their academic language use (Jordan, 1997; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Thus, teaching IELTS Academic Listening requires certain approaches and techniques which aid learners' preparation for and subsequent taking of the Listening test. Furthermore, it must prepare learners for general academic Listening which is encountered across disciplines in a multitude of contexts within higher education. To this end it is suggested that teachers focus upon strategies which will be of use across the four sections of the test as well as key features of a variety of spoken disciplines, utilizing materials found within as well as outside of the four sections of the test in order to reinforce strategies and rehearse them within a variety of Listening contexts to maximize transfer. Students will become effective IELTS listeners and, more importantly, be better equipped for future general academic Listening if teachers of listening aid their students to become aware of the various functions that different sections of the test may serve and aid them in rehearsing a number of strategies within various contexts utilizing various materials found both within and outside of the four sections of the test (Field, 2008; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Teaching learners to prepare for the psychological and practical challenges of taking an IELTS Listening test is also an important aspect of preparing them for the Academic version of the test. While many learners can cope well in class when listening to spoken English, as soon as they are in the IELTS test situation, their scores can drop significantly. This can be due to a variety of factors but mainly to the fact that the test taker is only given the chance to listen to each section once, while he or she is expected to take notes on all the information and answer all the questions on the ensuing sections while listening to the recording, in real time. He or she is also expected to write down all the answers to the questions on the test papers in full, within the time given for each section. It is for this reason

that a large amount of the work on preparing learners to take the Listening test should focus on helping them acquire the strategies needed to cope with these practical challenges. These include both those which help to deal with any anxiety felt and those which help to deal with a loss of focus on the part of the test taker. In addition, learners need to be taught to recover from any answers that they feel they get wrong. The writer believes that it is very rare for a single answer to be wrong, while the rest of the answers for that question are correct. The writer's experience is that a single wrong answer often leads to a chain of other errors, on the part of the test taker, for the remainder of the section (Field, 2008; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

As test-takers listen to the audio, their anxiety may cause them to misinterpret or fail to answer certain questions. For example, the test-taker may become anxious the moment he or she starts listening to the audio or may become so upset after missing an answer that it becomes difficult to continue listening to the rest of the recording. Thus, in addition to showing students how to get back on track when they have missed an answer, teachers should also help students manage anxiety so that they can refocus on the following questions (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Brown & Lee, 2015).

For this reason, as learners complete listening practice exercises, it is useful to incorporate activities into lessons that enable students to practice their recovery skills. There are many instances where, during a listening exercise, students are provided with a recording and questions to answer about what has been heard. Teachers can modify some of the questions to enable students to develop their skills in recovering from a moment when they have failed to understand information. As students listen to a recording to answer questions about what they have heard, at times the teacher can provide a version of the recording that has a segment removed. When this occurs, after students have completed all the questions, a class discussion can be held about how students managed when they were unable to understand information that occurred in a specific section of the recording. As Vandergrift and Goh (2012, p. 148) point out, "the effective listener monitors his/her own comprehension while listening and makes decisions about what to do when there is doubt or confusion." As well as focusing on a range of strategies that are useful for IELTS Listening tasks, such as those noted earlier, it is also important that learners are provided with opportunities to

monitor their attention to what is being heard. As they listen to recordings for listening practice exercises, students can be asked to indicate specific moments in time when they feel that they have lost attention to what is being heard. As students comment about specific moments, strategies can be shared about how to recover from such moments to return to focus on the task at hand.

As the test progresses, the recordings become increasingly demanding. Sections 3 and 4 contain recordings of academic discussions and lectures, which differ significantly from the spoken language encountered in everyday situations. Section 4 is likely to be tiresome for many test-takers, as the recordings are lengthy and contain complex language. To help learners develop listening stamina, teachers may include activities and practices that require learners to complete full listening tests under test-like conditions (Burgess & Head, 2005; Cambridge Assessment English, 2023).

This kind of test practice should be balanced with shorter, more focused listening exercises and activities (Field, 2008; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). If all the test practice that a student does is long, then they are likely to become tired before they can improve at the specific points where they are making mistakes. One approach to this is to alternate between full mock tests and so-called ‘micro-listening’ practice, where students listen to very short extracts from listening tests in order to study features of connected speech, or to correct specific mistakes, or to examine specific distractors or to compare different versions of a given answer, including a so-called ‘paraphrase’. Field (2008) describes listening instruction as focusing on the processes involved in successful and unsuccessful listening by learners. Many IELTS test-takers have no idea why they made a particular mistake on a given test. They may have written a correct number of words for a given question but have gotten the content of those words wrong. By analyzing very short extracts from listening tests, students can come to understand the specific reasons for their errors (Field, 2008; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

It is also important to teach students how to approach each section of the test. Before the section begins, students should read through all the questions to get an idea of what to listen for and underline any key words and phrases. They should also use the time to make a

prediction of what type of information they will hear. Before the recording begins, students should also check the word limit for each answer. This will prevent students from writing too much and incurring a penalty for errors. It is also important that students pay close attention to the question numbers while the recording is playing and do not spend too much time trying to think of the correct answer to a question that they have missed. When the recording has finished, students should use the time to check their spelling, grammar, plural forms and to make sure that they have written the correct number and that the word limit has been adhered to. This is particularly important for students who have good listening skills, but who are not as accurate when writing. Students also need to become familiar with the specific features of the IELTS test, for example, if it is a paper-based test, learners can practice transferring answers to the answer sheet, or if it is a computer-based test, they can practice typing answers on the computer as well as moving from question to question. Students may be fine in class listening to teacher or peer presentations but be less confident when using headphones to listen to recordings, working on a computer screen, or sitting in a test room with unfamiliar seating. Wherever possible, such as with practice tests, teachers should attempt to replicate the test circumstances to familiarize students with test format (Burgess & Head, 2005; Cambridge Assessment English, 2023).

A further technique for helping the students is for them to do a full listening test and then complete a post-test reflection form for the errors they made during the test. This form enables the student to classify each error made during the test and then the teacher can go on to plan further lessons that will address these errors in more detail, e.g. the student classed 10 errors as being due to misspelling of words. The teacher can then incorporate more writing practice into the next lesson (Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Brown & Lee, 2015).

Building listening confidence is a gradual process, achieved through several means. Students must experience multiple practices, complete a number of tasks, and have the chance to recover from mistakes in listening. It also helps to remind students on several occasions that listening to IELTS Audio does not necessarily mean listening to and understanding 100% of everything that is said. Instead, as listeners, students need to be able to gain sufficient information from what is said to answer questions about what has been

played. Many students are deterred by having to listen to new vocabulary, but the key message here is that even very good listeners do not manage to listen and understand 100% of what is said in a recording (Field, 2008; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

In summary, the IELTS Listening test can be prepared for on two main levels: the learners' psychological preparation for the test and their linguistic and strategic ability to deal with listening tasks in general and the specific tasks of the IELTS test in particular. In class, as well as in self-study, learners need to be equipped with strategies for dealing with different listening tasks, for example prediction, for recognizing paraphrased versions of information, for note-taking during longer extracts, for identifying certain types of distractors and for dealing with anxiety and for maintaining concentration while completing long tasks. In class, therefore, learners should be given the opportunity to complete full mock tests, and to complete a variety of shorter focused listening tasks, which are of a very short length, followed by questions, which test different skills. These tasks can help to help learners to identify the reasons for their mistakes and to focus on areas for improvement. In addition to completing these tasks, learners should also be given the opportunity to check their answers, to go through the questions with their teacher and to think about how they can deal with similar situations in the future. If, therefore, learners are given the opportunity to complete a variety of listening tasks, both long and short, and are also given the opportunity to reflect on their performance in these tasks, then they should be well prepared for the IELTS test and for any future listening tasks that they may be required to complete as part of their future academic studies (Field, 2008; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Jordan, 1997).

CHAPTER FOUR

Developing Academic Reading Competence

The Academic Reading test is particularly demanding because candidates must process long passages and answer 40 questions within 60 minutes (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023). The Academic Reading test is made up of three passages and 40 questions, which must be completed within 60 minutes (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023). The Reading test includes passages and materials from all types of printed media such as books, journals, magazines and newspapers. Such test materials are written and published for readers from a non-specialized but academic background. Test takers are therefore under no obligation to have previous knowledge or experience of the topics on which the passages are written. What they do need to do is to be able to read those passages and answer the questions about them. Candidates must therefore be able to deal successfully with written material which is written in typical language used by academics and understand the main ideas, specific details, the writer's opinions and the argument or discussion, as well as how the different parts of the text are organized in order to be able to answer the questions about it.

Academic Reading assessment primarily measures whether a reader can construct meaning from given materials (Alderson et al., 1995). In other words, the reader must be able to perform variously to understand the material he/she reads. This view of reading assessment is discussed by Alderson et al. (1995), who emphasize the relationship between the reader, the text, and the task. From a pedagogical perspective, IELTS Reading assessment is not mere word-by-word reading of the given passages and corresponding questions. Rather, teachers need to teach their students how academic reading texts are organized, how ideas in such texts are cohesively linked, and how a writer presents arguments or information within such organized structures of a text. In sum, teachers need to teach students to be able to read to understand given materials, not to read in order to memorize all information in given passages.

The main challenge for many candidates, however, is the length of the passages. Many students can handle short reading texts but struggle with the IELTS Reading section, which consists of three long passages. Such passages are often on unfamiliar topics. In addition, the sentences are often long and complex, containing unfamiliar vocabulary and a range of ideas or concepts. Also, the questions are often written in such a way that parts of the Reading Passage have been paraphrased, and candidates are required to identify such sections. As a result, many students end up reading far too slowly and spending far too much time trying to read every word in the Reading Passages. Given that candidates have only a limited amount of time to complete all forty questions, this kind of reading is unlikely to be effective for IELTS. Thus, teachers must teach students to read selectively and purposefully (Grabe, 2009).

This variety of questions also means that candidates need to be able to change their reading strategies to deal with the different types of questions. This means they need to read for the main ideas of a paragraph, for specific information to complete a sentence or table, and with great care to be able to decide whether a statement is True, False or Not Given. As Green (2007, p. 20) noted, how students are taught to deal with IELTS tests can have a positive or negative influence on how they approach other academic reading and writing tasks. It is therefore important for teachers to focus on helping their students to develop strategies for IELTS reading that will also help them to deal with other academic reading tasks. This means that a range of strategies should be presented in reading lessons, and that students should be encouraged to use these strategies to improve their comprehension of the material that they are reading.

The first pedagogical task of the teacher of IELTS Reading in academic IELTS contexts is to help learners realize what is involved in working with academic reading texts, i.e. that Academic IELTS Reading assesses test takers' ability to process efficiently and accurately academic reading texts to answer questions. In other words, their ability to use reading texts for other purposes as well as for studying. This also involves test takers' awareness of the way in which questions are organized in relation to the passages, i.e. that while for some tasks the questions appear in the same order as the corresponding parts of the

passages, for others this is not the case. This, in turn, helps learners to approach reading tasks with greater confidence in test situations, as well as in out-of-test situations, and to employ more strategic approaches to tackling reading tasks than they would were unaware of such aspects of reading for general academic purposes.

Teaching Academic IELTS Reading draws on established reading pedagogy. First, the learners must be made aware of the test format and reading abilities required to complete it. They must be made aware of the types of texts found in the Academic Reading section and how much time they have to complete each section. They must also be made aware of the reading sub-skills required to complete the questions. After this, the teacher can move on to the various question types, and then to how to approach reading in the classroom to improve reading ability and performance in test situations.

The IELTS Reading Academic Test comprises a variety of task types that demand a range of reading sub-skills to be performed by test-takers. For many learners, however, IELTS Reading is a section of the test that is feared by learners. Although learners are able to obtain overall scores that reflect a high level of comprehension of a given reading passage, they still obtain low scores on specific tasks. A major reason for this problem for learners is that they are not aware that IELTS Reading is not a single reading task, but rather several reading operations that need to be performed to obtain high scores. Teachers therefore need to alert their students to this key fact to assist them to achieve their targets in IELTS Reading.

There are many different question types, each requiring different reading sub-skills to complete. For example, a common IELTS Reading task requires the test-taker to match headings to relevant paragraphs. To complete such a task effectively, the student must be able to identify the main idea in each paragraph. Often students fail to choose the correct heading for a given paragraph because the chosen heading contains a word or words from the paragraph. To avoid mistakes of this kind the student must read the first and last sentence of each paragraph as well as identify any ideas that have been repeated in the paragraph. The student must also be able to summarize the main ideas in each paragraph in his/her own words before looking at the possible headings. This will help the student to complete such questions more effectively by helping him/her to understand the gist of the reading passage.

True/False/Not Given or Yes/No/Not Given questions can also be tricky as they require a close comparison between a given statement and the corresponding part of the text. A statement is classed as True if it agrees with the information in the text. It is False if it contradicts the information in the text. Not Given refers to information that is not provided in the text. This is different from assuming the information to be true because of prior knowledge. In IELTS Reading, candidates are only assessing the information provided in the passages. They must therefore carefully read each statement in relation to the corresponding section of the text. Alderson et al. (1995) explained that reading assessment is based upon the relationships between the text, the task and the reader's interpretation of the two. The reader must be able to provide evidence from the text to support his/her answer. To do this, the candidates should be trained to underline the part of the text that corresponds to the answer to a statement. This will enable them to check that their answer is correct and to explain why they chose the answer they did.

In addition to these, a further range of reading sub-skills are required for matching information, matching features, and matching sentence ending tasks. Here again, it is the case that the information needed to complete the task is located within the text and the answers may not necessarily be in the same order as the information in the text. However, these tasks can be learned by the students if they are given practice in identifying the key words for these types of questions, in scanning for names and other terms of particular significance to the text, and then in reading the surrounding sentences in order to confirm their interpretation of the information.

In terms of Reading sub-skills required by various types of IELTS Reading completion tasks, the key skills are Scanning and Grammatical Awareness. Scanning is required to locate relevant information within the given Reading Passage and matching sections, whilst Grammatical Awareness is required to check whether the chosen answer(s) fit the given sentence(s) in terms of meaning and word form. In terms of the type of sentences found in Reading tests, candidates must also be able to complete sentences of varying lengths and containing different structures and note and summary sections. This is to test whether candidates have sufficient Reading Comprehension skills, i.e. not only are they able to locate

information, but also to understand how words and sentences work together to form texts. Teachers can use these types of questions to help train their students to check word class, singular and plural forms, and the overall logic of completed sentences.

Another set of Reading tasks which require different reading sub-skills are the Multiple-choice Questions (hereafter referred to as MCQs) and the Short-answer Questions (hereafter referred to as SAQs). As has already been pointed out, the biggest challenge for many learners is understanding how to approach a particular task to arrive at the correct answer. For example, with the MCQs, many learners fail because they do not realize that, although all the options are relevant to the information in the text, only one of them is correct. And, in many cases, the incorrect options contain information that has been mentioned in the text; the problem is that it has been used in a different way or in a different context. In these instances, learners need to recognize paraphrases, and this is not always easy. Grabe (2009) points out that being able to read fluently involves a number of processes, including word recognition, syntactic processing of written language, construction of meaning from what has been read, and strategic control. In terms of IELTS Reading, this means that learners need to be able to read not only for individual words but also for entire sentences and paragraphs to make the correct decisions about answers.

However, IELTS Reading tests a wide range of reading skills. A reader who depends on scanning certain details or is used to reading from start to finish slowly and carefully and completing answer sheets in that way will likely realize that the IELTS Reading test requires more than one reading skill to be used in answering each question. To develop an effective IELTS Reading program, it is therefore necessary for teachers to examine in some detail each type of question and the reading skill which is needed to complete it successfully.

Table 2 links the principal IELTS Reading question types to the reading processes and classroom strategies required to answer them effectively (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023; Grabe, 2009).

IELTS Reading question type	Main reading skill required	Main teaching focus
Matching headings	Reading for gist and main ideas	Identifying paragraph purpose, avoiding keyword traps
True/False/Not Given	Careful comparison of meaning	Distinguishing stated, contradicted, and absent information
Yes/No/Not Given	Understanding writer's views or claims	Separating textual evidence from personal opinion
Matching information	Scanning and locating details	Finding specific ideas across non-linear text sections
Matching features	Connecting people, theories, dates, or ideas	Tracking names and reading surrounding context
Matching sentence endings	Understanding sentence logic and cohesion	Checking meaning, grammar, and textual sequence
Sentence completion	Locating details and fitting grammar	Following word limits and checking word class
Summary/note/table completion	Selective reading and information transfer	Identifying key information and maintaining grammatical accuracy
Multiple choice	Detailed comprehension and distractor control	Evaluating options beyond keyword matching
Short-answer questions	Locating precise information	Writing concise answers within word limits

Table 2. IELTS Reading question types and required reading skills

Source: Prepared by the author based on Cambridge Assessment English (2023) and Grabe (2009).

The table shows a summary of IELTS Reading questions in relation to the reading skills needed to answer them. The tasks in IELTS Reading require different approaches or skills to complete. For example, some of the tasks, such as matching headings, require global evaluation to complete the task satisfactorily. On the other hand, sentence completion questions or short-answer questions require readers to identify detailed information to complete the task correctly. True/False/Not Given questions and multiple-choice questions require close comparison between the question and the corresponding text in the text.

This information can be very useful for teachers of IELTS candidates. Teachers can organize their reading lessons more effectively if they teach IELTS Reading skills one question type at a time, rather than having candidates complete the whole test without any guidance. In this way, candidates learn how to choose strategies for each type of question and how to avoid common mistakes. Candidates will also be able to see that IELTS Reading is made up of many different academic reading skills, which can be learned, rather than a mass of difficult vocabulary that is to be tested in a whole range of unpredictable questions.

Academic IELTS Reading can be effectively taught using practical strategies that enable students to read more efficiently, to read more accurately and to read with greater purpose. The first of these strategies is that of skimming. Skimming involves the student reading very quickly to gain overall understanding of the material that is being read. This form of reading is particularly useful for the IELTS Reading test, especially for the task of matching headings, for identifying the writer's purpose and for gaining an overall structure of a passage to complete more detailed tasks. Students can be trained in this skill by being given a few paragraphs to read and then asked to discuss the general matter of the reading with their partner. Before this discussion takes place, students should be asked to read the title, the first sentence of the passage, the final sentence of the passage and any sentences that repeat key ideas from the rest of the passage.

Scanning: This reading strategy is used by students to read passages to complete reading tasks or to answer specific questions. It is utilized for IELTS Reading sub-tests that include completion, matching features, and short answer questions. Most of these tasks demand readers locate information concerning details or certain facts in the reading material.

By practicing scanning, students of IELTS acquire skills to locate various information such as certain names, particular dates, numbers, places and technical terms as well as to comprehend other key information that appears in passages for reading. This reading approach does not demand students to read each sentence completely; it requires them to scan passages to move quickly over reading material until required information is located. Then, they can read surrounding sentences very carefully.

Another very important skill that students should be taught is the recognition of paraphrases. Much of the IELTS Reading test is based on matching headings to relevant parts of the text. Also, many of the questions are worded differently from the corresponding parts of the text and students must recognize that the wording of the question and the wording of the text are very similar although not identical. Often the question contains words such as increase, while the corresponding part of the text contains words such as rise, growth or become more common. The processes involved in reading include recognition of vocabulary, syntactic processing and strategic comprehension (Grabe, 2009). This means that students cannot rely on matching key words from the questions with corresponding key words from the text. Instead, they must recognize that there are equivalent meanings in different words and in different sentences and in different forms.

Moreover, an important aspect of IELTS Reading methodology is vocabulary development (Nation, 2013). However, this should not be done in the form of word lists and learners should be introduced to a range of vocabulary in context. Teachers should ask learners to record in writing new vocabulary that they encounter during reading practice, such as useful words, synonyms, collocations, and different forms of the same word as well as examples of how these words are used in sentences and paragraphs. In this way, learners can develop their lexical awareness and be able to recognize different forms of the same word or similar ideas in other words when reading. This is also important for Writing and Speaking exams in which learners are expected to use a range of vocabulary to express themselves clearly and accurately.

Time management is also another critical aspect in Reading test, where many test-takers fail to score better because they spend too much time reading one passage or one

question. Teachers should therefore train their students on how to manage their time wisely by reading three passages and moving on to other questions when they have spent too much time on one question. The teacher can first practice reading test without time limit to help students familiarize themselves with different question types, and then gradually reduce time in subsequent practice tests.

It is also very important that students use the order of questions to their advantage. For example, questions that require readers to read the entire passage will typically be in the order that the passage is read, whereas questions that require readers to match information from different parts of the passage may not. Students who understand this can save a great deal of time and reduce a lot of unnecessary stress when answering questions in reading tests.

After completing a reading task, students can review the task to find out why each answer was correct and why the other options were not. This kind of post-reading analysis is particularly important for True/False/Not Given and multiple-choice type reading questions because of the subtle differences in meaning that can cause students to select incorrect answers. As Alderson et al. (1995) stated in their assessment of reading, reading assessment is a three-way interaction between the reader, the text, and the task. In the classroom, feedback on reading questions should be given not only for the correct answers but also for the reasoning behind them and how the student arrived at the answer with reference to the text.

In summary, IELTS Reading students can be taught several key strategies to become more effective readers. Students can be taught to skim for overall gist as well as for specific information. They can be taught to scan specific information of a particular type such as dates, times, places, names, etc. Students can also be taught how to deal with vocabulary, how to recognize paraphrases, how to understand grammar and how to organize a piece of written text. It is by practicing these strategies in reading lessons that students can become more confident, independent readers of long pieces of academic text.

The final point in teaching students to complete Academic IELTS Reading tasks is identifying students' problems and using feedback. While many test-takers find the Reading section very difficult because of the long reading passages, this is not the only problem that

they encounter. Many of them also use incorrect approaches when attempting to complete different tasks. One of the most serious problems is that some students read every single word in a very long reading passage before attempting to complete any of the questions. Such slow reading is clearly unnecessary and will inevitably result in failure to complete the Reading section on time. The student must learn to use different approaches and to read selectively to complete different tasks. For example, in some cases a general understanding of the main ideas in a passage is required to complete questions, while in others a very detailed understanding of specific parts of the passage is required.

Many students depend too heavily on a few words from the question when reading for IELTS Reading. They may read for the exact word that appeared in the question, and then select the first answer that includes that word, without checking whether the word has the same meaning in the answer choice as it did in the question. Since many of the question types for IELTS Reading test for paraphrasing, it is very important for students to be taught to check the meaning of answers, rather than only checking the vocabulary.

Another problem faced by IELTS candidates is the large amount of unfamiliar vocabulary found in the Academic Reading materials. A lot of candidates believe that they need to understand every word, even if it appears to be an unknown word. However, there are many readers who can read on and get the gist of the text even when they come across words and phrases that they have never seen before. Indeed, as Jordan (1997) pointed out, to read successfully in an academic context, a learner needs to have strategies for dealing with complex written materials, as well as the specific language found in different disciplines. The IELTS candidate should, therefore, learn how to read for IELTS to find out which words are essential for the answer to the question and which can be completely ignored. The candidate should also learn how to deal with unknown vocabulary to read efficiently in the test and avoid feeling anxious.

A further challenge facing the teacher of Reading is that of ensuring that students have sufficient practice in managing their time for the exam. It is not uncommon for students to spend too long on the first passage, which they may feel is more 'do-able' than the subsequent ones, and as a result run out of time to complete the remaining passages to the

best of their ability. Other students may get ‘stuck’ on a particular question and, as a result, spend too much time on it and not enough time on the subsequent questions. In the classroom, the teacher should use timed practice to help students manage their time for the exam, but this must be used carefully. At the initial stages, students may require untimed practice to gain insight into the question type and how to tackle it. However, as students become more confident and adept at completing tasks, the teacher can introduce time constraints to prepare students for the exam circumstances and to prevent them from spending too much time on a particular question and not enough time on the remaining ones.

It is also essential to recognize common problems learners have with a particular part of the task and how teachers can provide feedback to aid the learners to recognize similar problems themselves in the future. It has been previously mentioned that a major problem for IELTS test-takers is reading every word of the passage before looking at the questions for part of the task where the questions and the relevant part of the passage are different. However, for the Reading section of IELTS, it is generally not acceptable to read every word of very long passages before looking at the questions, as this would take far too long. Candidates need to develop skills that enable them to read long passages in a purposeful way in order to reach answers to the questions within a reasonable time. Sometimes, learners overly rely on identifying the exact words in the question within the passage. However, in the case of IELTS, it is common practice for the questions to contain paraphrases. This is particularly the case for matching type questions and True/False/Not Given type questions. Hence, for these types of questions, teachers should also teach the learners to check the meaning of the possible answers to select the most suitable answer, rather than simply trying to identify similar words. The same can be said for multiple choice questions. It is hoped that by familiarizing test-takers with these practices they will be able to use similar strategies within the questions of the IELTS test as well as within other academic reading texts.

All Reading lessons should include a mix of full practice tests and shorter focused practice exercises. Full practice tests are very important for helping students to develop their reading speed and to get used to managing their time for long reading tasks. However, there are many specific sub-skills that can be practiced using just one paragraph, one set of

completed version / question version pairs for a True/False/Not Given task, or one section of a passage for a Recognizing Paraphrase task. Green (2007) refers to the ways in which IELTS preparation can influence learners' academic literacy practices. For this to be positive, however, IELTS-style materials must be used for more than just practice tests. They must also be used for developing skills that can be used in a wide variety of contexts to achieve academic goals.

In addition, it is crucial that students outside of the classroom engage in reading as much academic and semi-academic nature as possible to improve reading speed, recognize relevant vocabulary and become familiar with written formal text. Suitable sources of reading include newspaper articles, university websites, academic blogs, popular science books and articles, reports and even the introduction to books that are likely to be used as supplementary reading in university classes. Students should be able to summarize reading to find the main argument and record any relevant vocabulary as well as completing comparison exercises of similar articles written by different authors to study how they have structured their writing.

In summary, to help students prepare to take IELTS Reading tests, teachers need to show their students how to complete tasks, teach students strategies to use when reading for different purposes, introduce students to important vocabulary, complete timed practice tests, and provide feedback to students regarding their work. Also, by teaching students to read a variety of Reading materials within the classroom and outside of it, teachers can help their students acquire skills that are crucial to reading in academic situations. For this reason, by teaching students how to read within the context of the IELTS Reading test, teachers can prepare students to not only perform well on IELTS tests but also to become better academic readers.

Teaching Academic IELTS Reading requires a dual focus on test preparation and long-term academic reading development. Although reading strategies and IELTS Reading test type questions are crucial for test takers to succeed in IELTS, students also need to develop reading skills to become competent users of English for Academic Purposes in higher education studies. If reading is only practiced with IELTS test-type passages, students

may master the test but not develop reading skills to adequately deal with reading in higher education studies.

Extensive reading can play an important role in students' reading preparation (Grabe, 2009). While the teacher is working on the intensive reading skills of the students, the students can work on their extensive reading skills outside the classroom. The materials that can be used for extensive reading are, for example, newspaper articles, university web pages, reports, chapters from introductory textbooks, popular science articles, academic blogs, simplified academic texts. These types of reading materials can help students to get used to the formal written English and to familiarize with the topics that are frequently used in IELTS reading tests, such as education, technology, health, environment, culture, work and social issues.

There are several reasons why extensive reading is helpful for improving reading speed. For many learners of English as a Second Language, reading in English is a slow process. They may spend a great deal of time studying individual words and then try to translate what they have read into their first language before moving on to the next part of the text. To read efficiently, learners need to be able to recognize words automatically, process information quickly and accurately and use a variety of strategies for monitoring their reading. Grabe (2009) notes that fluency in reading is a complex skill, and extensive reading can help learners to develop this skill by automatically recognizing and using many of the words, phrases and other features of written language that they encounter. It also helps them to become familiar with many of the common text structures and to develop strategies for monitoring and controlling their reading.

Furthermore, extensive reading helps learners develop their vocabulary in an effective way. A major portion of IELTS Reading test consists of unfamiliar vocabulary that students encounter only once during the test. Rather than trying to memorize as much vocabulary as possible before the test, students can develop ability to understand the meaning of a word from context. They can also learn word families, learn to recognize collocations and learn to recognize the way a word is used repeatedly. According to Nation (2013), vocabulary knowledge consists of four dimensions, i.e. meaning, form, use and motivation

between words. For example, when students recognize a word and then read it again in a different context, they develop their ability to understand the word. In this way, students develop their vocabulary knowledge by reading extensively.

For a start, reading tasks can be set in the classroom as well as for homework. If, for example, a student reads an article on a Friday, by Monday he or she could have analyzed the article, noted main points, found out 5 new academic words and sentences with similar meanings. Other reading tasks can be to summarize an article, read and compare two articles on a similar topic and give an oral summary of a reading text to the rest of the class. In such a way reading can be given a function in the classroom as well as for study purposes outside the classroom and will then become an integral part of a student's language study, or, in other words, of the learning of Reading, Writing and Speaking in an integrated fashion for Academic purposes.

As another aspect of reading in the classroom, the teacher can have his/her students maintain a reading log. By completing a reading log, students record the title and source of what they have read as well as give a summary of the main ideas and any useful vocabulary that they have come across. They can also make notes of any particularly difficult sentence structures that they have encountered as well as offer a comment on what they understood from what they read. Reading logs are particularly useful for IELTS students who are improving their reading skills over a long period of time. They provide evidence of a student's progress and encourage him/her to become a more proactive learner by taking responsibility for his/her own learning.

Teachers can guide their students to select appropriate reading materials. For example, very easy reading materials will not help students develop their academic reading skills. On the other hand, reading materials that are too difficult for students may deter them from reading altogether. Thus, reading materials for IELTS candidates should generally increase in difficulty level and cover a wide range of both general-interest topics and academic topics that are studied in higher education. Teachers can recommend suitable reading materials to their students based on the students' English language abilities, their IELTS target band score, and their field of study or academic interests.

While it is true that extensive reading does not replace IELTS test practice, it can be used to enhance the effectiveness of test practice. In other words, as learners become more proficient readers of longer academic texts, they will be able to apply IELTS-specific reading strategies more effectively. For example, learners with a larger vocabulary, faster reading speed, and ability to read longer, more complex texts will be able to complete Reading tests more quickly and accurately. Consequently, extensive reading and test practice should not be seen as mutually exclusive and should be used in tandem by teachers to develop their students' Reading skills effectively.

Academic IELTS Reading is best taught as a test skill and as part of the learners' development of general academic literacy skills. Therefore, while learners need to practice reading specific IELTS test types, such as multiple choice, True/False, etc., doing IELTS reading practice tests is not enough. Learners also need to be exposed to written English of other types on a regular basis. Extensive reading not only increases learners' reading speed, enhances their academic vocabulary, boosts their confidence in reading and generally develops their ability to deal with a wide variety of academic texts. Thus, when teachers practice IELTS reading test tasks with their students, they should also aim at developing their learners' reading skills that are relevant to academic purposes.

CHAPTER FIVE

Developing Academic Writing Competence

Academic IELTS Writing requires test-takers to write in academic English within a given time frame. The Writing component consists of two separate tasks which are to be completed within a total of sixty minutes. Task 1 requires test-takers to describe, summarize, or explain visual information such as graphs, charts, tables, diagrams, processes, or maps by writing a minimum of 150 words. Task 2 involves writing an essay of at least 250 words in response to a point of view, argument, or problem (IELTS, n.d.). Both tasks assess candidates' ability to write in academic English; however, different types of organization, language use, and task awareness are required (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023).

The writing sections of IELTS are especially difficult because candidates are asked to carry out several tasks or functions at the same time. They must understand a task and answer it, plan a response, organize the ideas in that response, use appropriate vocabulary, use accurate grammar and write within a limited period. This contrasts with the Reading and Listening sections of IELTS in which candidates select answers from a range of possibilities and then transfer those selected answers to answer-sheets. Thus, writing in IELTS requires candidates to produce English of their own as part of their academic studies, which is very challenging for some students, even if they have studied English grammar for a long time but never written extended texts of academic type before.

Viewing IELTS Writing within the framework of a pedagogical study, IELTS Writing should not be taught as a mechanical reproduction of given model answers. Rather, it is useful for students to understand the nature of writing, to study and learn a range of lexis and writing structures that are modeled as examples and to study multiple written examples. Students, however, should also learn how to use this lexis and writing structures to communicate their ideas to their intended audience within given parameters. Importantly, second language writing studies have identified that second language writing development involves more than simple attempts to write accurate sentences; it involves awareness of

audience, organization, knowledge of genres, and finally, aspects of revision. Thus, teachers of IELTS Writing need to focus on developing students' ability to comprehend the task requirements as well as the requirements for writing in any given academic genre. Students need to develop writing that is relevant, coherent, and can be reworked to achieve a higher level of quality writing.

Many IELTS candidates focus too much on individual sentences rather than on the overall structure of their response. This can mean that they write correct sentences but do not fully answer the question. Alternatively, they may have good ideas but fail to organize them into clear paragraphs in a logical order. Candidates doing Task 1 may concentrate on describing too many details of the visual material instead of selecting the most relevant features. Candidates doing Task 2 may put down a list of ideas but fail to develop them into a clear argument. So, teaching IELTS Writing involves teaching both language accuracy and teaching learners how to organize their writing as discourse.

However, a great deal of importance needs to be given to task awareness, or the need to complete two different tasks to the best of their ability in sixty minutes. This includes awareness of time allocated for each task. If students understand the demands of both Task 1 and Task 2 they can, in Writing lessons, receive a lot of help to write Task 1 responses more concisely, and help to argue a point of view more effectively in Task 2, using a greater variety of academic discourses. Students should, therefore, become familiar with the requirements of each task. If more weight is added to Task 2 for the IELTS Writing Test, more emphasis in Writing lessons should be put on developing adequate arguments, organizing content effectively into suitable paragraphs and adopting appropriate academic discourse.

A further challenge faced by teachers of IELTS Writing is helping students to write under test conditions. There are many learners who can produce better work when given unlimited time to complete a writing task. However, it is not the role of teachers of IELTS to help their students to produce better work outside of test conditions. Rather, they should focus on helping their students to develop the ability to plan and produce writing within a limited time frame. Teachers should therefore help their students to plan writing quickly and to use

that plan to guide the writing of a complete response. Planning does not have to be long, and learners should be able to produce a simple outline in a few minutes that helps to stop them from repeating information, including irrelevant information, and from writing weak organization. As noted earlier, much IELTS preparation can have a negative effect on learners' writing in terms of making it too limited, turning it into a set of test routines rather than helping learners to develop their general academic literacy. As a result, the teacher's role is crucial in ensuring that IELTS writing tasks are used in a way that is useful to learners outside of the test itself.

In summary, effective pedagogic practices for the Academic IELTS Writing Module will facilitate learners to understand the tasks that need to be completed, acquire necessary academic English, organize written output efficiently, and write within a strict time frame to produce quality output. Teachers aim to enable their students to develop their writing ability so that, in time, they will be able to produce longer pieces of quality written academic English. Above all, it is crucial that, while learners are being prepared for IELTS Writing Module, they also develop skills and strategies to become adequate writers of academic English for higher education studies.

The IELTS Academic Writing Test – Writing Task 1 requires candidates to describe, summarize, or explain given visual information in no less than 150 words. The information can be presented in a variety of formats including line graphs, bar charts, pie charts, tables, maps and process diagrams or even a combination of the formats. The key objective in Writing Task 1 is to accurately and coherently describe the key features of the information provided in the form of visuals and, in some cases, tables. The type of writing required for this task is descriptive, selective, and objective in nature, meaning that candidates are expected to focus only on the information provided in the visuals and avoid providing explanations beyond the data.

One of the first key features to teach in Task 1 writing is that there is a difference between describing data in a visual and interpreting it. Many candidates mistake writing about the possible causes of trends in a graph for writing about reasons for those trends. And they often make the mistake of writing about whether the information in a chart or graph is

good or bad. It is only when information in a visual is described as causing something that a candidate is writing about causes in a Task 1. Candidates need to be taught to concentrate on the information that is given in the visual, on the information that can be described—on increases and decreases and comparisons and proportions and stages and changes and trends of all kinds.

A strong Report includes an Introduction, an Overview of main points and two body paragraphs. Introduction restates Task question and Overview restates the main points or trend of the data represented in the visuals. The two body paragraphs further explain the main points outlined in the Overview. For a line graph describing the number of international students from three countries over a twenty-year period, the Overview might present the highest and lowest numbers, the biggest increase and/or decrease and main trend, whether up or down. For a map the Overview would set out the main changes in each geographic location. For a process diagram the Overview would provide a concise description of the number of stages in a process and the result or main change.

An example of a line graph for IELTS Writing Task 1 practice (Figure 3).

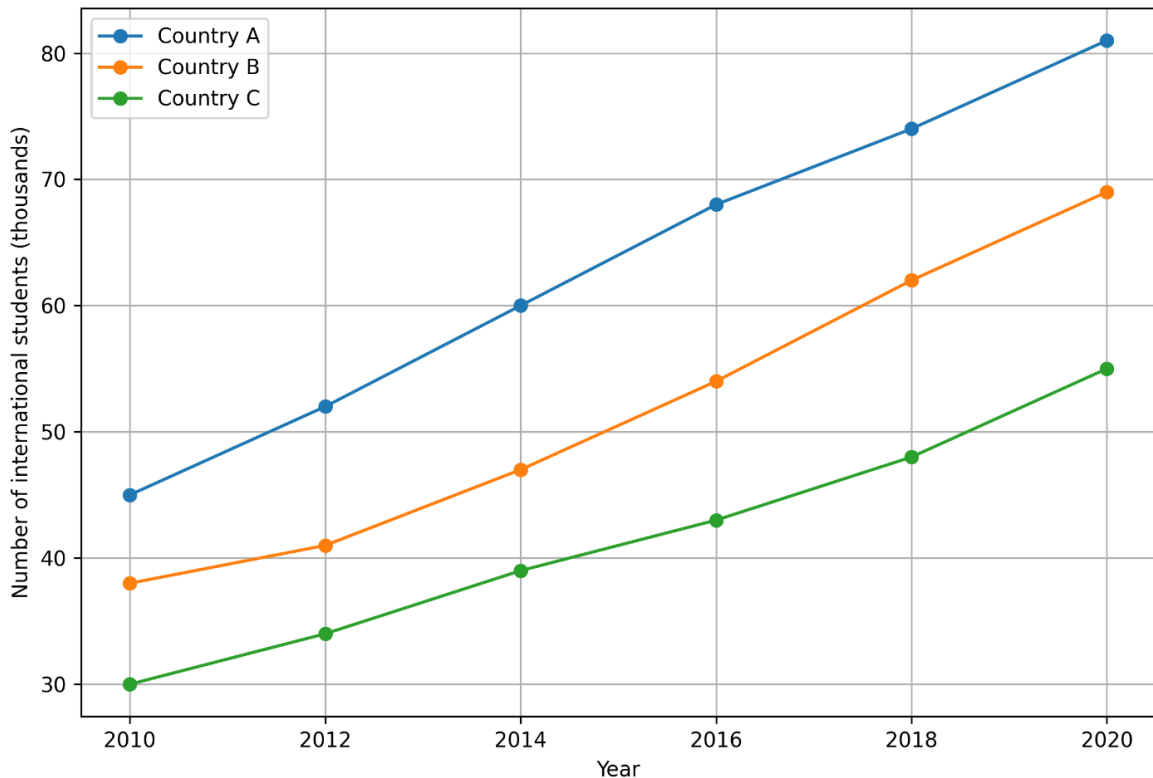


Figure 3. Sample line graph for IELTS Writing Task 1 practice

Source: Prepared by the author for illustrative IELTS Writing Task 1 practice.

As shown in Figure 3, the line graph for IELTS Writing Task 1 practice is better created by teachers for their dissertation instead of copying from actual IELTS test materials. These practice samples for IELTS Writing Task 1 are provided with two lines on the graph. It clearly shows the trend of data over time from 2010 to 2020. Three lines are better for practice as it allows students to compare and contrast between more than two countries. The line graph provided clearly shows the increasing trend of number of international students in three countries from 2010 to 2020. Students should identify the main trend of the data as well as compare between the three lines and choose the most important information to describe in their writing. It is also important for students to avoid explaining every single data point on the graph as it would make their writing very lengthy and unorganized.

For line graphs students need to learn trend language, i.e. verbs that describe the way in which the line is moving (increase, decrease, rise, fall, fluctuate, remain stable and peak), and adverbs and adjectives which describe the degree and speed of change (e.g. sharply, gradually, slightly, dramatic, steady, and significant). Of course, all this vocabulary should not be presented as a list of words to be memorized but rather as choices which are suitable for different data. Thus, a rise of 2% to 12% would not be described as dramatic, whereas a rise of 60% to 70% would not be described as slight.

A teacher of IELTS needs to help a student to work with a bar chart, a pie chart or a table. The student needs to be able to learn how to compare different categories and how to pick the highest and the lowest figures and to gather similar information. A student tends to write a weak answer when he or she describes each individual figure in a table in turn. To achieve a strong score in Task 1 the information from a table, a bar chart, a pie chart or any other graphic needs to be organized around the main similarities and differences in the data. The main structures used to compare different pieces of information are higher than / lower than; twice as much as / twice as less as; the largest proportion / the smallest percentage etc. A student needs to learn how to group information in a logical manner to present all the main features of the graphics.

Maps and process diagrams are generally taught using different approaches than graphs, bar-charts, tables and other numerical data presented in visual form. For map tasks, the focus of the teacher and students is placed on the location of features and their changes and developments over time. This may involve the use of certain language forms, such as to the north of, next to, opposite, was replaced by, was converted into, was expanded, and so on. Process diagrams are used to present information about a process or several processes and the focus of the teacher and students in lessons is placed on identifying and describing the individual stages of the process or processes in the correct order. This is often achieved by using a few passive forms and linking words and phrases such as first, then, after that, following this, and finally. The teacher's role in lessons, therefore, is to teach students the different genres of writing used for different types of visual data. Writing about graphs is different from writing about maps and writing about process diagrams is different from

writing about other visual data that presents numerical information about a particular topic or topics.

As a teacher of IELTS Writing Task 1, you should pay close attention to the main features of the data provided in a visual. Your students need to be able to describe numbers and quantities on a graph or chart accurately using the correct units of measurement and to ensure that are shown on the axes of the graph. They should also be able to distinguish between percentages, numbers, amounts and proportions in the data provided. They need to be able to understand dates and other details that may be presented graphically.

Similarly, teachers can also encourage the learners to write more concisely. As it is recommended for Task 1 that candidates complete their answer within twenty minutes, they are expected to select information to describe in their answer and write accordingly. This means that they should not attempt to describe all the data and attempt to include too much detail. It is also expected that they will identify the main features of the data or information and then use relevant data to support them. Green (2007) noted how IELTS preparation could affect a candidate's use of their writing in other situations, and in the case of Task 1, this could be positive in the sense that candidates learn to summarize information that has been presented in the form of visual data and select the most relevant information from it. In many academic situations, students are required to be able to present information that has been in the form of charts and tables, as well as research findings that have been presented in the form of statistics.

From analyzing Task 1 to writing Task 1: classroom practice. It is through practicing to write Task 1 that candidates can improve their writing skills, and they should begin from introducing each key feature of the given visual data, then go on to writing an overview of the overall comment on the visual data provided, and, finally, write a full essay within the word limit set for the task.

In summary, the IELTS Writing Task 1 can be taught by paying close attention to how candidates can present information and complete the task. Students must be able to present visual information, select relevant information, organize the selected information, use appropriate vocabulary and grammar and be accurate. Most importantly, the students

must understand that Writing Task 1 is not an essay, but a summary of the information provided and that they must present the information objectively.

Writing Task 2 consists of a longer piece of writing (minimum of 250 words) and is the more weightily marked component of the Academic IELTS Writing paper. Candidates are asked to write an essay which consists of four or five paragraphs of a minimum length of 250 words on a given question. Such a question can be a statement or a series of questions and will comprise an argument, a problem and/or a number of points of view on a topic and the candidate's attempt at writing Task 2 will be judged on the extent to which he or she is able to produce a piece of writing in which the above-mentioned criteria are met. The score from Writing Task 2 counts far more than the score from Writing Task 1 and as such is an even more serious component of the IELTS exam for candidates preparing for the Academic module.

First, students need to be taught how to write different types of essays. IELTS Task 2 questions require candidates to write an essay in response to a question, argument, problem, or point of view. There are many different essay types, and although there are some common writing features that are typical of many types of essays, the way in which a writer responds to a Task 2 question can vary greatly. Most essays require writers to present a main idea or argument, followed by support for that argument. However, the way in which a writer presents the main idea or argument and supports it can vary. For example, in an agree/disagree essay the writer's position on a topic is usually presented throughout the body of the essay. In a discuss-both-views type of essay the writer presents both sides of a debate before presenting his/her own point of view. This can be very different from an advantages and disadvantages type of essay in which the writer presents information about the pros and cons of a situation. As well as these types of essays there are many others, including, for example, identify-causes/write-solutions essays and essays that deal with problems. Because of these differences it is very important that writers first analyze a question before writing an essay in response to it (Hyland, 2019).

Analyzing the task is very important as many candidates tend to write about a general topic instead of focusing on the specific question. While it is possible to write a good essay

on issues related to education, technology or the environment, writing a good IELTS essay means focusing on the specific question. For this reason, it is crucial for candidates to understand the purpose of writing an IELTS essay as well as the genre and the target audience. Teachers can help their students understand this by asking them to identify the topic of the essay, the focus of the question and the type of answer the question requires. As Hyland (2019) points out, writing is a form of communication and candidates need to be able to understand the purpose of the task as well as the specific genre of writing required in IELTS.

The next important element of Task 2 that should be covered in a writing class is planning. As previously mentioned, many test-takers start writing immediately. They are afraid of not having enough time to complete the task. Consequently, their essays may contain repetitions, lack of organization, and lack of clear argument. A short plan will help students to organize their ideas in a better manner. A plan can include a thesis statement and two main points for the body and examples to support these points. A plan can also help writers avoid including too many irrelevant ideas in their essays. In IELTS writing, quality of content is very important, and this means that fewer but more developed points are preferred to many ideas which are not developed in adequate manner.

The teacher should also pay special attention to teaching learners how to write a clear Task 2 essay in terms of paragraph organization. The basic framework for a clear Task 2 essay includes an introduction and three main body paragraphs and a conclusion. In the introduction, the writer should rephrase the question and clearly state his/her position on the matter being discussed. Each of the main body paragraphs should develop a single main idea. Each main idea in the body paragraphs should be supported with sufficient explanation, examples or even results. The writer's conclusion should summarize his/her answer to the question without introducing any new and relevant ideas. The teacher should make his/her learners realize that the way a piece of writing is presented and organized on the page also affects how easily the ideas are followed by the reader. In other words, the way a piece of writing is presented on the page also affects how clearly the writer's points are conveyed.

One of the major problems that many students have in writing an essay is to present sufficient evidence to back up their arguments. In IELTS Task 2 students are expected to develop arguments. Many students are unable to explain their opinions. For example, a student might write that online education is better than traditional education because online education is convenient. However, he or she would fail to explain why being convenient is important and how it affects students. Teachers need to teach their students how to present sufficient evidence to back up their arguments by using explanation, cause and effect, examples, comparison and consequences. Such skills help students to write more effective essays and to develop academic argumentation which is expected in academic writing.

The use of examples is another issue that many students find challenging. IELTS questions do not require learners to provide unique or original ideas. They do not require learners to provide statistics, graphs, or research data. In fact, many questions are answered successfully using examples that are general in nature and based upon experience of the world around us. Examples of the way in which education is provided, of the use of technology in the world, of work and industry, and of our personal experiences are all relevant when writing an IELTS essay. It is essential that examples are relevant and support the argument being presented. However, it is equally important that examples do not replace explanations. A main idea or point must be explained and then supported by an example or a consequence of that idea.

Additionally, candidates need to be cautioned against writing a memorized essay. Such essays are typically written for a generic question, which can be similar to the IELTS question, but not identical. Candidates can fall into the trap of writing an essay about education, technology, the environment, etc. without realizing that they are not actually answering the question asked in the task. In fact, much of the candidates' writing in the academic format is influenced by IELTS preparation, and this can be either positive or negative depending on the nature of the writing tasks that the candidates complete during preparation. What is desirable is that candidates' preparation helps to develop their ability to write in academic format for a variety of formats or tasks, not merely to complete IELTS-style writing tasks. Green (2007) explores how IELTS writing preparation affects candidates'

use of writing in other contexts. In order to ensure that candidates' writing develops in positive ways during IELTS preparation, teachers should help their students to use a variety of common and less common academic structures and to learn many of the commonly used academic features in context, so that they can apply them appropriately in their own writing.

The approach to teaching Task 2 in the classroom can be progressed from analysis of question types through to planning, writing of individual sections of the essay such as introductions, thesis statements, topic sentences and conclusions, and then finally writing complete essays within the allotted time. Students can be initially relieved of the burden of writing full essays within a set time and complete tasks which will allow them to gain control of individual components of effective academic writing.

Teaching IELTS Writing Task 2 helps students to progress from general opinion writers to focused academic argument writers. If students can answer IELTS Writing questions, organize their ideas, develop arguments and opinions to support, and write academically within the word limit, they will be well equipped to produce relevant, coherent, and appropriately formed essays for academic purposes.

Feature	Writing Task 1	Writing Task 2
Minimum length	At least 150 words	At least 250 words
Recommended time	About 20 minutes	About 40 minutes
Main purpose	Describing, summarizing, or explaining visual information	Presenting and developing an argument or response to an issue
Common task types	Graphs, charts, tables, maps, processes, diagrams	Opinion, discussion, problem-solution, advantages-disadvantages, causes-effects
Main skill	Selecting and reporting key features objectively	Developing relevant ideas and supporting a clear position

Feature	Writing Task 1	Writing Task 2
Use of opinion	Personal opinion is not required	Personal position is often required
Main organization	Introduction, overview, body paragraphs	Introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion
Main teaching focus	Data selection, comparison, trend language, accuracy	Task response, argument development, paragraphing, coherence
Weight in final Writing score	Lower weight	Higher weight

Table 3. Main differences between IELTS Writing Task 1 and Task 2

Source: Prepared by the author based on IELTS (n.d.) and Cambridge Assessment English (2023).

From the above table we can see that IELTS Writing Task 1 and 2 require two different types of academic writing. IELTS Writing Task 1 is mainly descriptive. The writer selects visual information from graphs, charts, etc. and reports it accurately. IELTS Writing Task 2 is argumentative or discursive writing. In this writing task candidates are expected to respond to issues by presenting their relevant ideas and explaining them with suitable support.

This difference needs to be addressed in the classroom. For Task 1, students should learn to identify main features, to organize information, and to use very precise descriptive language. For Task 2, the focus should be on analyzing the question, on developing ideas, on writing effective paragraphs, and on building an argument. In this way, students will be able to manage their time more effectively and avoid adopting methods and features of writing which are more suitable for one task than the other. Teachers will also be able to plan more effective lessons which are based on a realistic understanding of the writing tasks that their students are required to complete.

Language development is a key component in teaching Academic IELTS Writing. Both tasks in the Writing paper require candidates to express their ideas clearly, accurately and appropriately. In addition to ideas or essay structure, language control is another critical component in determining the band score of a candidate's response. Even if a candidate produces a good quality response with adequate ideas, a low score can be obtained if there are frequent errors in grammar, inadequate use of vocabulary or inadequate cohesion between ideas. Teachers can therefore play an important role by helping learners to develop the necessary vocabulary, range of grammar, coherence and formal written style for the two tasks (Taylor & Falvey, 2007).

The academic vocabulary should be presented to students as a tool for accurate communication rather than as a long list of 'difficult' words which students can then practice memorizing. However, even when individual words are known accurately, students often combine them in non-idiomatic ways and so produce nonnatural-sounding English. In studying Academic Writing, students should concentrate on acquiring vocabulary which is relevant to topics which they are likely to be studying and learn to use a range of different words to refer to similar concepts, including synonyms, different forms of a single word, and various collocations. This is particularly important when writing about a single topic, as in Task 1 Writing, where students will be expected to use a range of different vocabulary to refer to similar aspects of a single piece of information.

Collocation is another important aspect of academic vocabulary. Although students may be familiar with individual words, they can be combined in ways that are not natural in English. For this reason, it is important for teachers to draw attention to the most common collocations used in academic writing such as a significant increase, a major problem, play an important role, develop skills, provide evidence and reach a conclusion. As Jordan (1997) stated, *English for Academic Purposes* requires learners to use language forms that are commonly used in academic study. This is also the case with IELTS Writing. Vocabulary should be presented in relation to the different functions of writing such as comparing, explaining, evaluating and arguing. Students should be made aware of how vocabulary is used in academic sentences.

For learners of Academic English writing, it is crucial to practice and learn sentences of different structures. The writer of an IELTS essay should combine simple sentences and use more complex ones to express his/her ideas. For instance, using clauses of different functions (such as cause and effect, comparison, contrast, condition) in addition to complex sentences will help the writer express his/her ideas more effectively. For this reason, learners of Academic English should be taught to write more complex sentences. However, it is also important to make sure that they can write clear sentences. In other words, a very simple sentence that is written correctly is better than a long and disorganized sentence.

For Task 1, the focus on grammar should be on the use of structures for comparison, the use of the passive voice, use of prepositions of location and structures to describe change. To complete the Task 1 writing task effectively, students need to be able to write sentences such as ‘The number of students increased steadily’; ‘The library was replaced by a new sports center’; ‘The process begins with the collection of raw materials.’ For Task 2, the focus on grammar should be on the use of argumentation structures, cause and effect, condition, contrast and generalization. The need for learners to understand how to use grammar in meaningful communication has been emphasized by Brown and Lee (2015) in *Language in Action: A Sociocultural Approach to Raising Globally Competent Students*. In terms of classroom practice, this principle suggests that grammar should be taught through academic writing tasks rather than through the isolated sentence practice that is still the norm in many language classrooms. Students should therefore practice using grammar in contexts that are relevant to the two writing tasks, i.e. in descriptions of graphs and in essay writing.

Another crucial area to focus on when teaching students to improve their writing is that of cohesion. This refers to the connections students make within paragraphs and between them to enable the reader to follow the writer’s line of reasoning. Linking words and phrases are the most obvious means of achieving this but there are many other methods such as reference words, substitution, and the repetition of key words or phrases in other parts of the same text. While it is not unusual to come across writers who use a large amount of basic linking words such as firstly, secondly, moreover, and in conclusion to attempt to provide cohesion for their reader, this does not automatically mean that the writer has achieved

adequate coherence. There are many writers who achieve greater coherence by using more logical connections between sentences and paragraphs to enable the reader to more easily follow the writer's line of argument.

A final consideration in language development for the IELTS writing paper is that of academic style. While students need to avoid the use of language that is too informal, contains too many emotive comments, is written in contractions and contains generalizations that are unsupported by evidence, this does not mean saying that their writing should become over-the-top, wordy and complicated. Students should aim to produce writing that is clear, objective and is written in a style that is controlled and measured. In the case of Task 1 writing, students need to be able to describe information given in visual form, without resorting to personal opinion. Task 2 writing on the other hand, requires students to present and support arguments in a balanced and rational manner. Teachers can help students to understand how to achieve such a style by comparing informal and formal written versions of sentences, and by asking the students to decide which of the two versions would be more appropriate in a given situation.

To integrate language development into writing practice, teachers and students go through the writing process of a Task 2 paragraph together. They may look at the topic sentence of the paragraph and try to improve it. They may look at the vocabulary that has been used and try to vary it so that there is no repetition. They may look at the grammar of the sentences and try to correct any errors that there are. They may also look at the cohesive devices and try to add more to link the ideas together better. In a similar way, after a Task 1 response, students could be asked to revise their trend language, check their comparative forms, and generally try to improve the overview of their work.

The sum of these components enables candidates to become more effective writers as their ability to write longer pieces is complemented by the quality of what they have to say. Specifically, language for writing Academic IELTS needs to be accurate, appropriate, flexible and clear. Therefore, students need to be able to access a range of vocabulary that they can use to describe topics as well as a range of grammatical structures to express meaning. For coherence, candidates need to use a variety of cohesive devices to connect ideas

in their writing and for effective writing, learners need to use academic style and write in a controlled yet clear manner.

For learners of Academic IELTS Writing, feedback and assessment awareness are key. When learners give their time to writing and repeatedly produce essays without adequate feedback on their performance, they are likely to perpetuate the same errors in their writing – in terms of Task Response, Organization, Vocabulary Resources and Lexical Choice and Grammar, as well as Grammatical Range and Accuracy. Thus, for effective facilitation of the IELTS Writing process, feedback must be a central feature of teachers' writing pedagogy.

In IELTS Writing, providing feedback on written work and assessing that work are crucial aspects of teaching that students can apply when writing academic essays. Given that assessment criteria in IELTS Writing are based on four areas (Task Achievement (or Task Response), Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy), these criteria can be used in a more pedagogical sense rather than being seen as fearsome. Students can learn to understand how to improve their writing by recognizing the various aspects that are critical to effective Task Achievement, for example. They can also see how better organization of ideas using a clear and logical flow, with appropriate use of cohesive devices, can enhance a writer's overall ability to achieve success in a written task. Similarly, they can study how a writer's use of a wide lexical resource and Grammatical Range and Accuracy can help to write effective and successful academic essays in IELTS Writing. Green (2007) noted that IELTS preparation can influence students' writing, in terms of how they use language in their writing for academic purposes, and teachers should use the assessment criteria in a way that helps students recognize the critical aspects of effective written work in order to help improve their writing skills.

Using model answers for IELTS Writing is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, model answers can be very useful for teachers to show their students how a successful answer could look, i.e. how a Task 1 overview could be written, how a Task 2 argument could be developed, and how to use appropriate and sufficient academic language in a piece of writing. On the other hand, model answers should not be used as texts for students to memorize. Rather, the teacher should use them to help students analyze what makes a good piece of

writing and then apply that analysis to their own writing. By comparing a weak answer with a model answer, students can identify the structural differences, the differences in relevance, the differences in cohesion, and the differences in vocabulary. This is far more useful than just reading a high-scoring answer and not knowing how it was produced.

Another crucial step in students' writing development is rewriting their essays based on the feedback they receive from teachers and their peers. Teachers should help their students understand that after they receive feedback on their errors in grammar, vocabulary, cohesion and organization, they should use this feedback to improve their writing. This, according to Hyland (2019), is when feedback is most useful. The teacher's feedback on students' mistakes needs to be followed by students' use of that feedback in revising and improving their writing. In this way, students not only learn to recognize and correct mistakes in their own writing but also improve their writing significantly.

There is also a role for peer review in the classroom. While students can benefit from reviewing each other's writing in terms of how they organize their ideas in an introduction, how they set out to cover all of the points of a diagram in an overview for Task 1, how they develop arguments in support of their thesis statement for Task 2, and how they use a range of vocabulary to create cohesion in their writing, there is a limit to the extent to which peer review can replace teacher feedback, especially for students who are new to IELTS. For this reason, teachers must provide students with checklists and focused questions that they can use to review their peers' work. For example, students may review each other's introductions in terms of whether they answer the task question, or they may review each other's body paragraphs in terms of whether each paragraph has a clear topic sentence and supporting ideas.

Teachers should also alert students against relying on templates for certain parts of essays, for example on introductions or on the beginnings of individual body paragraphs. While students may sometimes find it helpful to draw on a bank of pre-formed expressions that could be incorporated into an essay to provide certain organizing features or functions, there is a point at which memorizing such a lot of IELTS formulaic writing could start to do more harm than good. After all, students are entering an academic testing situation in which

they are required to write in response to given tasks or questions or visual data, and so what is required is that they are able to generate written responses that are relevant to the task in hand, rather than simply re-heating and re-packaging previously memorized material. Green (2007) has commented on the impact of IELTS preparation on students' writing behavior in academic contexts, with the preparation for IELTS often encouraging formulaic writing in other contexts where more free-standing, spontaneous writing is required.

The assessment criteria can, and should, be used pedagogically. The band descriptors can be explained to students in simplified terms, and they can be shown examples of writing which are improving at different levels. For example, it can be explained to students that a paragraph which lists points as in a shopping list is less able to address a task than a paragraph which develops one main idea. Students can be shown examples of weak cohesion and strong cohesion. They can be shown examples of limited vocabulary and more flexible vocabulary. They can be shown examples of simple grammar control and more complex grammar control. In this way, assessment can be more transparent, and students can take more responsibility for their own learning.

Teaching Academic IELTS Writing involves a process-orientated approach and an awareness of assessment criteria. Students need to learn how to analyze tasks and to plan their writing. They need to learn how to write within a time frame and to review and revise their work. They also need to gain control over the use of academic language and to understand the criteria on which their work is assessed. To achieve these goals, students benefit from using model answers, from studying assessment criteria and descriptors, from peer review and from rewriting sections of their work after feedback from their teacher and/or their peers.

CHAPTER SIX

Developing Academic Speaking Competence

Speaking Part 1 is often the most familiar section of the IELTS test. The questions concern familiar topics such as home and family, studies and work, hobbies and interests, food, travel, weather, and daily routines (IELTS, n.d.). Although the questions in this section are straightforward and students may feel that they are easy to answer, it is important not to underestimate the section and not to attempt to teach students to answer questions in this section in a way which is too mechanical. It is therefore an important section for teachers to teach to help students gain an understanding of the type of questions that are asked in the test and to develop their initial fluency and ability to speak in a confident manner.

Many students give answers that are far too short. As already noted, IELTS candidates are tested on their ability to produce extended answers. In Part 1 is the only part of the test in which candidates are given the opportunity to produce short answers, but it is still very important that candidates can give more than a few words of answer to each question. For example, the candidate in the extract above gave a very acceptable answer to the first question in the extract but his answer to the second question was far too short. He could have said that he likes reading because it is interesting and relaxing and that he likes to read in his free time as it helps him to escape from the pressures of study.

To extend answers in Part 1, teachers can work with students using simple pattern answers, reason, example. So, for example, if a student is asked about his/her hobbies the student can give a clear answer, go on to explain why he/she enjoys the activity, and finish off with an example of when he/she does the activity. The student will have to extend his/her answer in Part 2 and Part 3 of the Speaking exam, so getting used to extending answers in Part 1 is an important part of preparing for the exam.

Also very important is the vocabulary for familiar topics. Students must learn to talk about studies, for example, in terms of subjects, schoolwork, tests and exams, classmates, dates and plans and study arrangements. In talking about their hometowns, students must

learn to talk about location, size of population, facilities, transport, weather and atmosphere. This type of vocabulary should not be learned as complete sentences for re-use. Students need to learn flexible vocabulary that they can use in several contexts to discuss similar topics. This should enable them to give more detailed answers to Part 1 questions, without their answers sounding unnatural or being composed of largely memorized material.

Pronunciation and fluency should also be addressed from the very beginning of Speaking classes, and it is particularly so in Part 1 of the most familiar section of the test where students must complete question-and-answer interactions. A lot of practice should be done using question and answer type drills, pair work, short dialogues, role-plays, group work and recordings, with an emphasis on students using familiar vocabulary to discuss topics of interest to them. Such speaking activities allow for meaningful interaction between speakers and the use of language for communication. Thus, in the case of Part 1 of the Speaking test, it is important to remember that the main focus should be placed on students completing a number of question-and-answer interactions to provide them with sufficient opportunity to use familiar vocabulary to discuss everyday topics. To do this effectively, students should be encouraged to complete different speaking tasks, such as completing question-and-answer interactions, and to be able to use familiar vocabulary to communicate their views on topics of interest to them. In order to be able to do this, however, students need to be given a number of opportunities to use spoken English in order to be able to complete a number of speaking tasks in order to allow them to become more familiar with the way in which they can use familiar vocabulary when interacting with other speakers so as to communicate their views on a number of topics of interest to them.

There are some pitfalls that students need to be warned about and helped to avoid. First, students need to make sure that their answers are not too short and not too long. Also, they should avoid answering every question in the same way and repeat parts of their answers should not sound as if they have been memorized. Similarly, there is no need to use the same words every time to try to remember vocabulary, and in fact this is likely to sound unnatural. The examiner is not looking for students to come up with long, difficult sentences, but rather for them to be able to communicate in a natural way to be able to have a conversation. This

is why, in class, students need to practice speaking in a clear manner and extending their answers to topics in a simple way.

Teaching IELTS Speaking Part 1 helps students to respond naturally and successfully to the simplest types of questions. Such questions include those that test candidates' ability to respond confidently to a variety of straightforward questions and to establish basic and simple communication. This section of the Speaking exam also tests candidates' ability to express ideas that are common and familiar to any candidate can and should respond by establishing basic communication.

Part 2 of the IELTS Speaking test is known as the long turn. Candidates are given a cue card containing a question. They are given one minute to prepare their response, and they may make notes in that time, though these notes must be short, comprising a few keywords or key expressions, not a full written script of what they intend to say. They then speak for one to two minutes on the topic of the question on the cue card. In Part 2 the candidate speaks individually to the examiner, unlike Part 1 where candidate and examiner speak alternately. As with Part 1, it is a challenge for many learners to speak for longer periods of time and to organize their ideas and words in real time without pause.

Students can make full use of the preparation time if they learn to make notes instead of writing down a full answer. Short notes consisting of a few keywords or even single words can be very effective for students. For example, a plan for a speaking answer on the topic of a place could include the following: name of place, location, description of place, reasons for visiting, how place made student feel, conclusion. Of course, the plan is not to read from the notes word for word. The purpose of making notes is to support the speech, not to write a piece of writing that will be read by the examiner.

Teachers also need to guide students to analyze a cue card. Typically, each cue card will contain a main topic and several related prompts or questions, which serve to guide the candidate's answer and to help him or her to speak within the time frame allocated. The student should note that the prompts or questions on the cue card need not be answered in the exact order in which they are written, although the main topic should be fully covered and sufficient detail provided to speak for the required time. Students should be able to

classify different types of cue cards such as describing a person, a place, an object, an event, an experience, a decision, etc. and plan their answer within the time frame provided.

A further problem for Part 2 speaking is to sustain fluency throughout the two minutes for the long turn. Many candidates cease speaking after thirty to forty seconds, as they are unable to find sufficient material to continue speaking. The teacher can teach students to extend their speaking to sustain longer periods of speaking. This can be achieved by adding more detail to the speaking by way of description, explanation, examples, comparison and comment. For example, when describing a place in Part 2, students could explain where the place is, what it looks like, when they went there, why they remember it, how it compares with other similar places and whether they would like to go there again. All these additional points will extend the speaking in a natural way.

A further important aspect that affects performance in Part 2 is students' strategies of storytelling. Because many topics in Part 2 ask candidates to talk about their own experiences of the past, students' ability to narrate past events of their lives within the space of the required duration of the long turn is crucial. To meet this requirement, it is crucial that students know how to organize events in chronological order by using temporal markers such as first, after that, later, eventually, and in the end. In addition to organizing their stories within a space of time, candidates should also know how to describe events in detail using descriptive language and make evaluative comments on those events in order to explain why they were so important for the speaker. Speaking as argued by Thornbury (2005) involves not only knowledge of linguistic items but also ability to manage spoken discourse in real time while speaking, and thus students' ability to produce extended spoken discourse is as crucial as their control over other aspects of spoken language.

In addition, students need to be cautioned against preparing too much for Part 2. Students realize that there are certain topics which are more frequently used in IELTS Speaking than others. So, they may prepare answers in full for such topics. However, as was mentioned earlier, each question on the cue card is unique. Therefore, even if a student has memorized an answer for a certain topic, he or she will not be able to use the answer verbatim for every question on that topic. Furthermore, a memorized answer sounds unnatural and

therefore it is not effective. It is better if students prepare certain vocabulary, typical stories and ways of generating ideas to be used for different topics on the cue card.

The classroom practice for IELTS Speaking Part 2 should gradually increase in length and complexity as students progress. First, students practice speaking for 30 seconds on topics that they know well. As they gain confidence, they then move on to speaking for 1 minute and then, for the final stage, 2 minutes. Teachers record their students' speaking and require them to comment on their speaking, in particular their fluency, hesitations, organization and use of vocabulary. They are also encouraged to note down and comment on the strengths and weaknesses of their own speaking.

The key area for teaching IELTS Speaking Part 2, therefore, is planning, organization, fluency and extended speaking. By learning to use the preparation time to full effect, to organize their speaking in the best possible way to cover all of the points they want to make, to speak fluently and for a long enough time, and to avoid long pauses in their speaking, students will be well equipped to tackle even the more complex part of the Speaking test.

Part 3 of the IELTS Speaking test is the most abstract and academically oriented section of the interview. It is even more challenging than Part 1, which is composed of familiar personal topics, and Part 2, where candidates are given a cue card topic and speak individually for one to two minutes after being given one minute to prepare to speak. In Part 3, candidates are asked to discuss several general topics related to the topic of Part 2. These are usually abstract and the questions require candidates to provide explanations, to compare things, to evaluate information, to predict future developments and to justify their opinions. As a result, Part 3 is used to assess candidates' ability to express more complex ideas than those expressed in Parts 1 and 2 and to take part in somewhat academic discussions and debates.

This Part of the IELTS test requires candidates to develop their answers from personal experiences, which they spoke of in Part 2, to be able to present their point of view on society, education, culture, technology, work, the environment, etc. in a more general manner than in Part 1. Thus, after speaking of a memorable experience from his/her life in Part 2, the candidate can be asked for example in Part 3 whether tourism is good or bad for the local

community. This type of question requires the candidate to change from a personal narrative to general argumentation and hence it is important for candidates to develop their ability to explain their arguments in Part 3.

A good Part 3 answer would go beyond a simple statement of opinion and include an explanation of why the speaker holds that view. This could be developed and supported by an example or description of consequences. Such an answer would have the basic structure of opinion, reason, example and consequence. For example: I think the best way to travel is by air. One reason for this is that it is very fast. Another reason is that it is very convenient, especially over long distances. There are many airports around the world, and they are well linked to cities and towns by road. Taylor and Weir (2012) comment that speaking assessment is concerned with candidates' ability to communicate meaning effectively in real interactive contexts. So, in Part 3, candidates need to respond to the questions of the examiner and, in doing so, develop their answers into a coherent and well-supported discussion. They also need to be able to extend their answers, clarify points and change direction as necessary.

A further feature of Part 3 that teachers must pay attention to is that of using abstract language, whether for analysis, for comparison, for evaluation and for speculation. While discussing the implications of past developments and future trends, students will compare and contrast situations, list advantages and disadvantages, attempt to explain causes of phenomena and predict future developments. To do all of this, they will require a range of expressions that enable them to generalize, to make comparisons, to evaluate situations and to put forward hypotheses about future events. It is for this reason that teachers should teach a variety of phrases such as *in many societies*, *from a broader perspective*, *one possible reason is*, *this may lead to*, *compared with the past*, and *it is likely that*. In isolation these are merely words on a page. It is in discussion that they are utilized.

Many of the questions used in Part 3 of an IELTS Speaking exam will be unfamiliar to test takers. Furthermore, in many cases, the candidate will not have sufficient time to consider all aspects of a question prior to speaking. As such, test takers are sometimes inclined to respond immediately and attempt to elaborate as much as possible in the hope that they will manage to provide an adequate answer to have been answered correctly. In such

instances, it is possible for candidates to provide inadequate answers and as such receive a low score for their responses in Part 3. That said, there are ways in which teachers can support their students in developing an ability to respond effectively in Part 3 of an IELTS Speaking exam. For example, as has already been described, students can be taught to develop answers using explanation and support. In addition to this, students should also be taught to acknowledge the possibility that, at times, they may require time to consider different options or aspects before being able to answer a question. This may include using phrases such as the following: That is an interesting question; I suppose it depends on the situation; I have not thought about that before, but I would say that; or That is a difficult question, but.... (O'Sullivan and Weir, 2011, p.54).

For Part 3 of the test teachers can practice with their students the ways of discussing topics in general. For such discussions a number of topics are suitable: education, technology, health, transport, work, culture and the environment. Students can discuss questions about these topics in pairs, i.e. hold a discussion, and then each student in turn can answer the same questions in a mock interview. It is not necessary for the student to reproduce in the mock interview the answers that s/he produced in the discussion with his/her partner. The main goal of such practice is to help students to be able to discuss topics in general in a clear manner. Such practice also helps to link test taking with real communicative ability. That is, the practice for Part 3 should not be confined to reproducing in class answers that students may produce in the test to questions. The practice should also include all the aspects of communicative ability that are required to be demonstrated by a candidate in the test while discussing topics in general in Speaking Part 3.

It is very common for IELTS test-takers to experience difficulties with Part 3, especially with overgeneralizing statements (e.g. "Everyone thinks technology is good" or "People do not read books anymore" – without providing sufficient support for such claims). On the other hand, some test-takers underdevelop their answers and as a result, fail to provide sufficient content for the examiner to assess. For both issues, students need to be taught how to qualify their statements and use examples to support their ideas, and to acknowledge the limitations of their claims. For instance, instead of saying "In many cases ...", they would

say, “In many cases ...”, or instead of saying “Some people believe...”, they would say “This may be true for most people, but this may not be true for everyone. One possible exception is...”. This would help make their answers more balanced and therefore more adequate for assessment.

Teaching students for IELTS Speaking Part 3 will focus on the key aspects of abstract thinking, idea development, and spoken argumentation. Many learners fail to move from discussion of their personal experiences to more general discussion of topics relevant to society at large. They will benefit from a range of activities, including explanation, comparison, evaluation and justification of arguments and opinions. These tasks are likely to enable learners to hold a variety of discussions both in the test and in academic situations at university.

IELTS Speaking part	Main focus	Candidate’s task	Main teaching priority
Part 1	Familiar personal topics	Answer short questions about daily life, studies, work, interests, and preferences	Natural responses, basic extension, fluency, familiar-topic vocabulary
Part 2	Individual long turn	Speak for one to two minutes on a cue-card topic after one minute of preparation	Planning, organization, extended speech, storytelling, idea development
Part 3	Abstract discussion	Discuss broader issues connected to Part 2 topic	Argumentation, explanation, comparison, evaluation, justification

Table 4. IELTS Speaking parts and teaching priorities

Source: Prepared by the author based on IELTS (n.d.) and Luoma (2004).

As with the other parts of the Speaking Test, the Speaking parts increase in difficulty from Part 1 to Part 3. While Part 1 tests candidates' ability to hold a personal conversation using mostly familiar material and vocabulary from a range of practical genres, Part 2 requires candidates to produce extended speech as part of a longer turn on a particular topic, using more vocabulary from academic and general educational genres. For this reason, while teaching candidates for the Speaking Test, teachers should not rely on merely developing candidates' ability to hold conversation in everyday situations, as each part of the test requires candidates to produce very specific types of speech (Luoma, 2004). Thus, for Part 3, teachers should focus on developing candidates' ability to hold a discussion about a number of general topics that are relevant to a number of different genres.

The final stage is the systematic development of four key elements in Academic IELTS Speaking—fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar—supported by mock interviews, feedback, and confidence-building (Taylor & Falvey, 2007). These four key elements for teaching and the four key aspects for Speaking mock tests are interconnected and are also closely related to the official IELTS Speaking assessment criteria which test candidates' ability to communicate in spoken English. Thus, it is not sufficient for teachers to just ask their students Speaking questions in class. The Speaking lessons should be organized in a systematic way to help students develop the features that affect their communicative performance and their band score in the IELTS Speaking test.

Fluency is often the most immediate noticeable feature of spoken performance and therefore a clear focus for development (Thornbury, 2005). For the IELTS Speaking test fluency does not mean speaking fast all the time but it does mean being able to maintain speech, connect ideas together and generally communicate efficiently without too many pauses for thought. Some students pause for longer than others for a variety of reasons, but the main reasons are translation from the students' first language, searching for grammatically correct sentences and the fear of making mistakes with English language that they have not used before. Brown and Lee (2015) note that there is a large body of research which supports the idea that learners need to engage in meaningful spoken interaction with native speakers and other learners to develop speaking ability. In the IELTS classroom the

teacher cannot provide all the spoken interaction that the student requires therefore the student must practice speaking in other contexts as well as in the IELTS classroom. However, the student can practice speaking in the IELTS classroom and the teacher can help the student to improve fluency by providing the student with as many opportunities as possible to practice speaking for longer periods of time and to answer more questions. The teacher can also provide the student with diverse speaking opportunities including pair work, group work, timed speaking, role-plays, short presentations and follow-up questions for after a speaking task.

Pronunciation is another crucial skill to be taught to IELTS candidates for them to achieve intelligible communication. Candidates' pronunciation does not have to sound natural or native like. What is required is that they are able to be clearly understood by the test taker. Candidates should be taught various aspects of pronunciation such as stress on words, stress on sentences, intonation, and rhythm of speech, as well as individual sounds that they find difficult to pronounce. Students' recording of their speaking could be used as a tool to identify areas of pronunciation that need to be improved upon. The improved versions of recordings could then be listened to by students to enhance their ability to identify and to reproduce sounds accurately.

Vocabulary for IELTS Speaking lessons must be taught so that candidates can use vocabulary flexibly and appropriately. There are many learners who attempt to use all the words they have learned in spoken lessons because they believe that the more words, they use the higher their Speaking band score will be. In fact, it is only when a candidate uses words appropriately that those words will add value to the candidate's speaking ability. For this reason, candidates must be taught topic-specific vocabulary, which is used to describe common IELTS Speaking test topics including education, technology, the environment, work, health, culture, and topics about travel including transport and the media. Furthermore, candidates should be taught to paraphrase when they are unable to find the exact word to use to continue speaking fluently and confidently.

The learner's grammar in speaking should be developed to be both accurate and varied. This is particularly important for the more complex Part 3 of the Speaking test.

Candidates are expected to discuss fully and at length issues and situations and to explain their opinions and views. To do this effectively, they need to use a range of more complex grammatical structures such as sentences with because and although; sentences with whereas and while; passive structures; and a range of conditional structures. However, this does not mean that the learner should only use complex grammar in speaking. Rather, he or she should aim to use a mixture of simple and more complex structures to communicate most effectively.

For these reasons, mock interviews have become an essential speaking tool for many teachers and students alike. Of course, not all mock interviews are created equally. Good mock interviews should attempt to mimic the format, timing and intensity of the real Speaking test, covering all three parts. And, crucially, mock interviews need to be followed up by effective feedback, especially if they are to be of any value to the student. Speaking assessment, in test conditions, provides a means of evaluating a speaker's communicative ability. As we have seen in previous sections, many of the Speaking test tasks are designed to require candidates to speak in a variety of ways and, furthermore, to tackle a range of tasks, often in quick succession. In the IELTS Speaking test, for example, candidates are required to perform three quite different speaking tasks in succession. It is, therefore, essential that students can practice these different test parts, often in isolation, prior to combining them in mock interviews. If a mock interview does not include all three parts, then, in terms of test preparation, it will lack value for the student. In short, students need to practice speaking English to improve their IELTS Speaking scores, but they also need to practice speaking English in test conditions. The mock interview provides one of the most effective ways for students to achieve this in the classroom (Fulcher, 2003).

IELTS Speaking criterion	What it assesses	Classroom focus
Fluency and coherence	Ability to speak continuously, connect ideas, and organize responses	Timed speaking, answer extension, discourse markers, reducing unnatural pauses

IELTS Speaking criterion	What it assesses	Classroom focus
Lexical resource	Range, flexibility, and appropriacy of vocabulary	Topic vocabulary, paraphrasing, collocations, avoiding memorized phrases
Grammatical range and accuracy	Variety and control of sentence structures	Complex sentences, tense control, conditionals, relative clauses, error correction
Pronunciation	Clarity, stress, rhythm, intonation, and intelligibility	Recording practice, stress patterns, intonation, problematic sounds, natural rhythm

Table 5. IELTS Speaking assessment criteria and classroom focus

Source: Prepared by the author based on IELTS (n.d.), Luoma (2004), and Taylor and Falvey (2007).

The Speaking assessment criteria are thus not merely random aspects of speaking which are to be covered in speaking classes, but rather the various features which affect a candidate's communicative performance in spoken English and therefore need to be developed by the teacher in order to help his or her students obtain the desired band score in IELTS Speaking. In addition, when these aspects are to be covered in the classroom, they should be developed in a manner that is to be similar to how they are to be assessed. In other words, students should be provided with speaking opportunities in order to develop their Fluency and Coherence, work on Vocabulary in contexts that are to be relevant to them, complete sentences of varying levels of complexity and accuracy in order to develop their Grammatical Range and Accuracy, and listen to their own speaking and that of others, complete speaking tasks, and perform speaking and listening tasks, including speaking and listening for information, in order to develop their Pronunciation in order to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently in spoken English.

Feedback on student performance should be clear, selective, and constructive (Luoma, 2004). Delayed feedback after completion of a speaking task rather than real time correction while the student is searching for words and speaking is better for the learner. It is better to give the student feedback on the few errors they make rather than focusing on all the mistakes made during the speaking task. The focus of feedback in assessing speaking should be on evaluating the language use of the student. The teacher should focus on how the learner's language use affects his/her communication. In addition, teacher feedback on student speaking performance should provide students with criteria for evaluating and setting realistic goals for their speaking development (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 55).

An additional aim of the IELTS Speaking teacher is to increase learners' confidence, as anxiety can negatively affect spoken performance and lead to avoidable mistakes (Brown & Lee, 2015). To achieve this, it is important to create a safe learning environment, and in addition to speaking in pairs and groups, the learners should be given many opportunities to listen to and watch others speaking in similar circumstances.

Student reflection also can be of benefit for improving students' speaking ability. Students can be made to listen to their speaking again and make comments or list strong and weak points. They can note that they often speak with pauses or even in some cases of using vocabulary that they have previously learnt. This type of comment from themselves enables them to become more autonomous learners and take more responsibility for improving themselves. Students also can more easily notice and therefore be motivated to improve their speaking ability when they see how they are progressing.

In summary, teaching IELTS Speaking requires a range of strategies that focus on communication as well as providing students with an understanding of how they are assessed and how they can receive feedback on their performance. Through several classroom practices teachers can work with students to build up their confidence in communicating effectively in spoken English. In the classroom, students can learn how to tackle each part of the IELTS Speaking test. They learn to speak naturally in Part 1 of the test, to develop their ability to extend their speech in Part 2, and to discuss a range of abstract topics in Part 3. Using mock speaking tests, pronunciation practice, selected feedback on student speaking,

vocabulary study, and learners' evaluation of their own speaking in the classroom, teachers can help their students to gain sufficient experience of speaking in order to be adequately prepared for the IELTS test as well as the demands of communication in academic settings worldwide.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Assessment Principles and Band-Score Interpretation

Assessment criteria play a significant role in IELTS preparation, because candidates can find out how their performance has been assessed and what band score they have received for each test (Hughes, 2003). The IELTS band scale ranges from 0 to 9, and candidates receive separate scores for Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking (IELTS, n.d.; Cambridge Assessment English, 2023). These test scores are combined to produce an overall band score for candidates. Learners and teachers need to be aware of IELTS assessment criteria and the band scores that candidates receive for each test.

Although teachers recognize the importance of assessment criteria in an IELTS lesson, awareness of the criteria should not be taught as a separate unit or as a ‘final lesson’. Rather, assessment criteria should be integrated into lessons from the beginning of the course (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Since a learner understands that he or she needs Band 7.0 for example but is unsure what it means in terms of specific language use in writing and speaking, teachers must make criteria for assessment as familiar as possible for students to achieve their goals.

The band scores from 0 to 9 are also useful for teachers and students because the band scale explains the different criteria for evaluating language use. For example, Band 7.0 Writing is different from Band 6.0 Writing, and a student can learn what features to include in their writing to receive a higher score. A criterion for Speaking, for example, is whether the candidate’s speech is clear, i.e. whether others can understand him/her. The same criterion for Reading is whether the candidate’s reading is accurate, i.e. whether what he/she reads is correct. Bachman and Palmer (2010) comment that scores in language assessment are only as good as the ability or performance that the scores measure. IELTS band scores therefore need to be interpreted in relation to the criteria that assess different aspects of a candidate’s language ability (Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

In addition, assessment criteria also help students set realistic goals. Although it is possible for students to improve their skills in a very short period, provided they practice and study regularly, band scores also develop in many areas. For example, students can develop their Writing skills by improving their task response as well as ensuring that their writing is coherent. The range of vocabulary that they use can also be developed as well as the range of different grammatical structures. For Speaking, students can develop their fluency as well as improving their pronunciation and using a greater variety of language to communicate effectively.

These assessment criteria also provide a great deal of assistance to teachers when they are planning lessons and giving feedback (McNamara, 2000). If a teacher of IELTS has a class of students who are having difficulty with Writing Task 2, then the teacher can assess the students' work to see where the main problem area is. Is it their task response, the coherence of what they have written, their use of vocabulary, or their use of grammar? Similarly, if a teacher of IELTS has a class of students who are having difficulty with the Speaking test, then the teacher can assess the students' speaking ability to see if the problem area is with their fluency, their use of vocabulary, their pronunciation, or their grammatical control. The language testing criteria provided by Alderson et al. (1995) should be well understood by any teacher of IELTS as they relate to the skills which are being tested by each component of the exam and the constructs which are being measured by each component of the exam. The criteria can thus be used by teachers to plan lessons and to design tasks which focus on specific aspects of a skill.

There is, however, a danger that criteria can make IELTS teaching become mechanical. However, the assessment criteria for IELTS should be seen by teachers as a description of the academic English abilities that their students need to develop. When these are made transparent, students can see why one answer is better than another and what they need to do to improve their writing and speaking. In this way, the IELTS marking criteria are not just a means by which examiners are able to keep track of candidates' performance; they are also an extremely powerful pedagogical tool.

Understanding the assessment criteria for IELTS is an essential component of any effective IELTS preparation. It helps teachers plan lessons, give appropriate feedback, and best of all, helps students understand just how far they have come. Criteria for assessment need to be communicated to learners in such a way that they understand what is expected of them in terms of language ability and how they can achieve their desired band score. Assessment criteria should be presented to learners as a tool for their language learning and not as something to be feared.

The average of the four section scores is used to calculate the overall IELTS band score. This average is then rounded to the nearest whole or half band. IELTS states that when calculating the average for the overall band score that an average score ending in .25 is rounded up to the next half band while an average score ending in .75 is rounded up to the next whole band. This is illustrated in the following examples:

Another important aspect of IELTS scoring is the equal weight given to all four sections of the test. While a candidate's overall IELTS band score gives an indication of their ability in English, it does not necessarily give any indication of strengths and weaknesses. In other words, the section scores are averaged together to produce an overall score and, as a result, all four skills are treated equally. This means that a candidate cannot focus only on his or her strong points and rely on other sections to pull up the average. Instead, candidates are encouraged to consider all four sections of the test and to work to improve their performance in each area, regardless of whether it is a strength or a weakness.

IELTS band scores are rounded to the nearest whole number or half number, and this is the overall band score calculated by averaging the four section scores. The averaging process calculates the average of the four section scores and rounds up to the next half band when the average ends in .25 and up to the next whole number when the average ends in .75. This means a very small increase in one section can result in an increase in the overall band score. An example would be a candidate who scores 6.5 Listening, 6.5 Reading, 5.0 Writing and 7.0 Speaking would have an average score of 6.25 which results in an overall band score of 6.5. However, if the average score were 6.125 then the overall band score would be 6.0.

One way of using score calculation in lessons is to explain to learners the practical implications of their scores. For instance, a learner might achieve an average overall score of Band 7.0 but have a writing score of only 5.5. In such a case, the learner would be advised that their writing is not yet of a sufficient standard to be considered suitable for entry to university, and that in academic contexts, the scores for Writing and Speaking are viewed as direct indicators of a student's potential to participate in and succeed in studies at post-secondary level.

Score interpretation is an important part of a teacher's work, and this should be done as part of a teacher's diagnostic work with a student. A mock test can be used to give the student an approximate score. Looking at a score profile gives the teacher immediate information as to whether a student is generally balanced between the four skills or whether there are large gaps between the student's receptive skills and productive skills. A student who scores 7.0 in Reading and Listening but only 5.5 in Writing will need targeted work on the writing on tasks such as writing an essay in a reasonable amount of time, organizing ideas into clear paragraphs, using suitable grammar and a wide enough vocabulary. In this way, the teacher can plan the student's work more efficiently and realistically.

Teachers and students also benefit from an understanding of the score that a student needs to achieve in order to reach their goals. An equal weight is assigned to the four sections of IELTS, but it is well known that, while receptive skills (Listening and Reading) can be improved through practice and the development of strategies, the other two sections (Speaking and Writing) require much deeper work on a student's language ability. If a student achieves a high score in the four sections of IELTS, this does not necessarily mean that they will reach their academic goals. For instance, a student with an average score of 7 could be unsuccessful in gaining entry to a university due to a low score in the Writing section. Similarly, a student who achieves high scores in all the sections, but below 6.5 in any one of them, will not be considered for admission to a university that requires an average score of 6.5 or higher.

The overall band score can be useful in deciding on a candidate's acceptance to a program. On the other hand, the scores for individual components of IELTS can be used for

planning lessons, setting realistic goals for learners and explaining how learners have developed in terms of their English skills.

Scoring also makes an important distinction between objective measures and measures that assess performance. The Listening and Reading tests consist of forty questions each. Each correct answer is given one mark. After that the raw scores are converted to the IELTS band scale. The marks for the Writing and Speaking tests, on the other hand, are given according to a set of assessment criteria. These criteria for the Writing tests are Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy and Fluency for the Speaking tests. In the case of the productive skills, as opposed to the receptive skills, improvement is less likely to be as mechanical as increasing Listening or Reading accuracy through the development of a range of strategies for answering questions. Fluency, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy are skills that are generally more challenging to develop than accurate completion of questions in a Reading test.

The IELTS band score for Academic purposes is a measure of the learner's ability to understand and use English in an academic environment. It is essential for both teachers and learners to understand how IELTS band scores are calculated, and how scores for individual components are interpreted. Learners can then organize their IELTS Academic test preparation more efficiently and help themselves reach their target band score. For teachers, an understanding of the scoring system for IELTS enables them to plan more effective lessons, and to provide their students with greater insight into, and explanation of, their progress.

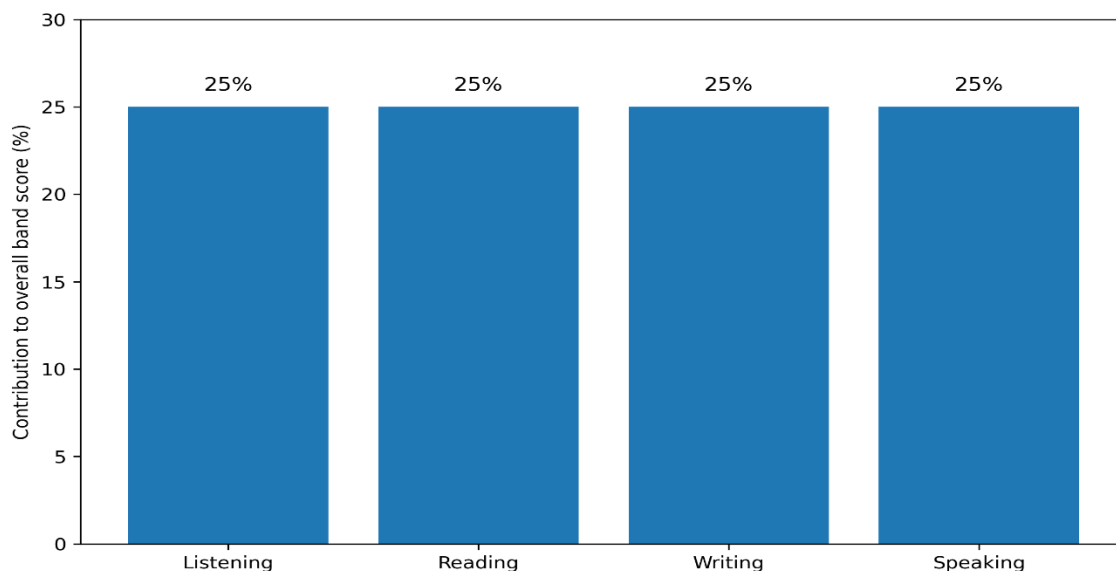


Figure 4. Contribution of the four IELTS skills to the overall band score

Source: Prepared by the author based on IELTS (n.d.).

Figure 4 shows that Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking contribute equally to the overall IELTS band score. Each skill represents one quarter of the final score calculation. This visual representation is useful for learners because it shows that IELTS preparation should not be limited to one or two preferred skills. A weakness in any single component can affect the overall result, especially when the candidate is close to the required institutional band score.

The figure also supports the idea of balanced preparation. Although learners may need more time for their weaker areas, teachers should still monitor progress across all four skills. In practical terms, this means that diagnostic testing, lesson planning, feedback, and mock assessment should consider the full score profile rather than only the overall band. Such an approach helps learners understand their performance more clearly and prepare for IELTS in a more strategic way.

In the IELTS Listening test, each correct answer is given one mark. The raw score from the number of correct answers is then converted into the IELTS 9-band scale. For the Listening test, the score is reported in whole and half bands. Objective marking means that

the examiner does not judge the candidate's performance. The number of correct answers that have been written in the correct spaces on the answer sheet is counted to give a raw score out of 40.

The marking of the Listening test is objective but the skills that the candidates need to use in order to answer the questions correctly are complex. The test taker has only one chance to listen to the recording and they must follow the questions in the same order as the information in the recording. Therefore, candidates must continue following the recording through Section 4 without returning to earlier questions. The test taker must therefore be able to understand information that they hear for the first time, recognize the language of transformation (paraphrase), avoid being misled by distractors, and write their answers accurately. It is therefore crucial that test takers can recover from missing an answer to a question to continue listening to the next question.

A further complication to scoring the IELTS Listening exam is the fact that candidates can lose marks because of spelling mistakes or incorrect grammar in their answers, even if they have understood the audio correctly. Some of the most common errors in this regard are mistakes with plural nouns, compound words, dates, proper nouns and words that are pronounced similarly to other words. For example, a candidate might have understood what was said on the audio but written the singular form of a noun that requires a plural form in the answer key. As such, teachers should be sure to include a lot of practice of spelling, number recognition and word forms when teaching Listening.

Also worth considering are the word limits given for answers to individual questions. In many cases, candidates will be required to respond to a question using 'NO MORE THAN ONE WORD', 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS' or 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER'. Where a candidate's response contains more words than are allowed for in the question, that answer will be scored incorrectly. Again, a major focus for the teacher will be on ensuring that candidates fully understand the task and respond accurately within the given word limit. It is also useful for the teacher to provide students with the opportunity to review answers and check that they have adhered to the word limit as set out in the question.

Another factor which is scored is the transfer of answers. As candidates complete the questions in the four parts of the Listening test, they transfer their answers to the answer sheet provided at the back of the test booklets. In the paper-based test, candidates have an additional 10 minutes to transfer their answers to the answer sheet (IELTS, n.d.). The candidate must make sure that all the words are spelt correctly and that the numbers and dates are written in the correct format. Any spelling or grammatical errors on the answer sheet will result in marks being deducted from the candidate's score. For this reason, teachers should also provide their students with lots of practice in transferring answers to an answer sheet. The students should also be made aware of the importance of double checking their answers for any spelling mistakes or misnumbered dates.

In the computer-based version of IELTS the answers are typed in by candidates on the computer keyboard or by using the mouse to select from a list of options. Even though answers are entered in a different way, it is just as important to pay attention to spelling, grammar, accurate numbering and word length as it is in the paper-based version of the test. For some students who are not very familiar with typing in English, it may be a good idea to include some computer-based practice tests in listening classes.

The score from the IELTS Listening test is a raw score. A teacher would need to analyze this score in a diagnostic way. That is, the teacher needs to establish why the candidate obtained a particular score. For example, a candidate might have obtained a score of 7 because of his or her ability to spell accurately or because of his or her ability to recognize distractors in the test. On the other hand, the candidate may have obtained a score of 6 because of his or her limited vocabulary or because he or she is not able to concentrate on the audio. It is also possible that the candidate obtained a score of 5 because of a combination of several reasons, such as his or her limited vocabulary, lack of knowledge and inability to concentrate. In the case of the Listening test, it is also useful to analyze errors by category. This can help a candidate to establish his or her own pattern of error and to practice for future tests in areas where he or she is particularly weak.

Although IELTS Listening seems to be a straightforward test in which candidates score one mark for each correct answer, to achieve a good score requires a combination of

ability to understand audio, ability to complete tasks to exacting standards, ability to be accurate when writing answers and ability to sustain concentration for the entire test. By highlighting for students how each aspect of the test is scored, and how a small mistake could result in a loss of a whole band, teachers can link Listening class work more clearly to how the test is actually marked, i.e. by focusing on spelling, on grammar, on word limits, on tackling distractors, on completing the transfer of answers to the Answer Sheet correctly and by analyzing errors made by students in different ways.

Like Listening, the IELTS Reading section is scored objectively (IELTS, n.d.). There are forty questions in total, and one mark is awarded for each correct answer. Candidates' scores from the Reading section are converted to the IELTS 9-band scale. For the Academic IELTS module candidates have sixty minutes to complete the Reading test. There are three sections or texts, and all answers are to be written on the answer sheet. Unlike the Listening test, there is no additional time given to candidates to transfer answers from the Reading test paper to the answer sheet. Candidates therefore must manage their time to read the passages and to write the answers on the answer sheet.

Although both Reading and Listening are scored in an objective manner, there are considerable differences between both sections. First, as far as Listening is concerned, candidates are dealing with spoken language. They are given the opportunity to listen to the recording once only and they must process the information as quickly as possible to complete the necessary number of questions. In Reading, candidates are dealing with written language. They can always go back to a particular part of a text, but they must make use of their reading skills in an even more efficient manner. In other words, not only are candidates tested on their ability to understand a given text but also on their reading behavior in general. This implies that a candidate who can read at a satisfactory speed will be able to complete all forty questions in the section even if he or she is not able to understand every part of the three given passages.

A total score from the Academic Reading section is reported as a band score from 0 to 9. Because the Raw Scores from different forms of the Academic Reading section may not be perfectly equivalent, it is possible that different candidates may receive different band

scores for the same total number of correct answers. When reporting examples of total scores that correspond to band scores, IELTS provides examples of how Raw Scores have been converted to band scores for particular test forms. These examples, however, are only rough guides and should not give candidates or teachers the idea that there is a precise number of correct answers required for a particular band score.

Again, when results from IELTS Reading are used diagnostically rather than just as numerical results, the causes for students' mistakes can be pinpointed and thus teachers can give more appropriate advice. For example, when a student gets only 25 marks out of 40 for Reading, he or she gets 15 marks for True/False/Not Given questions, 8 for matching heading, and only 5 for completing a passage. Looking at the results for each type of question, the student loses marks mainly because he or she cannot distinguish between situations when information is contradicted by other information and situations when the information is simply not provided. The next most common mistake is choosing keywords from a passage over the main ideas, and the last but most serious problem is that the student fails to complete the third passage although he or she has sufficient time to do so. In this case, one of the biggest problems that the student has in IELTS Reading is that of time management.

When looking at errors in Reading tests, it is helpful to look at them in terms of the different types of questions and reading skills required to complete them. For example, a student who is having trouble with the Reading section may be getting a lot of answers wrong because they are having trouble with different reading sub-skills. For example, in True/False/Not Given questions, students may be getting a lot of answers wrong because they are having trouble distinguishing between a statement being false and the statement not being mentioned in the passage. In the Heading match task, the student may be getting a lot of wrong answers because they are relying too heavily on keywords in the questions rather than understanding the main ideas of the passages. In the last section of the test, the students may not complete the section because they are running out of time to read the passages. All of these are very different problems and thus require very different solutions.

In addition, in completion tasks, errors in spelling or grammar can result in a candidate losing a mark for a whole answer, even though they had identified the correct part

of the text from which to obtain the answer. For example, in sentence completion, summary completion, table completion and short answer questions, candidates must be able to write their answer in the correct form, using the correct form of verb and noun for both singular and plural. Candidates should also pay close attention to word limit and ensure that they have allowed sufficient time to transfer their answers to the answer sheet. Teachers can assist their students in developing these reading skills by practicing copying answers correctly, and by ensuring that their students are aware of the requirement for correct spelling and grammar in reading.

Another aspect to take into consideration is that of the absence of extra time for transfer of answers in IELTS Reading as opposed to IELTS Listening. In the case of Reading, candidates have to complete the Reading test within 60 minutes and transfer answers to the answer sheet for the corresponding questions within the same time. In terms of the paper-based version of IELTS, candidates should not wait until the end of the section to complete the transfer of answers to the answer sheet. In the case of the computer-delivered version of IELTS, candidates should check their answers for the section before moving on to the next section. Therefore, in addition to teaching candidates how to complete transfer of answers on the answer sheet for IELTS Reading, candidates should also be taught answer-sheet routines, timed reading exercises and given strategies on when to stop reading a particular question and move on to another.

Also important for goal setting is an interpretation of the Reading score in terms of distribution of correct and incorrect answers over the individual passages as well as over the different task types. A candidate, for example, might score Band 7.0 in Academic Reading, and, on closer inspection, achieve 36/40 in Passage 1 but only 4/14 in Passage 2 due to the increased complexity of the texts. Another candidate might achieve very different scores in different task types and, therefore, benefit from lessons which are focused on using practice time more effectively in Reading.

In summary, IELTS Reading scores are given as objective marks in a paper-based test or as a score in a computer-based test. However, it is very important for the teacher to use the scores for diagnostic purposes and for helping students to improve in reading. For

this, it is necessary for teachers and students to understand how a Reading test is scored and how marks are given for wrong answers. With this understanding, students can be helped to improve in reading and in using their time efficiently in Reading tests. They can also be equipped with the necessary skills for academic reading.

IELTS Writing and Speaking are viewed as productive skills in that candidates are tested on their ability to use English to produce language to complete a task or engage in conversation with another person. Thus, unlike the Reading and Listening tests where candidates select answers from printed text or recorded speech respectively, candidates in the Writing and Speaking tests produce their own unique piece of work. For this reason, the two tests cannot be strictly marked by reference to a set of correct answers, and the work is assessed by trained examiners using a set of assessment criteria that specify what constitutes good work.

Assessment criteria for Writing candidates are divided into four equally weighted categories. These are: Task Achievement (or Task Response), which measures how far the candidate has achieved the requirements of the task set; Coherence and Cohesion; Lexical Resource; and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. The first of these, Task Achievement, applies to both Task 1 and Task 2 writing. Thus, for Task 1, candidates will be awarded a score for how far they achieve the requirements of the task set; for Task 2, a score for how far they achieve the requirements of the task for Task 2 writing. If a candidate's writing is grammatically accurate but fails to address the task set, then the score will be limited. This means that candidates and teachers must pay close attention to how candidates organize their writing. Writing is a whole-text activity and a single sentence, even if grammatically accurate, is not the writing.

Speaking is assessed by four criteria which focus on the candidate's ability to communicate in speaking, to produce speech in real time. So, for example, Fluency and Coherence is concerned with candidates' ability to speak without excessive hesitation and to convey their ideas in a logical order. In the study by Taylor and Weir (2012) on IELTS Speaking mentioned earlier, the first major section of the book is entitled Communicative Features of Performance. In the classroom the teacher will wish to provide opportunities for

students to practice speaking to improve their Fluency and Coherence, to extend their answers, respond to follow-up questions and make use of discourse features, among other things. Note that the teacher is not aiming to develop candidates' ability to reproduce answers that they have memorized; on the contrary, the focus is on enabling them to communicate effectively in real time using whatever language they happen to have at their disposal.

The criteria for assessing the IELTS productive skills (Writing and Speaking) are useful to show how IELTS assessment is a multi-faceted exercise. Most students assume that assessment is based on a single feature, for example, that in IELTS Writing, students are assessed for grammar only, and in IELTS Speaking, students are assessed for pronunciation only. In fact, there are many features that are considered for each skill and a student's overall score is usually influenced by many of these. For instance, in Task 2 Writing, a candidate may have thought of many relevant ideas but failed to organize them in a coherent fashion. Similarly, in Speaking, a candidate may have used a wide and accurate range of vocabulary but spoken fluently only on a few occasions.

Skill	Assessment criterion	What it focuses on	Classroom implication
Writing	Task Achievement / Task Response	Whether the response answers the task fully and appropriately	Teach question analysis, overview writing, thesis statements, relevance, and full task coverage
Writing	Coherence and Cohesion	Organization, paragraphing, logical progression, and linking of ideas	Teach paragraph structure, topic sentences, referencing, sequencing, and controlled use of connectors
Writing	Lexical Resource	Range, accuracy, flexibility, and appropriacy of vocabulary	Teach topic vocabulary, collocations, paraphrasing, word forms, and precise academic language

Skill	Assessment criterion	What it focuses on	Classroom implication
Writing	Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Variety and control of sentence structures	Teach sentence accuracy, complex structures, punctuation, comparison, condition, cause, and contrast
Speaking	Fluency and Coherence	Ability to speak continuously and organize spoken responses	Use timed speaking, answer extension, follow-up questions, and discourse markers
Speaking	Lexical Resource	Flexible and appropriate spoken vocabulary	Teach topic-based vocabulary, paraphrasing, natural expressions, and avoidance of memorized answers
Speaking	Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Range and accuracy of spoken sentence structures	Practice accurate simple forms, complex sentences, tense control, and self-correction
Speaking	Pronunciation	Clarity, stress, rhythm, intonation, and intelligibility	Use recording, pronunciation drills, stress practice, and feedback on unclear speech

Table 6. IELTS productive-skill assessment criteria and classroom implications

Source: Prepared by the author based on IELTS (n.d.), Hughes (2003), and McNamara (2000).

A simple way of organizing the criteria to check whether you are teaching the right things in class is to translate them into classroom priorities. For instance, the Coherence and Cohesion criterion for Writing could be taught through paragraph organization exercises, such as paragraph ordering, and essay planning. The Fluency and Coherence criterion for

Speaking could be developed through several speaking exercises, such as timed speaking and follow-up questions that require the speaker to extend his/her answer.

The assessment criteria should also be used to provide focused feedback to students (Weir, 2005). Instead of saying that a student's essay is weak, teachers and examiners should say why a particular aspect has been awarded a particular score. For example, was the problem with the student's essay to do with task response, organization, the use of vocabulary or grammar? Similarly, instead of saying that a student's speaking test was not fluent, teachers and examiners should provide specific examples for the student of where he or she hesitated, repeated the same words, produced very short answers or failed to develop his or her ideas. As Weir (2005) noted, language testing should have clear evidence to support its claims. This is particularly relevant when giving feedback to students on their performance in an IELTS test. The evidence to support comments on a student's performance should be based on the specific language that he or she used during the test.

On the other hand, teachers must also be careful not to teach the assessment criteria in such a way that students perform in writing and speaking in a mechanical or overly rigid way. While it is their function to help students to understand what is required in terms of quality of production, their objective must remain that of enabling students to use English for effective and suitable purposes in academic contexts. In short, when used pedagogically, the assessment criteria for the productive skills can serve to guide students to become better writers and speakers of English.

Assessment criteria serve several purposes in Academic IELTS teaching and assessment (Alderson et al., 1995). In addition to predicting band scores, assessment criteria have a pedagogical function; they should enable teachers and students to understand aspects of performance which can be improved. When students have understood the reasons for their band score, they perceive IELTS preparation as a process of learning and academic language development rather than a testing event. Such perception is critical, as many students are demotivated when given a band score with no explanation for aspects of their performance.

The assessment criteria are best used for giving feedback to students, for self-assessment, for peer-assessment and for tracking the progress that students are making. By

giving feedback on all of the assessment criteria for a particular piece of work the students will be able to see where they are doing well and where they need to focus to reach their full potential. In Writing for example, the teacher could give feedback on four key areas: the task response, the organization, the vocabulary and the grammar. By commenting on each of these areas separately the student will be able to see where the main problem area is rather than being left unsure as to how to go about improving their work. The same could be said for Speaking where the teacher could comment on issues such as hesitation, not giving enough time to develop an answer, pronunciation difficulties, over-use of certain vocabulary and instances of poor grammar. Bachman and Palmer (2010) assert that assessment becomes meaningful when it is directly related to the abilities that are being measured. This also means that the assessment of a learner's ability to use English for instance, in IELTS test conditions, can also be used as the basis of feedback that is linked to observable features of a learner's performance. This type of feedback is easier for students to understand and will enable them to work much better at improving their performance in the future.

Using assessment criteria for self-assessment. Many IELTS learners are not used to assessing their own work and need guidance on how to do this. Teachers can provide learners with simplified versions of the IELTS Writing and Speaking criteria and ask them to assess their own work. For example, after writing a Task 2 essay, a learner might assess his or her work by checking whether it: answers all parts of the question; has clear main ideas in each paragraph; uses a good range of accurate vocabulary. After speaking practice, a learner might assess his or her speaking by checking whether he or she: paused too often; used too many identical words; developed his or her answers sufficiently.

Peer assessment may also be provided for, if carefully managed to ensure that it is focused on criteria and that learners understand the goals of the assessment. For instance, after writing a Task 1 report, learners may be given a few questions to answer regarding their partner's overview, or after completing a Speaking test, they may be asked to comment on aspects of their partner's performance of Speaking Part 2. Learners are likely to take peer assessment more seriously, and to be more likely to benefit from it, if they know that it is intended to support learning, rather than as an end. It is therefore up to the teacher to ensure

that learners understand the focus of the assessment and can use their comments to improve their performance of the relevant skills.

The assessment criteria for IELTS also have a function for monitoring learner progress. If a teacher only records band scores from mock tests, he or she has little information to go on should the learner not improve as expected. By recording criterion scores, the teacher can note learners' repeated failures and thereby gain a more detailed impression of their development than from a single overall score.

However, it is also very important for teachers not to misuse the assessment criteria. If learners focus too much on the band descriptors they might start writing in a more mechanical way, trying to incorporate in their writing as many linking words as possible, or use very rare and unusual words to increase their Lexical Resource score. It is therefore the teacher's task to show the learners that the assessment criteria are meant to measure effective communication and not awkward language use. The writer has already pointed out that in academic writing it is very important to use clear, relevant, well-organized language and it is no different in IELTS writing. Good IELTS writing should sound natural and should have been written within the parameters of any given task.

The assessment criteria for IELTS should, therefore, be used to help students learn and to become more effective users of English in academic situations. This is especially the case when used to provide feedback on written work, for self-assessment, peer assessment and for monitoring students' progress in class.

In summary, the criteria for the IELTS marking scheme are of significance for both the assessment of candidates and the teaching of IELTS. It is particularly important for teachers to explain the differences between the four sub-tests as well as how the candidate's work is assessed by the criteria for Writing and Speaking. Assessment criteria provide important linkages between a candidate's IELTS preparation and his/her use of English for academic purposes. Assessment criteria help a student to understand and work with the reasons for his/her performance. Thus, the use of assessment criteria in a classroom situation provides students with crucial feedback on their performance, which, in turn, enables them to develop into better users of English for academic purposes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Synthesis of Pedagogical Findings

Academic IELTS teaching of the four skills requires very different pedagogical approaches. Even though all four skills are weighted equally in terms of the overall test score, they are very different and place very different demands on test-takers. For example, while all four skills require test-takers to use their academic English, Listening and Reading are both ‘receptive’ skills, and are very different from each other. In addition, while Writing and Speaking are both ‘productive’ skills, they are very different from each other and are affected in very different ways by test-takers’ ability to organize and use their own language.

Both Listening and Reading are receptive skills; learners are engaged in processing information, identifying meaning and recognizing paraphrase, to respond to a task or complete a task. However, there is a major difference between the two skills in terms of how information is received by the learner. In the case of Listening, learners receive information that is auditory in nature, a recording that is played only once. This type of skill requires learners to be highly aware of all elements that could affect their ability to complete a task to the best of their ability. Such elements as distraction, poor recording quality, issues with pronunciation and aspects of the test itself, such as timing and task type, all must be considered. As a result, the main aspect of listening that should be the focus of the classroom is the learners’ ability to predict what is likely to happen in a recording, to concentrate and take appropriate notes whilst listening to a recording and to recognize and filter out distractors in order to accurately complete a task. In Reading, on the other hand, information is received in written form. Students read from a text and complete a task or answer questions based on the information that they have read. Because students can go back to the text to check for specific information, the major focus in Reading lessons is on multiple different strategies to select the appropriate information from very long pieces of text in a very short period of time. Thus, skimming and scanning for specific information as well as recognizing and utilizing evidence from the text in addition to identifying and utilizing paraphrase in

order to accurately complete a task are all major aspects that should be focused upon in the classroom in order to aid students in preparing for Reading sections of IELTS.

Writing and Speaking are productive skills, which place different demands on learners than do the receptive skills of Listening and Reading. For instance, while the latter involves learners identifying and selecting or transferring information to complete a task, in Writing and Speaking they must produce language themselves. Thus, while the skills of Listening and Reading place a strong emphasis on learners' ability to process information, that of Writing focuses on their ability to organize language to complete a task in Writing, and that of Speaking on a number of factors, including their ability to organize language to complete a task while speaking, as well as to manage interaction and produce meaning in real time. This latter skill is highly dependent on learners' confidence and ability to use language automatically.

On the other hand, even though the four IELTS skills are taught and practiced separately, there is a connection between them as well. For one, studying reading can help improve a student's vocabulary as well as his or her ability to come up with ideas in writing. Similarly, listening to lectures on a variety of topics and discussing them in a classroom environment can help a student understand how different types of spoken discourse are organized as well as come up with stronger arguments for essays. Speaking, on the other hand, can help students organize their ideas in a more logical manner before putting them down on paper in the form of an essay. In sum, IELTS teaching should be both analytical and integrated as the four skills are often practiced separately but there is considerable overlap between them.

The difficulty of IELTS Test stems not only from the learners' English ability level, but also from the specific test takers' ability to tackle specific tasks within given time frameworks in an IELTS Test setting. Thus, what test takers encounter in IELTS Tests is a complex interplay between the learners' English language abilities and a range of test tasks that they must complete within strict time limits to be evaluated according to assessment criteria. Bachman and Palmer (2010) explained that the sum of test takers' language abilities and the sum of the various test tasks they are required to complete in a test setting equals the

sum of the test scores they attain in that test. Therefore, even learners of high levels of English proficiency may fail to achieve desired test scores if they are not able to understand tasks, they are required to complete in IELTS Tests and/or are unable to put their English language ability into practice when they are taking IELTS Tests within given time frameworks.

In summary, four IELTS skills require a different pedagogical approach. Lessons on IELTS Listening should help learners' real-time comprehension and accuracy to be improved. Lessons on IELTS Reading should help learners to become strategically selective and efficient readers. IELTS Writing lessons should help learners to become better writers of longer essays and to produce more effective academic writing in general. Lessons on IELTS Speaking should improve learners' fluency, ability to interact with others and confidence in communication. It is necessary to note that the focus of this dissertation is on how Academic IELTS can be effectively prepared. Academic IELTS preparation should be a) skill-based, b) strategic and c) pedagogically sound. That is, students should be helped not only to complete IELTS test sections but also to use English effectively in a variety of situations to achieve their academic goals.

The issue that is at the heart of all the chapters in this dissertation is how to link language learning with test-taking strategies in order to help students reach their full potential in IELTS, an academic test which has a fixed format, a set of task types and time limits. The way in which the test is marked and awarded also needs to be understood by candidates. Thus, test awareness is crucial for candidates, but it is not enough on their own. A test-aware learner with limited academic English will not achieve a high band score.

General language ability is not enough to help a learner reach their full potential in IELTS, even when that language ability is of a high standard. For instance, a learner who is very able to read the main ideas in longer academic texts, for example may struggle to complete the Reading section of IELTS within the time allocated because they do not understand how to manage their time effectively. Other learners, even those who are very fluent in everyday situations, can struggle to express themselves in Speaking Part 3, where they are expected to produce longer, more developed answers. Yet another problem is that a learner who can write very accurate sentences in academic style may find it very difficult to

complete Writing Task 2 to a high standard because the essay does not deal directly with the question. These are tasks specific and are therefore best tackled with the aid of a clear understanding of the requirements of each task.

Furthermore, the preparation for a test can be turned into an end. Learners and teachers alike focus on perfecting test-taking strategies, discovering shortcuts, memorizing templates for writing tasks, and completing as many practice tests as possible. This can lead to learners developing the ability to complete IELTS tasks in a similar way to how they complete other academic writing tasks. Green (2007) discussed how IELTS test-taking strategies can affect how learners approach academic writing in general. While this can have a positive effect and increase a learner's academic ability when the focus of test preparation is on developing a learner's academic English skills, there is a danger that the learner will only be able to write in a number of fixed ways using a variety of memorized phrases.

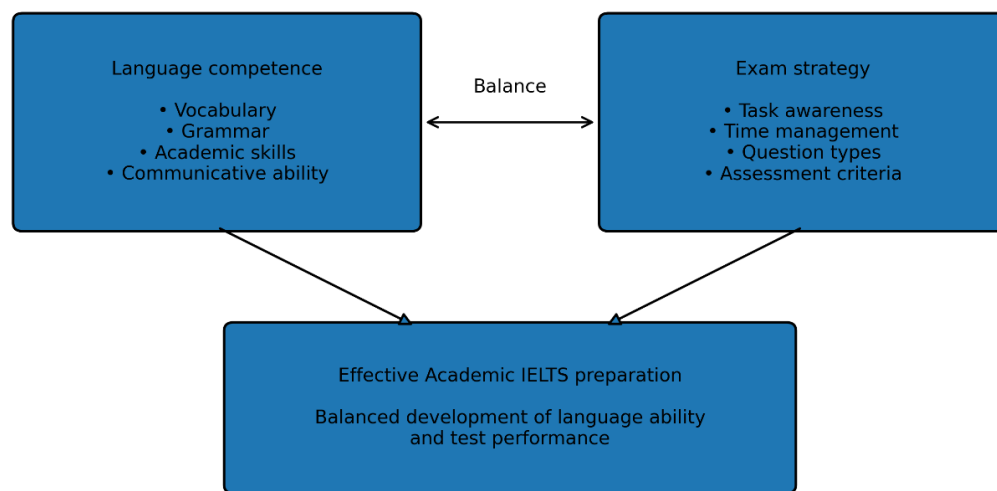
The opposite extreme to which a learner may be led is one in which IELTS is treated as if it were another general English lesson or course of study, albeit possibly a longer one. The learner may be gaining general control of their language in the long run, but in the short term, they will be unlikely to gain adequate familiarity with the test itself, with the specific set of conditions under which candidates are required to use their English. The controlled nature of the test, i.e. the set circumstances in which candidates are expected to perform must be considered by the teacher of IELTS. That is to say, the IELTS teacher should not reject test strategies in their entirety. Rather, they should teach a range of strategies for taking a variety of different tests, using the test strategies as tools to aid the learner in applying what they have learned about English in general to IELTS.

This interdependence of strategy and language competence is particularly evident in the case of the productive skills of writing and speaking. If a student who is studying for IELTS for the Writing component has a good grasp of the main aspects of writing an essay, such as overall organization and outlining individual paragraphs, but lacks control of various aspects of English such as grammar, vocabulary, and styles of writing that are deemed to be more formal or academic, then his or her performance in the Writing component of IELTS is likely to suffer. On the other hand, a student who is very strong in his or her general English

but has limited test-taking ability or a lack of awareness of IELTS tasks and requirements is also likely to receive low band scores in IELTS, even in situations where his or her general English ability would normally result in a high band score in other types of English language assessment. This is because the four components of IELTS are designed to test English language abilities as candidates engage in a variety of different academic tasks.

In terms of classroom practice the best form of IELTS preparation is that which helps learners gain an understanding of the test whilst they are at the same time gaining practice in using the academic communication that the test measures. That is, IELTS practice which develops the test-taker's ability to use language in a similar way to which it is used in real life situations. In his seminal work on language assessment, Bachman and Palmer (2010) identified certain abilities which are necessary for successful language use. These include, for example, different knowledge bases, a range of different cognitive processes and a variety of different use abilities. When IELTS tasks are used for pedagogical purposes in the classroom, learners practice using the various aspects of language which are tested. In this way, such practice also helps to develop the various language-use abilities which the test measures.

Thus, the discussion of pedagogy for IELTS – Academic Version, supports a balanced approach to its teaching. That is, IELTS tasks can be used to teach learners of English of various academic English skills, and in addition, general English skills can be taught to help learners of English prepare for IELTS. Materials and resources that are used for the teaching of IELTS, such as practice tests, model answers, band descriptors, and test taking strategies, are also very valuable when these are used as part of a learner’s English



study program and are used in an integrated manner in the learner’s English study program.

Figure 5. Balance between language competence and exam strategy in IELTS preparation

Source: Prepared by the author based on the study’s pedagogical synthesis.

Figure 5 highlights the core of the discussion on Academic IELTS preparation. Effective preparation for the test requires a balance of two key elements: language and test strategy. Language refers to learners’ language abilities including vocabulary, grammar, and academic skills in general. Test strategy refers to learners’ task awareness, effective time management, familiarity with test question types, and ability to be assessed against test criteria.

The figure demonstrates that both aspects are necessary; strong language ability is not sufficient for reaching the desired band score if a test taker is not familiar with the test,

does not know how to complete tasks, etc. On the other hand, even the best Academic English learners will not achieve a high band score if they are not familiar with the different types of questions, have not practiced timing their performance, etc. Hence, IELTS instruction must attempt to develop both aspects and to prepare learners to become more competent language users and effective test takers.

A final comment on the value of IELTS teaching for both IELTS and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers and for institutions around the world which are preparing their students to engage in studies in English as a second language. IELTS practice, as is confirmed in the earlier chapters on IELTS research, needs to be used as a framework for structured lessons within a planned IELTS course, as well as within English for Academic Purposes programs. Lessons should have clear learning objectives which are based on a variety of diagnostic tasks, as well as mock IELTS tests, written samples, and speaking interviews which are then used by teachers within lessons to guide their students in identifying, working towards, and achieving specific learning objectives.

First, for the IELTS teacher, the implication is that he or she needs to adopt a diagnostic and responsive approach to teaching the four skills. The key to effective IELTS preparation is for the teacher to be able to recognize the needs of individual students. The student who enters an IELTS preparation course has a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. The teacher must use a variety of diagnostic tools, such as mock tests, writing samples, speaking interviews, as well as other tasks, to find out the exact areas where a student needs help. This type of teaching is more effective than a generalized approach of offering practice tests of all the skills, because it is more focused. In addition, by basing his or her lessons on the results of the diagnostic tasks that the teacher has used, he or she will be able to avoid offering the same type of practice to each student. In this way, the IELTS preparation that the teacher is offering will not become too repetitive and dull for the student.

The relevance of EAP preparation for IELTS candidates can be highlighted by reference to the characteristics of English for Academic Purposes, as discussed by Jordan (1997). The EAP user operates within an academic context of study and communication and is required to utilize English for a variety of functions that are both communicative and

literacy based. Hence, in terms of both content and process, there are considerable parallels between the language required for effective participation in higher education studies and that required for successful performance in the IELTS Academic Module. Thus, IELTS preparation is highly relevant for students planning to study in English-medium universities, and teachers of English for Academic Purposes can benefit their students by teaching them to develop skills relevant to IELTS, particularly those relating to the use of academic language and understanding of written and spoken texts within an academic context. Specifically, candidates can be taught how to utilize appropriate academic vocabulary, organize written text, comprehend lectures, develop arguments and engage in independent study using English.

Institutions also need to be aware of the IELTS preparation needs of their students. Universities and language centers should have trained teachers using appropriate materials for IELTS preparation within a realistic time frame to achieve specific learning objectives. The teacher and the institution should not view IELTS preparation as a purely technical matter to be covered in a short intensive course. The focus should rather be on how to develop learners' language to an acceptable standard for effective communication and participation in academic studies in English.

Implication for learner autonomy. Since IELTS preparation is often conducted in a relatively short period of time, it is not sufficient for learners to rely solely on classroom lessons and materials for preparation. Rather, teachers and institutions should encourage learners to take responsibility for their own IELTS preparation by engaging in independent practice such as reading a wide range of materials, listening to lectures, recording new vocabulary, revising written work, and engaging in speaking with native speakers and other non-native speakers of English. Since IELTS is a test of English used in a variety of situations across different contexts, learners can benefit from a range of different situations in which to use English.

The implication of the above discussion for IELTS teaching and for Academic English in general is that it should be integrated into a broader framework of teaching and developing the skills which are used in real communication in English. IELTS can be taught

and its value realized for students' future academic studies in English when it is taught within the framework of the development of these real-life skills, and when institutions provide the necessary environment for their development. Therefore, IELTS teaching becomes educationally valuable and adequate when it is linked to EAP principles, test taking strategies and learner's autonomy.

A.1. Challenges of IELTS Preparation Lessons. In addition to lessons provided for students in academic English skills, lessons for IELTS Preparation must cater to students of very mixed levels. Some students enter the class with very strong reading skills in academic English for example, but lack in speaking fluency, while other students are very confident speakers, but struggle to organize their writing or with issues of accuracy. Teachers will have to use a wide range of strategies for different students, in the same class, within one lesson. The use of diagnostic assessment, followed by lessons that are flexible enough to be modified to meet the needs of individual students, through a variety of different tasks that students can complete as individuals or in pairs, and through the provision of study plans for students to use outside of class, will all play important roles.

Another challenge in IELTS preparation is that there is not enough time for students to reach their full potential. This is especially true for students who only start to study for IELTS a few weeks or months before they take the test. The test needs to be taken within a few months and students expect to reach high scores on all the bands, especially on the Writing and Speaking bands, within a short space of time. This is unrealistic as language takes time to develop and students need time to practice and to receive feedback on their work. O'Sullivan and Weir (2011) described language testing in relation to the ability being tested and the evidence required to support the scores given to test takers. In this sense, IELTS preparation needs to help students understand that the band score that they receive on each of the sections of the test is a score that shows their ability to carry out a range of tasks that require them to use English for communication. In other words, their band score shows how they perform in real communication in English, rather than just how familiar they are with the test itself.

Student anxiety when it comes to IELTS also poses a problem for students. There are many people who associate taking an IELTS test with events in their lives that are very important to them such as going to university, getting a visa to allow them to live and work in another country, being granted a scholarship or being registered to practice as a professional. It is therefore not unusual for students to be extremely anxious about taking a test. This is particularly the case when it comes to the Speaking test and the Listening test. Test takers may feel that they are not able to adequately express themselves in speaking, which causes them great stress and anxiety. In the case of the Listening test, students worry that they will not be able to understand what the audio is saying. In both cases, students worry that they will make mistakes when speaking or writing, and that as a result, they will not receive the band score that they require. As a result of this test anxiety, students may experience what are known as test taker biases. These are instances in which students do not perform to the best of their ability while taking a test. One of the most common test taker biases is known as anxiety-induced hesitations. This occurs when a student is so anxious that he or she is unable to communicate effectively while speaking. For this reason, it is the teacher's role to create a safe learning environment where test takers can receive support and guidance to help them deal with test anxiety. Mock tests, as well as a variety of timed exercises, should be used to familiarize test takers with test conditions. Additionally, it is the teacher's role to provide students with constructive feedback, which will also help test takers become more familiar with the type of pressure that they will experience while taking the test.

A further issue is the overuse of the templates that students use in a somewhat mechanical way. These may be very useful in terms of helping students to organize their writing, for example, but if students are expected to use the same template again, then the organization may become somewhat formulaic. This is particularly the case for introductions and for the different sections or parts of a piece of writing. In terms of speaking, students often memorize responses to a range of questions and then reproduce these in the test. This can result in problems, not least that the students' responses are not in any way natural and that the student fails to respond to the specific questions that are put to him/her.

Another challenge is learners' limited exposure to strong academic vocabulary used in Reading, Writing and Speaking Part 3. Although some learners are familiar with day-to-day words and expressions, they are not familiar with many of the more formal words and expressions commonly used in academia to discuss a range of topics. As a result, such learners cannot recognize key words and expressions in Reading and are unable to use an appropriate range of vocabulary in their own writing and speaking. In terms of Vocabulary in Language Teaching, Nation (2013) points out that the simple view of vocabulary is that knowing vocabulary means knowing the meanings of words. However, vocabulary knowledge is a lot more complex than that and includes knowledge of the use of words and combinations of words as well as knowledge of word form and the relationships between words and so on. To improve in IELTS, learners need to be exposed to a very wide range of vocabulary within context. Teachers need to help learners to recognize key words and expressions within texts and to use an appropriate range of vocabulary in their own writing and speaking.

Another issue teachers face in the classroom is the tension between preparing learners for IELTS and developing their academic language. As already noted, some learners enter IELTS classes expecting to learn only how to take the test whereas the teacher may be working to develop learners' language skills to enable them to participate effectively in academic situations after they have taken IELTS. There is thus a need for teachers to manage their classrooms in such a way as to honor the learners' immediate goals while at the same time developing their ability to use English for a variety of general and specific purposes.

The major challenges to the teacher of students preparing for the Academic Version of IELTS are the range of abilities in the class, the limited time available for study, anxiety, unrealistic targets for band scores, the overuse of pre-prepared templates and a limited vocabulary of academic English. If teachers are to produce students who have gained useful skills as well as achieved the desired band scores on IELTS, then they must employ a range of diagnostic techniques and deliver a range of different lessons and approaches, including a range of different methods for providing feedback to students. In addition, teachers must try to develop students' ability to work independently and to study on their own, and, as

importantly, they must attempt to deliver lessons that in some ways are meaningful to students in terms of developing their academic English. This is the basis of the main argument of this dissertation: that IELTS lessons are best taught using a strategic approach but should always remain educational in nature.

Moreover, the discussion should also cover the extent to which Academic IELTS preparation can be transferred to the university studies that the test is designed to enable the test-takers to enter. IELTS is commonly used as a selection criterion for English-medium higher education, so its preparation should equip the test-takers with sufficient skills to not only pass the test but also effectively make use of English in their future studies. All four skills that are tested in IELTS – listening, reading, writing and speaking – are crucially important in academic settings where students listen to lectures, read books and articles, write assignments and participate in seminars and discussions with fellow students and teachers, among other things. Thus, if effectively taught, IELTS preparation can also serve to develop a range of skills that students can later apply in a variety of situations in which they are required to use English.

Likewise, the listening skills that students acquire when preparing for IELTS can be transferred to their studies in university. IELTS Listening consists of four sections, and students are expected to listen to the main ideas, for signposting language, for examples, and to take notes. The ability to complete all these tasks when listening to lectures is crucial for students in university. Also, students can use the reading skills that they acquire when preparing for IELTS Reading to develop their skills in reading for meaning in academic situations. They can learn how to skim and scan long texts, how to recognize paraphrases, how to identify the main arguments in a text, and how to use textual evidence to support arguments in academic writing and speaking.

Speaking to an examiner can also aid the student's ability to communicate in a variety of settings at university. It is important that in class, students are given the opportunity to engage in discussion in pairs and in groups, to participate in seminar-style sessions, and to present their work to their classmates. Therefore, Speaking Part 3 in particular can aid students in being able to extend upon a given theme, thereby to be able to tackle topics in

greater depth and with more complexity, thus enabling students to better deal with a range of topics in the classroom, in written work, and in spoken communication, using both individualized discussion and group-work (Green 2006).

The same applies to speaking skills. Indeed, the skills learners develop through speaking for IELTS will be very helpful to them in speaking in academic situations, for example in seminars, in presenting work to the class, in speaking to their tutors in tutorials, and in group work and discussions. The IELTS Speaking test consists of three parts, all of which require learners to develop extended individual speaking and to discuss more abstract matters, particularly those that are of a social, general educational, technological or general cultural nature. While, naturally, there is a limit to the extent to which learners can prepare for the more general nature of the academic speaking situations they will encounter after IELTS, there is a great deal that can be done to help them. This will especially be the case when speaking in class is developed in a more natural way than when learners are required to reproduce pre-honed answers to questions which they have been exposed before.

Again, transfer to future academic situations is not guaranteed. Memorization of templates, lots of practice tests and study for short-term test goals is not enough to develop independent academic users of English. On the other hand, a range of strategies and skills for academic vocabulary use, critical reading for meaning, lecture listening, organized writing for argument, discussion of spoken interactions, feedback and learner reflection are all transferable. Indeed, Green (2007) demonstrated how IELTS preparation can affect a learner's academic literacy practice in a positive way.

This is important for both teachers and institutions, as recognition of the need for continued academic language support for admitted students. While a required band score is an indication of a student's English language proficiency at the point of test date, it does not necessarily mean that the student is adequately prepared for all the demands of the academic environment. For example, some students may require additional support with research writing, participating effectively in academic seminars, using discipline-specific vocabulary, reading extended pieces of academic writing. IELTS preparation is thus part of a larger process for the academic language development of students.

In summary, the most useful IELTS preparation will be of value beyond the test itself and help students to use English for academic purposes. When taught as part of a broader Academic English program, IELTS can be shown to have value in preparing students to use English to listen to lectures, read for meaning, write organized argued texts and take part in discussion. In this sense, the academic IELTS pedagogy investigated in this dissertation is not mere strategic test taking, but a vehicle for supporting students' long-term needs for academic communication.

Conclusions

This dissertation examined strategies for teaching all four skills of the Academic IELTS test: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. The study's central argument was that preparation for Academic IELTS should not be confined to 'test practice' and that while learners need to become familiar with all aspects of the test (e.g. timing, question types, assessment criteria) they also need to be developing their academic English competence in order to perform effectively in a variety of contexts in higher education. As such, preparation for IELTS should incorporate English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and IELTS test preparation in a way that prepares learners for both the test and the diverse contexts in which they will use English for studies.

The findings from the study provide substantial support for the central argument of the study, which claims that Academic IELTS preparation should involve more than test familiarity and understanding of test criteria. A comprehensive IELTS preparation process involves a series of steps and strategies that enable learners to prepare systematically and to improve their language skills academically as well as develop skills to use English for communication effectively. Teacher's role in IELTS preparation goes beyond explaining test format to the learners. The role of a teacher involves diagnosing learners' strengths and weaknesses, setting up learning goals in terms of target band score, selecting and using an array of IELTS materials, teaching specific skills for each test component and providing learners with feedback which would enable them to identify their errors and improve their English language skills accordingly. Thus, IELTS teaching is a systematic pedagogical process not mere test practice.

Each of the four skills of IELTS requires its own specific approach. The IELTS Listening Test requires test-takers to process auditory information in real time. This skill requires learners to be able to recognize paraphrases, to resist distraction, to deal with different speakers and accents, and to sustain their concentration throughout the test. The IELTS Reading Test requires test-takers to process written information contained in lengthy

texts. This skill requires learners to manage longer pieces of writing, to skim and to scan specific information, to recognize information that has been paraphrased, to recognize questions, to be familiar with a range of question types, and to use information from texts to answer questions. In IELTS Writing, candidates are expected to write two pieces of writing, one for Task 1 and one for Task 2. This skill requires test-takers to understand the difference between the two tasks, to organize ideas coherently, to use a range of vocabulary and grammar, and to edit their work. In IELTS Speaking, candidates are expected to interact with a speaker in an oral communication. This skill requires test-takers to be able to speak fluently, to have accurate pronunciation, to have a wide lexical range, to have control of a range of grammatical structures, to be confident, and to deal with a range of questions, some of which are familiar and others of which are less familiar.

On the other hand, each of the skills can be developed through the others. For example, Reading can support Writing by exposing students to necessary vocabulary, ideas and organizational structures for different types of texts. Similarly, Listening can support Speaking by helping learners to note important spoken language features, such as discourse, pronunciation, and other aspects of spoken academic communication. Speaking, in turn, can help students develop ideas for Writing. Writing can, therefore, be used to develop ideas that can be used in discussions, thereby supporting Speaking. As a result, IELTS preparation can involve a lot of skill-specific work as well as work that is more integrated to develop learners' Academic English.

Finally, the study underlines the importance of test-takers' assessment awareness. The four sub-tests are all scored in different ways: the Listening and Reading tests are objective, and candidates are awarded marks for correct answers. The two Writing tests and the Speaking test are formally assessed using clearly defined criteria. This means that candidates, and their teachers, need to have some idea of how each of the skills is scored. Moreover, the criteria for awarding bands in the Writing tests and the Speaking test should not only be used to provide candidates with an indication of the band score that they are likely to achieve, but also as a basis for providing feedback to test-takers and for other forms of assessment, including self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment. When

candidates are given feedback on their performance, it is more likely to be useful if they can understand the basis on which it has been given.

A final point of significance to make about IELTS is that effective study of the test requires a balance to be struck between two key elements: learning the language and learning how to take the test. In other words, learners with strong general English, but no idea of how the test is set out, how long it takes, or what each section requires of test-takers, will get very poor results. On the other hand, learners who know all the test strategies but lack key aspects of academic language (vocabulary, grammar, reading speed, writing ability, speaking fluency) will also get very poor results. Effective IELTS study involves using IELTS tasks to develop learners' real academic language ability and using academic language study to help learners get better at the test.

The teacher of IELTS preparation courses has a central role to play in this respect. He or she must have an adequate knowledge of IELTS and in addition possess the necessary pedagogic skills to use practice materials effectively for language learning. The teacher should be able to manage a mixed ability class, to deal with anxious learners, to provide adequate feedback on students' performance, and to turn written or audio materials into effective learning experiences for his or her students. Moreover, the teacher of IELTS has an ethical responsibility. No IELTS teacher should present the test as if it could be mastered by learners using memorized template answers or by other 'quick fix' methods. Instead, the teacher should help his or her learners to set realistic goals, understand what is required to achieve those goals, and to develop the academic language skills they need to use to study successfully in higher education.

Another major contribution of this study to the practice of teaching IELTS is to offer recommendations for IELTS teachers, for IELTS language centers, and for universities. For teachers of IELTS, this study recommends that each IELTS course should start with a needs analysis and diagnostic assessment of students' abilities. Lessons should include explanations of test items and tasks, as well as guided and independent practice of four skills. Practice tests of IELTS should be used for familiarization with test items and for monitoring students' progress. However, each test should be analyzed in detail for students. Teachers

should also help their students to become autonomous learners of English by requiring them to keep reading logs, record their vocabulary in a vocabulary log, practice their listening skills, revise and perfect their writing for IELTS, record themselves speaking English, and assess their own learning. Finally, teachers should provide students with specific feedback that is related to the criteria that are being targeted in a particular lesson.

In terms of educational settings, within language centers and within university departments, IELTS preparation needs to be recognized as serious Academic Language Studies programs rather than brief ‘test taking’ courses. These programs should have adequately trained instructors and relevant up-to-date materials; have sufficient duration to develop the range of skills covered in the test and allow candidates to receive feedback on their performance in the spoken sections. And after students enter universities where English is the medium of study, they will require continued support for a range of Academic Language Skills, especially writing academic papers, participating in seminars, understanding lectures, and acquiring the discipline-specific vocabulary in use.

In summary, IELTS academic test taking strategies, academic English skills, and language competence for IELTS need to be tackled in an effective, systematic, skill-based, learner-centered and academically meaningful manner. IELTS is an important test of language ability that requires test takers to develop ability to carry out all four skills within given time frames. However, the test of language ability to use English for academic purposes within specific test settings is closely related to real life situations in which English is used for study purposes and thus effective preparation of IELTS test takers should aim at helping them to become confident, effective and independent users of English for academic purposes and thus achieve their academic goals.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sample IELTS Learner Diagnostic Profile

This diagnostic profile can be used at the beginning of an Academic IELTS preparation course to identify a learner's current level, target band score, strengths, weaknesses, and study needs. It is designed to help the teacher plan lessons according to the learner's real performance rather than relying only on general impressions.

Area	Information to be collected
Learner's name	
Current English level	
Target IELTS band score	
Purpose for taking IELTS	University admission / professional registration / scholarship / migration / other
Time available before the test	
Previous IELTS experience	Yes / No
Previous overall band score	
Listening score or estimated level	
Reading score or estimated level	
Writing score or estimated level	

Area	Information to be collected
Speaking score or estimated level	
Strongest skill	
Weakest skill	
Main difficulty in Listening	Spelling / distractors / accents / concentration / note-taking / other
Main difficulty in Reading	Time management / vocabulary / paraphrase / question types / long texts / other
Main difficulty in Writing	Task response / organization / vocabulary / grammar / timing / other
Main difficulty in Speaking	Fluency / pronunciation / vocabulary / grammar / confidence / other
Recommended teaching focus	
Recommended independent study tasks	

Appendix B

Sample Academic IELTS Writing Feedback Checklist

This checklist can be used by teachers when giving feedback on IELTS Writing Task 1 and Task 2. It can also be simplified and used by learners for self-assessment or peer review.

Criterion	Questions for feedback	Teacher's comments
Task Achievement / Task Response	Does the response answer the task fully? Are all parts of the question addressed? Is the overview clear in Task 1? Is the position clear in Task 2?	

Criterion	Questions for feedback	Teacher's comments
Coherence and Cohesion	Are ideas organized logically? Are paragraphs clear? Are linking words used appropriately? Is there clear progression from one idea to another?	
Lexical Resource	Is vocabulary appropriate for the topic? Are words used accurately? Is there enough variety? Are collocations natural?	
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Are sentence structures varied? Are grammar errors frequent? Do errors affect meaning? Are punctuation and sentence boundaries controlled?	
Academic Style	Is writing formal enough? Does the candidate avoid informal language, unsupported claims, and memorized phrases?	
Timing and Word Count	Is the response completed within the recommended time? Does it meet the minimum word requirement?	
Main strength		
Main area for improvement		
Suggested revision task		

Appendix C

Sample IELTS Speaking Self-Assessment Form

This form can be used after a mock speaking test or classroom speaking practice. It encourages learners to reflect on their own performance and identify practical steps for improvement.

Area	Self-assessment question	Learner's notes
Fluency and Coherence	Did I speak without too many long pauses? Did I connect my ideas clearly?	
Lexical Resource	Did I use topic vocabulary accurately? Did I repeat the same words too often?	
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Did I use a mixture of simple and complex sentences? Were my grammar errors serious?	
Pronunciation	Was my speech clear and understandable? Did I use natural stress and intonation?	
Part 1 performance	Did I give natural answers with short explanations or examples?	
Part 2 performance	Did I speak for long enough? Did I organize my answer clearly?	
Part 3 performance	Did I explain and support my opinions? Did I discuss the topic in a general and abstract way?	
Confidence	Did anxiety affect my speaking? What can I do to feel more prepared next time?	
Main strength		
Main weakness		
Goal for next speaking practice		

Appendix D

Sample Independent IELTS Study Log

This study log can help learners continue IELTS preparation outside the classroom. It supports learner autonomy and encourages students to connect classroom instruction with independent academic English development.

Date	Skill practiced	Material used	Main activity	New vocabulary / strategy learned	Main difficulty	Next action
	Listening					
	Reading					
	Writing					
	Speaking					