

The Stand Point of Indians in the Race of IELTS Test

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Abstract

IELTS as a testing system has been the platform that promotes immigration of people from non-English speaking countries to English speaking countries like the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Amidst the other testing systems in existence currently, such as the TOEFL iBT (Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based test), OET (Occupational English Test), PTE-A (Pearson Test of English Academic), CAE (Cambridge English: Advanced) and Canada-specific testing systems, IELTS has a reputation around the world as it has provided the testing service for decades earlier in comparison to these relatively new testing systems that have emerged with the times. This article explores the history of IELTS and its relevance in the Indian market along with an introduction to the other testing systems in existence.

Keywords: IELTS, Indian market, Relevance of testing, testing systems, evaluation methods, history of IELTS

Introduction

Ever since the craze for immigration for the purpose of education, career prospects and settling abroad got rooted in the history of mankind, the standardized testing of eligibility in terms of language testing also gained prominence. This led to the emergence of language testing systems for the entry of people from the non-English speaking countries to English speaking countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. From its inception in 1963, the testing system has developed by leaps and bounds into a mindboggling system of assessment recognized by most institutions throughout the world. The story of its evolution is as interesting as the assessment itself.

English Proficiency Test Battery was initially the first form of standardized tests for immigrant students in UK Universities. The formulation of the testing system started by the British Council and the Birmingham University in 1963 and was effective from the year 1965. It comprised of two skills tests and three subsets namely listening, reading comprehension and reading speed. This testing system was in use until 1980.

After extensive research on English language testing the testing system morphed into the English Language Testing Service (ELTS) in 1980 when it broadened in scope to include six modules – five subject based and one general – assessment. Administration of the exams was still not very effective. This testing system lacked international scope. This was rectified further in the 1980s and reintroduced with an international perspective in the year 1989 as The International English Language Testing System. This testing system had the current structure with four distinct modules reading and listening modules being general; writing and speaking modules based on subjects. It underwent a further modulation in 1995 when the writing and speaking modules also shed the subject perspective and took on the general topics. Administrative and structural changes were also introduced.

The evolution of the system continued through the 21st Century. The year 2001 saw the division of speaking modules into smaller tasks and a well drawn rubric for assessment. First computerized version of the testing was introduced in the year 2015. A new IELTS Life Skills with two section assessment of speaking and listening modules alone came into being. From 210 test centers around the world in 1995, it expanded to 1,100 test centers gaining prominence as the world's popular testing system with wide recognition with most of the Universities, Governments and organizations.

The other major testing systems that developed in the recent times include four different systems recognized globally and three testing systems used specifically for Canadian government and organizations in Canada by the Canadian regulators.

TOEFL iBT or Test of English as Foreign Language internet-based test was designed in the year 2005 with an integrated skill format. It aimed at testing the Macro skills, Receptive skills including listening and reading, Productive skills comprising speaking and writing. *OET* or Occupational English Test aimed at occupation specific testing where the listening and reading components were general and the writing and speaking components were specific to professions targeting occupation specific language assessment. *PTE A*

or Pearson Test of English: Academic introduced in 2009 uses automated scoring for communicative scoring and enabling scoring. CEA or Cambridge English Advanced test was based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is accepted only by the Australian Community Workers Association even though it has worldwide credence.

Canadian regulators have formulated three different testing systems specific to the Canadian needs. They are CELBAN or Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses limited to internal Nursing communities, MELAB or Michigan English Language Assessment Battery used as an alternative for the TOEFL test and CAN TEST or Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees to meet tertiary educational institution entry requirements.

Globalization and migration for higher education and improvement of career prospects ensure that around 3.5 million people take the IELTS test every year, according to the British Council’s report on IELTS in March 2019. The Economic Times of May 30, 2021 has quoted the words of Ratnesh Jha, CEO of Burlington Group South Asia and India stating that “India is currently home to the largest number of IELTS test takers in the world”.

Analysis of the IELTS test results in 2019

The IELTS website provides the record of Indian test takers in the past years shows that the results for the writing test have remained the same at 5.8 in 2011 and in 2019 with a slight decrease in the 2012 when it is seen at an average of 5.6. It can also be noted that the skills that were difficult to score in were reading and writing as seen from the average score of the test takers have been lesser than listening and speaking skills in all the three years taken for study. These skill areas therefore are the areas that need to be focused on for improvement of the test scores.

Year	Academic/General	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
2011	Academic	6.4	5.6	5.8	6.2	6.1
2012	Academic	6.2	5.8	5.6	5.9	6.0
2019	Academic	6.5	5.9	5.8	6.0	6.1

("Test statistics", 2021)

Reasons for the test scores of Indians

The article published in the British IELTS website states that the average score of the Indian test takers is 6. It also states that 35% of the Indian IELTS General test takers and 45% of the Indian IELTS Academic test takers scored between 5.5 and 6 in the year 2015 in spite of the rigorous coaching undertaken by most test takers. It lists out the possible reasons for the low scores obtained by Indians in each module.

The major hurdles in speaking module, as listed by the article are pronunciation, use of slang, use of fillers, lack of clarity and low confidence. While the influence of the mother tongue can be seen as the prime reason for failure in pronunciation where mother sound is discerned as a part of speech and the major factor contributing to the lack of fluency which exhibits itself through fillers. Those who try to adopt a fake accent to make up for the influence of the mother tongue end up with lack of clarity as a result of the fake accent. Use of slangs and low confidence are other factors contributing to the low scores of Indians in the speaking module.

The notable difficulties faced by test takers in the reading module are slow reading speed and lack of time management, both stemming from the lack of sufficient practice before the actual examination. The problems with the writing module as listed out in the article are lack of relevance to the topic under discussion, lack of planning caused by insufficient planning in the mind, lack of vocabulary or inept usage of complex words where unnecessary, excessive usage of the adjectives marring the meaning intended and exceeding the word limit in an attempt to impress. The main issues with the listening modules were lack of concentration and lack of practice.

Keeping in mind the drawbacks of the language barrier caused by the L2 scenario in India, it is essential to tackle these shortfalls through the practice of effective instructional strategies in the tertiary education institutions. It can be added here that the recommendations put forward by the NSW Education Standards Authority in *Teaching Writing. Report of the Thematic Review of Writing* can also be applied in Indian Tertiary Institutions. According to the NSW Education Standards Authority review there are six major recommendations that have to be considered in order to improve students’ writing skills.

Recommendation 1: Teaching writing based on effective practice.

This would allow sharing of effective writing instructional practice and make these strategies easily and readily available for the use of teachers as resources in their classrooms.

Recommendation 2: Clarify and strengthen writing content in syllabus documents.

Identifying the key areas of the existing syllabus and drawing the writing expectations allows the students an opportunity to understand where they are lagging and thereby helps them in improving their writing content and methods.

Recommendation 3: Provide coherent direction for teaching writing in English and other Subjects.

This recommendation would ensure the review of the framework of teaching and assessing writing that is used by teachers and develop support materials to provide clear direction and guidance.

Recommendation 4: Develop minimum content specifications for the teaching of writing in teacher education courses.

The review identifies the differences in teaching writing including content and teaching methodology across the teacher education programs. The review emphasizes the need to educate teaching students on the importance of writing skill development as part of the teacher training program. This would encourage the graduate teachers to apply the skills that they have learnt and help them to in turn apply these writing skill development process in their classrooms.

Recommendation 5: Identify and promote professional development in teaching of writing.

A survey by the Australian Writing Survey brings out the undeniable fact that the extensive initial training offered through the teacher education programs would diminish in value if not supplemented with extensive experience. It reiterates the importance of ongoing support and periodical training for the teachers to maintain the quality of the writing instruction.

Recommendation 6: Declare the teaching of writing a priority.

Declaring the teaching of writing a priority emphasizes the importance of writing in education and helps in ensuring the quality of writing in education. Opening up the opportunity to enroll in courses in teaching writing in turn ensures a quality maintenance and the update of writing instruction imparted in schools.

These recommendations nail the importance of writing as one of the significant parts of educating children through their years of education in schools and through their tertiary education. These recommendations can also be applied in Indian education scenario and make a noteworthy mention.

Teaching writing

Writing skill is the last of the four major skills that make up the language learning wholesome and complete. Language learning as purported by many linguists and language trainers follows the learning of skill areas in the order of listening – speaking – reading – writing. Even though the writing skill is the last language skill learnt, it nonetheless is prominent among all the skills since the development of language is generally assessed more using the writing skill assessments in many countries and institutions.

Conclusion

Teaching writing is a skill that can be developed effectively when the students are sufficiently motivated. The motivation to learn writing can be instilled among students through effective instructional strategies employed from time to time. The successful student progress depends on the efficiency of the instructional strategy along with a well thought out curriculum. The IELTS test opens the door to higher education in a reputable University and for immigration to the countries intended for as well as for the purpose of career enhancement. With the increasing numbers of Indians taking up the IELTS tests, it is crucial to understand the pattern of the test, the process involved and the final test itself in order to succeed in the test with a good score.

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