

# IELTS Research Reports Online Series

The impact of IELTS on English language teachers  
in Central Vietnam



Huy Van Nguyen, Mai Xuan Nhat Chi Nguyen and Phung Dao

## The impact of IELTS on English language teachers in Central Vietnam

This study describes characteristics of Vietnamese IELTS teachers and the impact of IELTS on their teaching practice and lives outside the classroom.

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# Introduction

This study by Nguyen, Nguyen and Dao was conducted with support from the IELTS partners (British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge Assessment English), as part of the IELTS joint-funded research program. Research funded by the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia under this program complement those conducted or commissioned by Cambridge Assessment English, and together inform the ongoing validation and improvement of IELTS.

A significant body of research has been produced since the joint-funded research program started in 1995, with over 120 empirical studies receiving grant funding. After undergoing a process of peer review and revision, many of the studies have been published in academic journals, in several IELTS-focused volumes in the *Studies in Language Testing* series ([www.cambridgeenglish.org/silt](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/silt)), and in the *IELTS Research Reports*. Since 2012, to facilitate timely access, individual research reports have been made available on the IELTS website immediately after completing the peer review and revision process.

This report considers impact on a broader scale. In Vietnam, the drive to compete in international higher education has led to an increase in the use of large-scale standardised tests. Here, Nguyen, Nguyen and Dao investigate the ways in which teaching IELTS classes impacts on an important group of stakeholders: the teachers who are preparing candidates for the test.

In their mixed methods study, the authors use survey and interview data to investigate Vietnamese teachers' perceptions of the impact that teaching a high-stakes test like IELTS has had on their professional and personal lives. They focus particularly on the impacts on their classroom teaching, professional development, and personal development.

Previous washback research (Buck, 1988; Smith, 1991) suggested that large-scale standardised tests can exert negative effects on teacher classroom decisions and lead to a narrowing of the curriculum. This, together with other concerns, was discussed during the paradigm shift to formative assessment, and led to re-examination by the teaching and testing community of what was perceived by some as an increasingly results-driven macro-culture.

What is interesting about this study is that the data indicate something rather different. Teacher participants do not report finding that preparing students for the IELTS test narrows content and teaching. Instead, they provide examples of the positive effects it exerts on their classroom practice, such as their ability to adapt tasks and published materials to respond to the diversity of candidates and contexts. Rather than feeling constrained by the test, they go beyond it to design a dual curriculum, focusing on both test preparation and language improvement. The participants report being confident about their understanding of the IELTS construct, and their ability to assess students' current levels and adjust teaching appropriately. Another unexpected positive impact of teaching IELTS was the language gains that teachers noted in their own language ability; some saw the teaching as a form of ongoing training and professional development.

All participants reported a sense of personal achievement and an increased sense of professional pride in helping candidates access greater life opportunities; and several teachers were motivated to continue their own professional development by setting up businesses or selecting further higher education courses.

This study is a good example of how a large-scale test, such as IELTS, can have both intended – and also unintended – positive impacts. Members of the testing community are mindful of the power of tests, which is why impact is one of the cornerstones of any validity argument. Studies such as this, conducted in different contexts and with different stakeholder groups, make an important contribution to our understanding of the impact of IELTS in both micro and macro contexts. This ongoing inquiry will help testers mitigate potential negative consequences, and ensure that positive impact is maximised.

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# The impact of IELTS on English language teachers in Central Vietnam

## Abstract

This study describes characteristics of Vietnamese IELTS teachers and the impact of IELTS on their teaching practice and lives outside the classroom.

Participants were 137 Vietnamese IELTS teachers recruited from the Central area of Vietnam. They participated in an online survey and subsequent individual in-depth interviews which focused on describing their characteristics such as their education, teaching experience, their students, and narrative accounts of the impact of IELTS at both the micro level (e.g. language teaching practice) and the macro level (e.g. professional life and life outside the classroom).

The results reveal diverse characteristics of IELTS teachers with varied teaching qualifications, education, experiences and personal goals. The results also show an overall positive impact of IELTS on the teachers in several aspects, such as language proficiency, teaching skills and knowledge, continuing professional development, finance, and life outside the classroom.

At the teaching level, IELTS affected the content being taught and the teaching approach. However, this effect was mediated by teachers' autonomy and learners' individual differences (e.g. goals, proficiency, age and expectations).

Key words: IELTS, impact, washback, TESOL teachers, language testing, assessment

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## Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Literature review</b> .....	<b>10</b>
	2.1 Test impact and key concepts.....	10
	2.2 A theoretical framework.....	10
<b>3</b>	<b>The current study</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Research questions</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Method</b> .....	<b>13</b>
	5.1 Participants.....	13
	5.2 Study design and procedure.....	13
	5.3 Data collection tools .....	14
	5.3.1 Questionnaire .....	14
	5.3.2 Interview .....	14
	5.4 Data analysis .....	14
<b>6.</b>	<b>Findings</b> .....	<b>15</b>
	6.1 Characteristics of IELTS teachers in Central Vietnam.....	15
	6.1.1 IELTS teachers' demographic information .....	15
	6.1.2 IELTS teachers' training experiences .....	15
	6.1.3 IELTS teachers' targeted learners .....	16
	6.2 Impact of IELTS on teachers' language teaching .....	16
	6.2.1 Description of IELTS preparation courses.....	16
	6.2.2 The role of IELTS in language learning and teaching .....	16
	6.2.3 Perceived impact of IELTS on teaching .....	17
	6.3 Impact of IELTS on teachers' lives .....	18
	6.3.1 A junior full-time university lecturer (Nam).....	18
	6.3.2 A senior full-time university lecturer and administrator (Son) .....	19
	6.3.3 A junior freelance English teacher (Sa) .....	20
	6.3.4 An associate professor as an IELTS teacher (Hoa) .....	21
	6.3.5 A senior full-time lecturer as an IELTS teacher for high school students (Hung) .....	22
	6.3.6 A junior full-time language centre teacher (Hue) .....	22
	6.3.7 A junior full-time high school teacher (Que) .....	23
	6.3.8 Summative analyses of seven cases.....	24
<b>7</b>	<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>25</b>
	7.1 Diverse characteristics of IELTS teachers .....	25
	7.2 Teaching and learning goals .....	25
	7.3 Impact of IELTS on language teaching .....	26
	7.3.1 Perceived impact of IELTS on What to Teach.....	26
	7.3.2 Perceived impact of IELTS on How to Teach.....	27
	7.4 Impact of IELTS on teachers' lives .....	28
	7.4.1 Positive impact on IELTS teachers' profession .....	28
	7.4.2 Perceived benefits to IELTS teachers' lives .....	29
<b>8.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>31</b>
	<b>References</b> .....	<b>32</b>
	<b>Appendix 1: Survey</b> .....	<b>35</b>
	<b>Appendix 2: Interview questions prompts</b> .....	<b>42</b>
	<b>Appendix 3: Commercial IELTS textbooks used in IELTS preparation courses</b> .....	<b>43</b>
	<b>Appendix 4: Tables of descriptive survey data</b> .....	<b>45</b>



## List of figures

Figure 1: A holistic model of test effect .....	11
Figure 2: Location of Central Vietnam.....	12

## List of tables

Table 1: Specialisation of the teachers' formal education .....	45
Table 2: Teachers' formal education .....	45
Table 3: Teachers' English language proficiency.....	45
Table 4: Participants' main employment type .....	45
Table 5: IELTS teachers' training experiences .....	45
Table 6: Years of teaching English and IELTS.....	46
Table 7: IELTS teaching modules .....	46
Table 8: Age range of IELTS students and their formal education .....	46
Table 9: IELTS learners' education and studying/working status.....	46
Table 10: Teachers' report of learners' motivations for learning IELTS.....	46
Table 11: Target countries for overseas studies.....	47
Table 12: Teaching mode of IELTS preparation course .....	47
Table 13: Design of the IELTS preparation courses .....	47
Table 14: Facts about IELTS preparation courses .....	47
Table 15: Objectives of the IELTS courses from the teachers' point of view.....	47
Table 16: Perceived appropriateness and reliability of the IELTS test for assessing English proficiency .....	48
Table 17: Teachers' reports of positive motivation by the IELTS test .....	48
Table 18: Perceived impact of the IELTS test on language teaching .....	48
Table 19: Use of activities in the commercial IELTS books .....	48
Table 20: Activities often used in the IELTS lessons .....	48
Table 21: Skills in which supplementary materials were added .....	48



# 1 Introduction

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has become an increasingly popular measurement of English language proficiency in Vietnam over the past decade, especially at the tertiary level (Barnes, 2010; Tran, 2015). The driving forces behind the favourable status of standardised language proficiency tests such as IELTS in Vietnam are contingent on: (i) the governmental effort to ensure that the English competency of Vietnamese learners is assessed against an internationally recognised benchmark (Tran, 2015); and (ii) increased opportunities for Vietnamese to study abroad in English-speaking countries, which often requires learners to obtain either an IELTS or TOEFL certificate (Barnes, 2010; Nguyen, 1997). As a result of this growing learning demand, various IELTS preparation courses have been offered in different regions in Vietnam through different formats, such as formal training at public schools, private language centres and one-on-one tutoring classes at home. However, little is known about the teachers of these IELTS preparation courses in the country.

High-stakes language tests such as IELTS have long been believed to directly influence educational processes and stakeholders. To date, research in the area of language testing and assessment has mainly focused on investigating how these language tests impact on teaching practices (e.g. teaching methodology, lesson content, and materials). The way teachers adapt their teaching practices in order to prepare learners to meet the test's demands has been seen as a reflection of test impact. This phenomenon has often been described as 'washback' or 'backwash', which indicates that the course materials and teaching practices are modified according to the tests (Alderson, 2004; Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Hawkey, 2006; Hughes, 1989; McKinley & Thompson, 2018). The test washback could be either positive, i.e. encouraging good teaching practices and generating better learning outcomes, or negative, i.e. leading to a narrow perception of language ability and thus constraining the teaching and learning activities (Anderson & Wall, 1993; Kunnan, 2000; Taylor, 2005). Research has shown that washback is a highly complex phenomenon mediated by different social and contextual factors (Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Hamp-Lyons, 2000; Shohamy, 2001; Tsagari, 2009; Wall & Alderson, 1993). In addition, whether the test has generated positive or negative impact depends on different factors related to the perceptions of learners and teachers (Messick, 1996; Schissel, 2018; Sprat, 2005).

Although research on washback has contributed to an increasing understanding of how testing shapes classroom teaching and learning practices, it has been critiqued for being narrowly defined, focusing primarily on classroom learning and teaching activities. Recent research suggests that testing can have consequences beyond the classroom or the school site, and exert influence on a broader scale, such as the social and professional life of teachers, students, the educational systems or society as a whole (McNamara, 2000, 2012; Pan & Roever, 2016; Taylor, 2005).

However, little research to date has investigated how high-stakes tests impact on the professional lives of stakeholders (e.g. teachers) or on other aspects of their lives (Cheng & Curtis, 2011). Thus, it is important to extend the current research to investigate the impact of testing on a broader scale. To address this gap, the present study investigated how a high-stakes test (i.e. IELTS) affects teachers' professional lives and their lives outside the classroom. Drawing on Bachman and Palmer's work (1996), this research is designed to explore test impact at both micro (classroom teaching practice) and macro levels (teachers' lives) (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Findings from the study contribute to a better understanding about test impact on teachers and learners, and the strategies they adopt during test preparation courses. Practical implications drawn from the study findings could help inform IELTS teachers, learners and academic institutions with new insights to enhance and adjust their professional practices, and assist IELTS providers in terms of strategic planning.

This research project aimed to:

- describe the characteristics of Vietnamese IELTS teachers in terms of their demographic details, educational background and teaching practices (e.g., teaching materials and methodologies, teaching beliefs, experience of teaching IELTS)
- identify washback of IELTS on teaching practices
- identify the impact of IELTS on teachers' professional development (e.g., perception towards promotion of IELTS, language capacity, motivation, benefits/challenges of teaching IELTS, and development of expertise or teaching approaches/strategies)
- identify the impact of IELTS on teachers' lives (e.g. financial benefits, job opportunities, and socio-economic status).

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Test impact and key concepts

Historically, research on test effects has most commonly examined 'washback' or 'backwash' phenomenon (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Biggs, 1995; Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis, 2004; Hughes, 1993) by specifically focusing on how a test leads to changes in teaching and learning practices. It is suggested that a test could affect the process of learning, e.g. what and how learners adopt their learning strategies and style, and the teaching practice, e.g. what and how teachers adopt their teaching methodology and materials, in response to the test (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Bailey, 1996). However, examining test effects only at the micro level (e.g. the classroom practices) has not captured the potentially larger test impact at the macro level (Pan & Roever, 2016; McNamara, 2000; Shohamy, 2001).

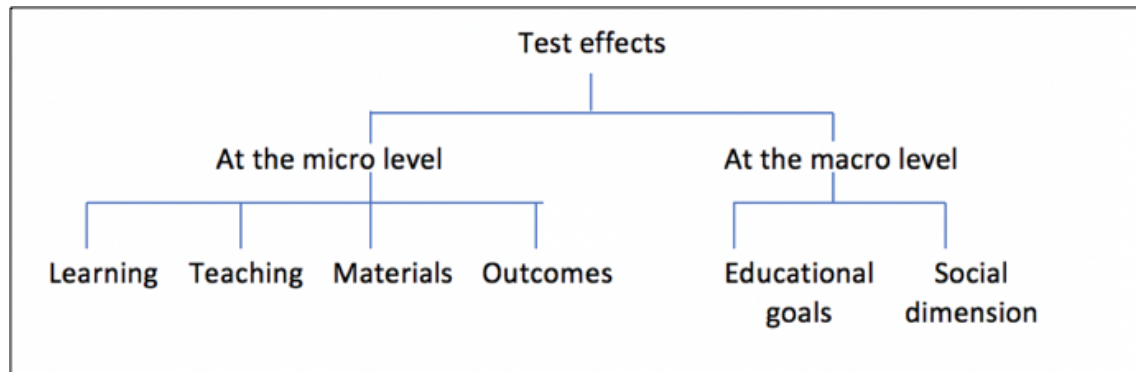
Recent research has called for broadening the investigation of the influence of language tests to gain a more comprehensive understanding of test impact. It is suggested that a high-stakes test (e.g. IELTS) could potentially have significant consequences on the lives of stakeholders, the educational context and society at large (Hamp-Lyons, 1997; McNamara, 2000; Shohamy, 2001). The term 'impact' has, therefore, been used to refer to the consequence of tests at both micro and macro levels. In this view, the term 'impact' includes 'washback' as one of its dimensions (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmner, 1996; Taylor, 2005; Tsagari & Cheng, 2017; Wall, 1997).

### 2.2 A theoretical framework

To better understand test impact at both micro and macro levels, recent research has followed a more comprehensive model of test consequence that is based on previous models of washback (Bailey, 1996; Hughes, 1993) and the concepts of micro and macro test impact (Bachman & Palmner, 1996) as shown in Figure 1 (Pan & Roever, 2016, p. 20).



Figure 1: A holistic model of test effect



In Figure 1, at the micro level, the test could have washback on four areas including learning, teaching, materials and learning outcomes. At the macro level, the test could affect educational goals or social dimension (e.g., the lives of stakeholders such as teachers and students). A large body of research has investigated the impact of tests on different aspects of the classroom contexts, including the content, teaching activities, classroom activities and learning outcomes (Burrow, 2004; Pan & Newfields, 2012; Saif, 2006; Smyth & Banks, 2012; Xie & Andrews, 2012).

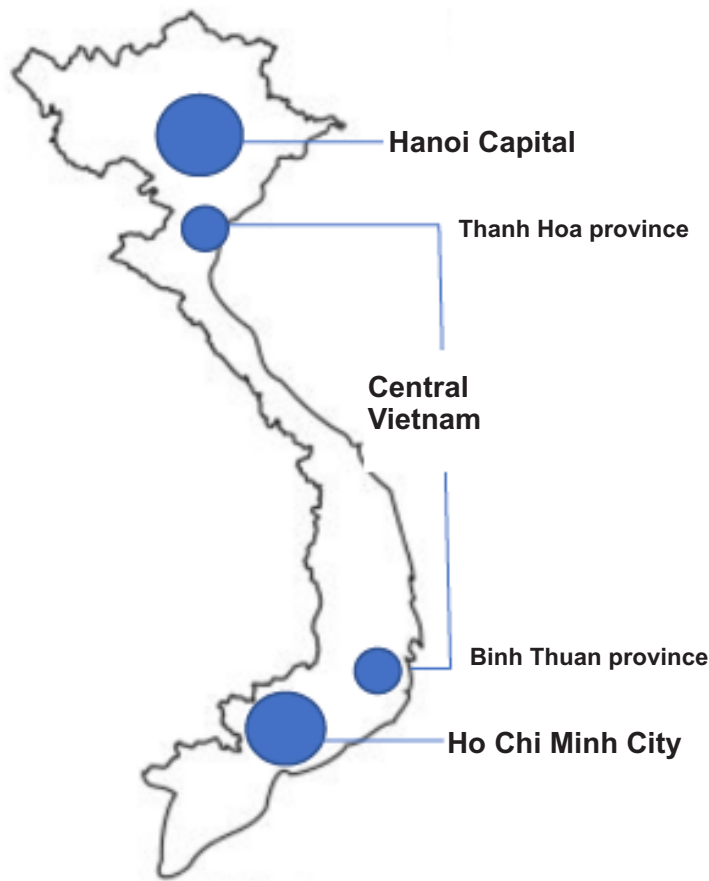
However, to date, only a small number of studies have looked at the impact of high-stakes tests at the macro societal level. The social dimension of test effects that has been examined in previous research often includes socio-cultural values or norms (Akiyama, 2004; Nkosana, 2008), the socio-economic background of test-takers (Wall, 2005; Wall & Alderson, 1993), private tutoring (Bray, 1999), and employers' perceptions of high-stakes tests (Pan & Roeber, 2016). Given that examining the social consequences of a test is part of the validity research in the field of language testing, more research in this area is needed to shed light on the social implications of IELTS for different policies and communities. Since there is also a dearth of studies that investigate test effects at both micro and macro levels, it is important to explore the test effects at both levels to contribute to the more comprehensive understanding of the impact of IELTS and provide some practical implications for the IELTS partners, teachers, learners and academic language-testing at large.

### 3 The current study

In Vietnam, IELTS appears to be one of the most dominant international standardised tests used as a passport to various opportunities such as getting a well-paid job, applying for scholarships, securing migration opportunities, or getting promoted in an institution (Vu, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016). Therefore, many individuals seek to attend IELTS preparation courses in the hope of achieving high IELTS test scores. However, questions about who the teachers of these IELTS preparation courses are, and whether IELTS has any impact on their teaching practices and lives are still left unanswered. This study aimed to provide insights into these areas. The study was conducted in Central Vietnam (including Thua Thien Hue, Da Nang, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Quang Ngai, Quy Nhon, Phu Yen, Nghe An and Gia Lai). See Figure 2 for the location of the Central Vietnam area.



**Figure 2: Location of Central Vietnam**



Consisting of a narrow coastal plain and rugged highland, Central Vietnam lies between Laos and Cambodia to the west and the sea to the east. Generally speaking, the Central area of Vietnam (consisting of 16 provinces from Thanh Hoa to Binh Thuan) is considered as less developed than the North or South of Vietnam. According to the Asian Development Bank (2017), a majority of provinces in Central are considered to be rural areas (except Danang and Thu Thien Hue provinces) and thus have a lower socio-economic status when compared to big cities like Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi Capital in the North and South of the country. The area is susceptible to harsh weather conditions, such as flood, typhoons and droughts, causing difficulties in farming. Central Vietnam accounts for about 21% of the country's population and 30% of the uninhabited land area, yet the economy is not as dynamic as in North or South Vietnam.

Most people in Central Vietnam live in rural areas (75.9% of its population). Therefore, investigating the demand for, and realities of, IELTS preparation courses in these areas will shed light on the social impact of IELTS in this vulnerable and under-researched context. To achieve the above-stated aims, the current study addressed the following research questions.

## 4. Research questions

The research questions are:

- RQ1. What are the characteristics of IELTS teachers in Central Vietnam?
- RQ2. What is the impact of IELTS on teachers' language teaching practice?
  - a.) To what extent does IELTS influence what the teachers teach?
  - b.) To what extent does IELTS influence how the teachers teach?
- RQ3. What is the impact of IELTS on the teachers' lives?  
(e.g., profession and life outside the classroom).

## 5. Method

### 5.1 Participants

Participants were 137 teachers (116 females, 21 males) recruited from different provinces in Central Vietnam. They offered IELTS preparation courses as a part-time job at homes or in local centres. Their ages ranged from 20 to 56 years old ( $M = 32$ ,  $SD = 7.56$ ). At the time of data collection, they were teaching IELTS preparation courses in different provinces: Thua Thien Hue (66), Quang Tri (20), Da Nang (19), Quy Nhon (7), Quang Binh (7), Vinh Phuc (4), Quang Ngai (4), Phu Yen (4), Hai Phong (2), Gia Lai (1) and other adjacent areas (3). Although a majority of the participants (81.02%) were originally from Central Vietnam, some of the participants (18.98%) were from different provinces of Vietnam and they had moved to teach IELTS preparation courses in Central Vietnam. Detailed background information of the participants is presented in the Results section and in the tables in Appendix 4.

In order to recruit participants, the researchers first contacted different language centres, language universities and high school language divisions in Hue, Da Nang, Quy Nhon and Phu Yen, and sought support from a network of local contacts (through personal network channels) in each place to collect information about potential participants. After we sent an invitation letter to confirm that they had been teaching IELTS preparation courses and they had completed the survey, they were asked to recommend the survey link to colleagues who were also offering IELTS preparation courses. Of 137 participants in the survey, 37 teachers agreed to join the interview via both face-to-face and Skype modalities. However, due to some unexpected reasons (e.g., teachers' availability, job commitments and location), only seven participants joined all follow-up interviews.

### 5.2 Study design and procedure

The study collected quantitative and qualitative data from 137 IELTS teachers in Central Vietnam who volunteered to participate in an online survey and individual in-depth interviews. To explore the characteristics and perceptions of IELTS teachers (Research Questions 1 and 2), we used SurveyMonkey to conduct an online questionnaire to collect quantitative and qualitative data. This data focused mainly on IELTS teachers' background education, their IELTS students, their relevant training in language testing and IELTS, experience and different approaches to teaching IELTS preparation courses. Through this survey, we also explored how IELTS preparation courses took place and the perceived impact on the teachers. This served as a basis for an in-depth understanding of the impact of IELTS on their teaching practices and lives.



The survey was disseminated to 250 IELTS teachers in Central Vietnam, and 54.80% (137) responded to the survey.

To further explore the impact of IELTS on teachers' teaching practice and lives (Research Question 3), we interviewed seven IELTS teachers who agreed to participate in all follow-up interviews. Through these interviews, we explored how IELTS exerts its influence on teachers' lives via the practice of teaching IELTS preparation courses.

## 5.3 Data collection tools

### 5.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire aimed to describe the characteristics of IELTS teachers in Central Vietnam. Question items focused on the following aspects: biodata, qualifications and education, certification of IELTS training, types of IELTS students, teaching locations (e.g., home or language centre), IELTS modules (General or Academic), understanding about IELTS, teaching materials, ways of recruiting IELTS students, experience of taking the IELTS test, language teaching experiences and the impact of IELTS on teachers' lives (see Appendix 1). The development of questionnaire items was mainly motivated by the research questions. The questionnaire was written in both English and Vietnamese so that the teachers (who read both languages) felt at ease in understanding the questions.

### 5.3.2 Interviews

Data also came from individual audio-recorded interviews with seven IELTS teachers. This was to understand how IELTS influenced teachers' lives. The process of interviewing took place in two rounds. Information from the first-round interview led to other recommended sources of evidence and a follow-up interview. The interviews were conducted on, though not limited to, a face-to-face, one-on-one basis. Open-ended questions were used in a semi-structured manner, using inductive probing – “asking questions that are based on the interviewee's responses and simultaneously linked to the research objectives” (Guest et al. 2013, p. 114). The topics for interviews featured two main areas: i) professional impact (e.g., development of language capacity, teaching approaches/strategies of IELTS, and perceptions of IELTS); and ii) social impact (e.g., financial benefits, job opportunities or career development, social and economic benefits, challenges of teaching IELTS, and perception towards promotion and goals/motivation of teaching IELTS) (see Appendix 2). Participants chose to speak Vietnamese in their interviews, with the exception of one participant who insisted on using English.

## 5.4 Data analysis

To answer the first and second research questions, the survey responses were analysed using frequency counts (i.e. percentages) and descriptive data was reported. The content-based analysis (i.e. identifying emergent themes) was then conducted to provide a detailed description of the IELTS teachers' characteristics.

To answer the third research question, we followed a general thematic approach. We first read through all interview responses, identified common themes, and assigned labels for these themes. Then, we constructed a thematic frame based on these emergent themes which included:

- 1) background information
- 2) financial well-being
- 3) professional impact
- 4) social impact.

This frame was then used to construct a narrative account for each participant.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 Characteristics of IELTS teachers in Central Vietnam

This section presents the findings for the first research question about the characteristics of IELTS teachers. To provide a description of characteristics of IELTS teachers in Central Vietnam, frequency counts (i.e. percentages) of responses in the survey were conducted, and data was then presented in four aspects: 1) teachers' demographic information, 2) IELTS training, 3) IELTS teaching experience, and 4) their students. Appendix 4 provides tables which summarise this descriptive data.

#### 6.1.1 IELTS teachers' demographic information

With regard to teachers' formal education (Table 1), the survey results showed that 82.4% of participants (113 teachers) had a specialisation in English teaching or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). The rest of the participants (17.6%, 24 teachers) had a degree in an area other than TESOL, such as English literature studies, international relations, business administration, world history, accountancy, social development, educational studies, philosophy, applied science, English interpretation, and language studies. In addition, 54% of participants (74 teachers) had a Master's degree as compared to 35.7% (49 teachers) holding a Bachelor's degree and 8.7% (12 teachers) with a PhD (Table 2). Two teachers (1.4%) had not finished their undergraduate degree but were studying for a Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching at the time of data collection.

As for the teachers' English language proficiency (Table 3), their achieved IELTS scores varied considerably, with 86 (62.7%) of the teachers' IELTS scores being 7 or above, compared to 31 (22.6%) with scores of 6.5 or 6. Notably, more than 20 teachers (15%) had not taken the IELTS test before. For 117 (85.4%) participants, IELTS was an additional part-time job as they were working full-time as language teachers and/or academic managers at their institutions (Table 4); these teachers taught IELTS courses at a language centre or in their home. Twenty teachers (14.6%) taught IELTS preparation courses as their main job, even though they were doing it part-time.

#### 6.1.2 IELTS teachers' training experiences

The survey results (Table 5) showed that very few teachers had formal training in IELTS teaching and assessment. A large majority, 85.9% (115) of the teachers, reported that they did not participate in any training for IELTS teaching and assessment. For those teachers who had taken part in IELTS training for both teaching and assessment, they reported to have received training mainly from their institutions or language centres where they taught IELTS preparation courses. The trainers were mostly senior language teachers at these institutions who had a number of years teaching IELTS preparation courses to learners of different proficiency levels. The content of these training workshops was mainly focused on teaching strategies to help students achieve a high IELTS score. Three teachers reported to have participated in free IELTS information and training workshops offered by the IELTS British Council in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

The majority of the teachers (74.4%) had taught English for over four years (Table 6). However, their experience of teaching the IELTS preparation courses varied significantly, with only 33.1% having four years of teaching experience as opposed to around 41% teaching IELTS for less than two years (Table 6).

Regarding the IELTS modules (Table 7), more than 68% of teachers taught an Academic IELTS course, with 20% providing a combined Academic and General IELTS preparation course. Only 15% taught an IELTS General module.



### 6.1.3 IELTS teachers' targeted learners

The teachers reported that they had taught a wide range of IELTS learners (Tables 8 and 9). While a majority of learners (89.8%) were adults ranging from 16 to 30 years old (high school students, university students and employees), 10.2% were young learners (secondary school learners). In addition, the teachers reported that their learners joined their IELTS preparation courses for multiple purposes (Table 10) such as studying abroad (80.3%) in different countries (Table 11), job application (20.8%), graduation requirement by universities/colleges (17.2%), immigration (12.8%), employment requirement (11.9%) and cross-cultural marriage (1.9%). It appeared that studying abroad was the main motivation among the participants. Thus, a majority of them took part in IELTS Academic preparation courses.

## 6.2 Impact of IELTS on teachers' language teaching

This section presents the findings for Research Question 2 on the impact of IELTS on teachers' language teaching practices. In this section, a description of the teachers' IELTS preparation courses is given, followed by their perceptions towards the role of IELTS in language learning and teaching, and their perceived impact of IELTS on their teaching.

### 6.2.1 Description of IELTS preparation courses

The teachers reported that a majority of IELTS preparation courses (70.1%) were delivered in face-to-face mode (Table 12). However, online or blended teaching modes were also an option for the IELTS teachers (27.2%). One-on-one home tutoring IELTS classes existed but were limited (2.6%). Teachers also reported that 81% of their IELTS courses were designed as a separate course tailored to the learners' demands (Table 13). Since the IELTS preparation courses were designed to meet the learners' expectations, the class size, length and frequency of each teaching session varied significantly (Table 14). Class sizes were generally small, with 72.3% of the IELTS courses consisting of fewer than 10 students per class/course.

In terms of frequency, 86.8% of the IELTS classes had two or three sessions per week, with each session lasting for approximately 1.5 or 2 hours. In most cases (82.4%), the purpose of the IELTS courses was reported to train learners to sit for the test, but 38.6% of courses were to provide general practice and learning of English (Table 15). Some teachers (1.7%) reported that their IELTS course was also to help learners build confidence and general knowledge about the world.

In sum, it appeared that the IELTS preparation courses were perceived as a tool not only for preparing to take the test but also for developing language development to serve other purposes (i.e. passing the exams into high schools as for the case of young learners).

### 6.2.2 The role of IELTS in language learning and teaching

With regard to the role of IELTS (Table 16), 81% of the teachers stated that IELTS was perceived as an appropriate and reliable tool for assessing learners' English proficiency at different levels. However, it was perceived as more appropriate for undergraduate and postgraduate levels and for the purposes of employment and immigration. Notably, 80.2% of the teachers reported that IELTS impacted positively on the learners' desire to learn English (Table 17).





### 6.2.3 Perceived impact of IELTS on teaching

The survey responses (Table 18) showed that the teachers' choice of teaching content and teaching approach were reported to be affected by the IELTS test's format and content. Specifically, 115 teachers (83.9%) reported that the content (e.g. materials) of their IELTS preparation courses was IELTS-oriented. In addition, 72.9% of teachers stated to have designed their courses following the IELTS test format and they focused on teaching IELTS test-taking strategies. Additionally, 85.4% of the teachers designed their everyday lessons using activities similar to, or the same as, the tasks in IELTS.

All teachers used a series of IELTS books published by Cambridge University Press for designing their lessons (Table 19). Over 90% of the teachers also used commercial IELTS books (see Appendix 3 for a list of IELTS books from commercial publishers). However, while they used activities or tasks from the commercial IELTS books, they modified them according to their beliefs about language teaching approaches. Furthermore, 61% of teachers reported using and modifying some of the activities from the IELTS books and adding additional materials from other sources. A small number of teachers (19.8%) created their own materials for teaching the IELTS lessons.

Analyses of teacher's qualitative questionnaire responses showed that the teachers modified activities taken from the commercial IELTS textbooks for a number of reasons. The main reasons were to: suit the students' language proficiency; increase their learners' interest and engagement; and create collaboration among learners during classroom activities. The teachers explained that not all activities from the commercial textbooks were interesting and diverse enough to engage learners in the activities, with some activities perceived as very boring and at times, either too easy or too challenging.

Another reason for modifying the activities was class size. Due to the various sizes of the IELTS classes, the teachers often adapted activities to fit into their situation. All teachers emphasised that teaching IELTS preparation courses did not mean focusing on test-taking strategies only but teaching for increasing the proficiency level first and then the practice of the test-taking strategies to ensure the students' development of both proficiency and test-taking strategies were sufficient for achieving their target IELTS band score.

While they used commercial IELTS books that featured different types of activities, 83.2% of the teachers used individual work because it was similar to what the students would do on the IELTS test (Table 20). They reported to only use pair work (67.88%) and group work (53.2%) to create opportunities for the students to practice their speaking skills. Pair and group work were also reported to serve as a pre-task activity for teaching IELTS writing task 2, reading and listening sections. For big classes, they also incorporated whole-class work (48.9%) although it was not frequent.

The teachers added materials from different sources to complement the commercial IELTS books they used in their courses. These additional materials were to focus on a wide range of aspects of English language competence (Table 21). Notably, pronunciation was the least focused, with only 2.9% of the teachers adding supplementary materials to their teaching content.



## 6.3 Impact of IELTS on teachers' lives

This section presents the findings for Research Question 3 on the impact of IELTS on teachers' lives. We provide seven case studies of teachers who reported the impact of IELTS on different aspects. These participants volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews after completing the survey. They represented four groups of IELTS teachers currently active in the region, including those working in tertiary education: university lecturers (4), high school teacher (1), language centre teacher (1) and freelance teacher (1). They were based in different areas in Central Vietnam including Hue, Quy Nhon and Phu Yen. All teachers offered IELTS courses in homes or local language centres.

We structured these case studies following common themes emerging from the interview responses. They include:

- background information (job title, location, education, teaching experience)
- financial well-being
- professional impact (teaching knowledge/skills, language proficiency, motivation and desire for further training, and overall impact on professional life)
- social impact (perceptions from learners, colleagues and themselves towards their social status and overall social impact).

### 6.3.1 A junior full-time university lecturer (Nam)

**Background information:** Nam is a junior full-time university lecturer who earned his Master's degree in TESOL in Australia in 2013. Nam started teaching IELTS preparation courses after he completed his Master's degree. He taught IELTS preparation courses at home, usually outside office hours.

**Financial well-being:** Nam stated that he "was satisfied with the income" he gained from teaching IELTS preparation courses. He admitted that the salary from his main job as a university lecturer was not sufficient; therefore, the income from teaching IELTS preparation courses was actually contributing significantly to his finances. He said that he "did not set the tuition fees" for his private IELTS lessons but "the learners decided on the salary" which was often higher than his expectations.

**Professional impact:** With regard to development of his teaching knowledge and skills, Nam stated that teaching IELTS preparation courses enabled him to implement what he had learnt in his Master in TESOL because he "had autonomy in deciding all aspects of the teaching, such as selecting materials, teaching methods, teaching activities, learners and classroom regulations". He also stressed that as he needed to "tailor to the learners' needs and help them to achieve their academic goals" (i.e., a high IELTS score), he really invested himself in teaching these IELTS preparation courses. This pushed him to be "disciplined" and improved his "teaching skills, such as time management and classroom management".

As for the language proficiency aspect, Nam acknowledged that his main motivation for teaching IELTS included his desire to maintain his language proficiency. He reported that "IELTS preparations were an opportunity to keep using English". He stated that while the income from the IELTS preparation course was good, what kept him on this job was "the frequency of English use" and his ability to "help students achieve their target IELTS score". In addition, his teaching of IELTS also motivated him to seek further training to improve his teaching effectiveness. In sum, Nam said that he was "overall contented" because teaching IELTS preparation courses had brought him a high income, flexible teaching schedule, motivated learners, and opportunities to "develop not only language proficiency but also general knowledge, and a sense of achievement".



**Impact on life:** Regarding his learners' perceptions of him, Nam reported he was "contented with the outcome" of his IELTS teaching since many of his students were able to achieve their target IELTS score to fulfil their academic or professional goals. As a result, he earned high respect and praise from his students. Notably, Nam said that his adult learners often asked him to teach their children IELTS English skills after they had completed their course, or they recommended him to other learners or their acquaintances. Nam considered this as "evidence for teaching effectiveness". Nam was also proud of himself for being "popular" among his colleagues who perceived him as a competent English language teacher due to his teaching of IELTS preparation courses. In sum, it appeared that teaching IELTS preparation courses had a range of positive impacts on Nam, such as financial gain, fine-tuning of language teaching skills and knowledge, development of general English, and self-esteem.

### 6.3.2 A senior full-time university lecturer and administrator (Son)

**Background information:** Son is a senior full-time university lecturer, teaching a Bachelor in English Language Teaching program at a university in central Vietnam. He has been working for 30 years. He earned his Master's degree and PhD in English Language Teaching at a Vietnamese university. He also worked as an education administrator, as well as teaching English.

**Financial well-being:** Son established an English language centre in the city centre and recruited younger teachers to work for him. Son claimed that "IELTS preparation courses contributed, though a small portion" to his general income. A bigger proportion of his income originated from other types of English training courses, especially those for young children. However, for IELTS preparation classes, Son had expanded his 'business' of IELTS preparation courses from small classes to multiple classes and, ultimately, established a language centre which delivered IELTS preparation courses at different levels. This demonstrated his motivation to increase his income from IELTS training and other English tutoring services.

**Professional impact:** By teaching IELTS, Son believed he developed his "knowledge of how to draw on the strategies in order to perform well on an IELTS test". This helped him "fine-tune his teaching approach and teaching knowledge". At the same time, he said his "general knowledge was also improved and expanded profusely". Son stated that teaching IELTS preparation courses had made him "become more well-informed due to the content covered in the IELTS materials". Son also felt his language proficiency had "grown exponentially" thanks to his IELTS teaching. When he had to take the entrance exam for his Master's course, Son achieved a very high score in the language proficiency test, which he ascribed to developing his proficiency through his IELTS teaching. Overall, in terms of professional development, Son claimed his IELTS teaching had led to knowledge expansion and language skill improvement.

**Impact on life:** Son said that "the most important reward for all my efforts in teaching IELTS courses was that it helped me earn prestige and respect from students". With his help, his students were able to achieve a high IELTS score. Son's language centre was popular for IELTS preparation courses, attracting a large number of students in the area and operating over many years. Son also reported that his success in IELTS teaching had contributed to his social status and his popularity among his colleagues. It appeared that teaching IELTS courses had become part of Son's career path. He explained that, with his prolonged offer of IELTS preparation courses, even though he is in his fifties, he has been "motivated to attain further professional training, especially a PhD in English language education".



### 6.3.3 A junior freelance English teacher (Sa)

**Background:** Sa is a junior freelance English teacher, who graduated as an English teacher, but her dream was not bound to one particular career. After tutoring English in many language centres, she managed to travel abroad and earn a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics. She then worked in hotels as a human resource manager but soon left to follow her other dreams. She participated in projects for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and became involved in helping children with language disabilities. Yet, Sa has never stopped teaching IELTS preparation courses to those in need. She has worked as a freelance IELTS trainer for more than three years.

**Financial well-being:** Sa was able to start as what she called “a social entrepreneur”, specialising in offering English language teaching, IELTS training and sign language to students with hearing disabilities. She ran a community centre and earned enough to maintain IELTS preparation courses and other kinds of English language teaching courses as an integral part of her life. However, Sa focused on reinvesting in educational purposes. She pledged to “reinvest more than half of the income in developing resources for learners”. Her language centre model is a combination of earning money and helping the community. She was able to call for help and support from international donors and was invited to give a talk on her language centre model in the US.

**Professional impact:** While not providing specifics, Sa believed that she “benefited from teaching IELTS and developed a very keen ear in phonetics”. She was recognised as a competent translator in some projects related to linguistic therapy, motivating her to consider a career as a speech therapist. Overall, Sa provides an interesting case study where teaching IELTS preparation courses has been a catalyst for further professional development. She was able to open a language centre named “Joyful English”. Sa aimed to help learners enjoy their learning and became interested in changing the way IELTS preparation courses were taught. Together with a group of friends, Sa organised different workshops on IELTS and test-taking strategies. She created IELTS classes which involved a debate, a YouTube watching session, or simply a group chat. Through these engaging options, Sa believed she had transformed the IELTS preparation courses into an enjoyable journey.

**Impact on life:** Sa said that “most of the students specialised in medical areas and they were very keen on learning English for the purpose of improving their specialised knowledge and sharing regarding the medicine discipline and for studying abroad”. These learners participated in Sa's IELTS classes mainly because of word of mouth, which demonstrated the popularity of her courses in the area. Sa began by teaching IELTS preparation courses by herself on a freelance basis but later, she was able to appeal to some young, dynamic IELTS teachers who had graduated abroad and had high IELTS scores to join her teaching team and expand her language centre. Sa said these new colleagues “embraced” her ambitions of offering social support by teaching IELTS preparation courses. She and her colleagues believed that English competence was an important skill and IELTS preparation courses helped achieve this goal, so they aimed to expand these courses at her Joyful English centre.

Sa seemed to be an influential individual and a self-confident teacher. She even had a fan page with more than 2000 followers because she believed this would help to achieve her “goal of developing learners' English language skills through teaching IELTS preparation courses”. Sa appeared to be a very dedicated, creative and responsible teacher as she planned well what she could do and how to do it.

In sum, the teaching of IELTS preparation courses was the foundation and the means for Sa to sustain her life and accomplish her interests in social work and volunteering activities. With the IELTS teaching experience, Sa moved to become an activist, earning recognition from an international audience for the innovative combination of language teaching service and social work.



#### 6.3.4 An associate professor as an IELTS teacher (Hoa)

**Background information:** Hoa holds an associate professorial position and is considered one of the most active researchers and lecturers in her university. She obtained both a Master's degree and PhD abroad (New Zealand) and had been teaching IELTS preparation courses for 14 years. She was also an IELTS trainer, offering IELTS training to a variety of teachers and learners.

**Financial well-being:** Hoa said that she felt “satisfied with the extra income from the teaching of IELTS preparation courses”. Right after she finished her studies abroad, she delved into delivering IELTS preparation courses with an “extrinsic motivation”, that is, “feeling motivated because of something external, not from within herself, including an extra source of income”. Hoa mentioned what is called “the paradox of income in Vietnam, i.e., the income you earned from additional work is better than the one you earned officially from your main job”. Thus, the income from teaching IELTS preparation courses appeared to contribute significantly to Hoa's total income.

**Professional impact:** Hoa said that teaching IELTS helped further develop her knowledge about teaching English. For instance, she tried to understand the structure of the IELTS test and stay current with the newest test developments to avoid being an outdated IELTS teacher. She stated “this had been pushing me ahead of the game and earned popularity in the city for being able to attract a large number of IELTS learners”.

**Regarding language proficiency,** Hoa claimed that teaching IELTS helped her to maintain good proficiency in the English language, which she said is “something that is not easy to do in an English-as-a-foreign-language context”. Given her intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for sustaining her IELTS preparation courses and attending professional development workshops as an IELTS trainer, she rarely missed any opportunities to make herself familiar with developments in the IELTS test.

**Impact on life:** Hoa stated that she had gained good respect from her students because she “helped many students to achieve their required IELTS score”. Also, many of her university English-majored students came to work at her home-run centre. As a result, she created a service for training young IELTS teachers who could apply to take an apprenticeship at her language centre.

However, Hoa said that she was not sure whether her colleagues knew that she was offering IELTS preparation courses. She said “if someone held an associate professorial position, they would often be assumed to have a high salary and they would not have to labour around their house, teaching students IELTS preparation courses”. Yet, in her case, she managed to do both tasks. The teaching of IELTS preparation courses was more like a ‘secretive’ business which she would not make widely known among her colleagues. She admitted that “in Vietnam, an associate professor is a highly respected position, with a strong orientation towards research, whereas IELTS teachers work in the practice level”.

Overall, what was interesting about Hoa was the perceived incompatibility between her position as an associate professor and her role as an IELTS trainer and teacher.



### 6.3.5 A senior full-time lecturer as an IELTS teacher for high school students (Hung)

**Background information:** Hung was a senior lecturer at a university in central Vietnam who started offering IELTS preparation courses in 2017. He earned a Master's degree in English teaching in Vietnam, and a doctoral degree in Australia. He was considered an experienced English language teacher in his university. Before teaching IELTS preparation courses, he offered general English practice courses to high school students who wished to pass the English entrance test to universities.

**Financial well-being:** At the time of research, Hung was teaching four IELTS preparation courses to learners who were mostly high school students. He charged a good sum of money for each IELTS session. This had brought him “a good source of extra income”. Since the teaching of IELTS preparation courses generated a good source of income, he was highly focused on investing time and effort to maintain and develop it. Hung stated that IELTS training generated an important second source of income which facilitated and nurtured his motivation to teach English in general.

**Professional impact:** Regarding the development of his teaching knowledge and language skill, Hung was “particularly focused on teaching IELTS writing rather than other skills”. Thus, a majority of his classes were IELTS writing preparation courses. Hung's approach was to “invest in learners and spend time interacting with them and giving feedback on their writing pieces”. He chose to teach small classes so that he could really help to develop his students' writing skills. Hung also had a placement test before accepting students into his class. Often, his students already had foundational knowledge and English language skills so that he could build on these to further develop their skills.

**Impact on life:** Hung said that thanks to his success in developing students' writing skills, he was popular among students in the town, especially for his “prestige” as an IELTS writing teacher. This has created a very special social status for him as an excellent IELTS writing teacher in his city. Hung stated that he was “among a group of successful teachers who offered good IELTS courses in town”. He reasoned that all of his students enrolled in his class because of word of mouth. Hung said that he “did not officially advertise or do anything” but students kept registering for his classes and that was why he could maintain his classes for the past three years. He explained this as evidence of his popularity.

### 6.3.6 A junior full-time language centre teacher (Hue)

**Background information:** Hue is a full-time IELTS teacher at a language centre. She earned a Bachelor's and Master's degree in International Relations at a university in the UK in 2018. However, after her graduation, Hue was interested in the field of education, especially teaching English. Thus, she decided to teach IELTS preparation courses. Although starting with just a few IELTS preparation courses and a small group of learners, Hue later established a language centre which offered different IELTS preparation courses to learners of all levels. She was not only an IELTS teacher but also the language centre manager in charge of hiring IELTS teachers and managing all academic issues.

**Financial well-being:** Hue reported that her “motivation of teaching IELTS preparation was not to earn money” although she acknowledged that “the income from the teaching of IELTS preparation courses was quite significant”. She said that if she wanted to generate more income, she would start doing other jobs in big companies rather than teaching IELTS preparation courses. However, the teaching of IELTS preparation courses gave her “autonomy and freedom” which she perceived as one of the bonuses of the teaching job.



**Language proficiency:** Unlike the others interviewed, Hue said that teaching IELTS preparation courses did not have any impact on her language proficiency. She reported that a majority of her IELTS preparation courses focused on lower IELTS levels, with a range of target band scores from 4.5 to 7.5. Because her own IELTS score and language proficiency was above the levels that she taught, Hue reported “not to benefit much from the teaching of IELTS preparation courses”. She resorted to other activities, such as watching movies and reading books, to maintain her language proficiency. However, she acknowledged that the teaching of IELTS helped her use English quite frequently.

**Professional impact:** Hue emphasised that one of the main benefits of teaching IELTS was that she could develop her “teaching knowledge and skills significantly”. She said that she “was very interested in designing and modifying classroom activities in order to achieve the teaching objectives”. In addition, she could design any activities that she perceived as effective based on her reflections of teaching these activities in the previous IELTS classes. She articulated that the autonomy she had in designing and implementing any classroom activities allowed her to experiment with the teaching methods and fine-tune them over time. This helped her reinforce her knowledge and improve her teaching skills to achieve the best outcomes.

**Impact on life:** Hue said that she was not sure how others perceived her when she was teaching IELTS preparation courses, but she was happy when her students achieved their goals because many of her “students who achieved their target IELTS scores were able to study abroad or fulfil the graduation requirements of their university, and that other students were able to find jobs which required high language proficiency”. She saw this as an impact that she had on the students. Hue stated that “many employers were increasingly requiring a high English proficiency level from their employees, thus IELTS preparation courses helped those students to achieve the language proficiency that they expect”. This was one of the main motivations that kept her continuing her work as an IELTS teacher.

### 6.3.7 A junior full-time high school teacher (Que)

**Background information:** Que is a full-time high school teacher in a rural area in Thua Thien Hue province. She earned a Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching from Hue University of Foreign Languages and a Master's degree in TESOL from an Australian university. She started teaching IELTS preparation courses a year after she finished her Master's degree.

**Financial well-being:** Que said that she “did not initially teach IELTS preparation courses for the sake of increasing income”. Rather, she was asked by many secondary and high school students to teach these courses because they were not available in their town. In addition, nurses who were working at an international foreign hospital needed a high IELTS score for the purpose of promotion and communication at work and they asked Que to offer courses. These were two main motivations for her to start teaching IELTS preparation courses. Although Que did not focus on earning more income, she admitted that “the IELTS income was considerable when compared with the income from other sources”.

**Language proficiency:** Que reported that she was always conscious about maintaining her English language proficiency after she returned from Australia to teach English at a high school in her hometown. Thus, she considered the teaching of IELTS as “a means to use English every day and prepare for retaking the IELTS test” whenever she wanted. For her own personal goal, Que always wanted to take the IELTS test every two years to make sure that her language proficiency was not lost; thus, the teaching of IELTS preparation was considered as practice for the test, which would help her maintain her high IELTS score. Que stressed that “this was one of main benefits” she gained from teaching IELTS preparation courses.



**Professional impact:** Que acknowledged that “teaching IELTS preparation was actually a great opportunity to reinforce language teaching knowledge and skills”.

Que said that all of the high school students who attended her IELTS courses wanted to prepare themselves for entering a specialised high school which required an English entrance exam with a similar format to IELTS. As a result, Que’s objective was to “help those students get a high score in the IELTS-like exam”. With this aim in mind, Que had experimented different teaching approaches such as adapting and modifying a range of teaching materials, and creatively designing effective activities in her IELTS preparation courses. Que acknowledged that this practice had helped her to reinforce and develop her language significantly.

**Impact on life:** Que stated that because her students achieved high results, she earned more respect than her colleagues who only offered general English classes. Que said that “in order to teach IELTS preparation, the teachers need to possess a high language proficiency level certified by IELTS tests”. With her good IELTS score and experience in teaching IELTS courses, Que was given more important tasks at her school, including preparing students for English contests at provincial and national level. This made her “feel contented when teaching the IELTS preparation courses”. She perceived that her “work of teaching IELTS preparation contributed to her students’ achievement”, which made her teaching become “more meaningful and enjoyable”.

### 6.3.8 Summative analyses of seven cases

In regards to professional development, the teachers reported that they had benefited in different ways from teaching IELTS.

1. It helped reinforce and develop their language competence.
2. It reinforced and developed their teaching skills, in terms of designing activities, and selecting, adapting and creating materials tailored to their students’ needs.
3. It enabled them to build up general English skills through learning the content of the reading and listening sections.
4. It allowed them to seek further professional development, such as IELTS training, attending conferences and informal learning opportunities in practice.

As for the impact on teachers’ lives beyond the classroom, teaching IELTS preparation courses enabled the teachers to gain a higher social status and respect from students, students’ parents, colleagues and their institutions. They also reported that, while financial gain was not always their ultimate goal, they benefited financially from these IELTS preparation courses. In addition, teaching IELTS preparation courses allowed them to achieve their personal goals, such as contributing to the development of the society (e.g. helping learners to develop their English language skills for better job opportunities), pursuing further education (e.g. doing a PhD), and experiencing a sense of achievement when their learners fulfilled their academic and professional goals.



## 7 Discussion

This study explored the characteristics of IELTS teachers in Central Vietnam and the impact of IELTS on the teachers' lives.

### 7.1 Diverse characteristics of IELTS teachers

The questionnaire results revealed diverse characteristics of IELTS teachers that could be classified into two categories: teachers with formal English Language Teaching major training (82.4%) and those without it. It was often expected that IELTS teachers had formal training in English Language Teaching or TESOL, but this study showed that a small group of IELTS teachers (17.5%) majored in disciplines other than English Language Teaching. However, they achieved high IELTS scores and later self-taught to become IELTS teachers. It should be noted that more than half of the IELTS teachers earned their Master's degree in English Language Teaching or TESOL and 8.7% had a PhD in Applied Linguistics or Linguistics. In addition, 62.7% of them had achieved an IELTS score of 7 or higher. The results indicated that, as far as this research is concerned, those teaching IELTS preparation courses appeared to be relatively highly qualified in terms of language proficiency and formal education in language teaching.

Very few teachers participated in formal training to teach IELTS preparation courses. A small group (14.1%) had received self-created training workshops from senior language teachers who had taught IELTS preparation courses for years. As a result, teachers generally taught the IELTS preparation courses based on their language teaching experience and their understanding of IELTS through their own experience of taking it. It seems that the impact of IELTS depends partly on the length of their language teaching experience and the extent to which they understood IELTS when they were learners taking this test (Sprat, 2005; also see Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996).

The teachers' responses in the survey converged to suggest four main factors deciding whether a language teacher could become an IELTS teacher.

1. The first factor was language proficiency and achieving a high IELTS band score.
2. The second was a language teaching background, such as being a language teacher at a prestigious high school or an English language lecturer at university.
3. The third was related to the financial aspect in which all teachers admitted their income from teaching IELTS courses was considerable as compared to their full-time main job which was argued to be relatively low in the context of Vietnam (Tran, 2013).
4. Finally, whether a language teacher was able to continue teaching IELTS preparation courses depended on their learners' achievements on IELTS, which was often spread through word of mouth.

These factors together suggest that the teaching of IELTS preparation courses was driven by learners' personal goals rather than governmental top-down language policies. This, therefore, suggests that the status of English and IELTS has been increasingly gaining an important part in many learners' personal growth plan.

### 7.2 Teaching and learning goals

Apart from describing characteristics of the IELTS teachers, the study also explored the goals of teaching IELTS preparation courses. The study looked into the characteristics of learners in these courses. It showed that learners varied significantly in terms of age, education, study and employment status. The major group of learners were high school students, university students and employees who took part in IELTS preparation courses for different purposes.



While preparing learners to study abroad was the major purpose of these courses, a relatively large number of students also wanted to facilitate their job application, university graduation, immigration or promotion in their companies or institutions. As a result, a variety of IELTS preparation courses was offered to address these different needs, although the IELTS Academic training module was the most popular.

Given that learners with diverse language proficiency levels participated in IELTS preparation courses for different reasons, the teachers created courses tailored to these learners' needs and individual differences. These results suggested two implications. First, it showed that the demand of IELTS preparation courses was high and thus courses were created in order to meet the demand. Second, IELTS preparation courses were designed based on the learners' expectations, goals and characteristics (e.g. proficiency level and age), which arguably had bearings on the practice of learning and teaching of the IELTS preparation courses.

The results also reflect an emerging landscape of education in the context of Vietnam regarding the status of IELTS and the teaching and learning of English language; i.e., an increasing trend in developing English proficiency in general, and taking IELTS preparation courses in particular. This trend has resulted in an increase in mostly private tutoring of IELTS preparation courses as reported in this study.

### 7.3 Impact of IELTS on language teaching

The results of the questionnaire and interviews show that all IELTS preparation courses were private tutoring or bespoke courses. This was reflected on the teaching mode, design and objectives of the IELTS preparation courses. More specifically, the teachers offered IELTS courses with a variety of teaching modes (e.g. face-to-face, online or blended), which were often designed as a separate tailor-made course with flexibility of learning schedule and class size. A majority of the teachers (82.4%) focused on training learners to take the IELTS test. These results provided evidence that IELTS determines the objectives of the IELTS preparation courses and how they are designed and delivered. The next sections further explore the impact of IELTS on what and how the teachers teach.

#### 7.3.1 Perceived impact of IELTS on What to Teach

The results show that IELTS affected what was taught in the IELTS preparation courses. The impact of IELTS on what the teachers teach was clearly reflected in the teaching materials. All of the teachers reported to use the *IELTS Cambridge Exam Paper Textbook* series (1 to 13) and commercial IELTS textbooks as core materials. The supplementary materials were designed following the IELTS test format to prepare the learners to take the test. These results provided evidence on the washback of IELTS on the content of the teaching of the IELTS preparation courses. This corroborates previous research that reported washback effects of testing on language teaching (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Burrow, 2004; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Qi, 2004).

It should be noted that, although IELTS materials were used for all the IELTS preparation courses, the teachers reported freedom in choosing their teaching materials. They stated that since these were their bespoke courses, they could decide on what materials were included. As a result, they varied in terms of using materials; i.e., there were no obligations for using a certain kind of teaching material but it was the teachers' discretion to choose the materials. This indicates that the teachers all converged to use IELTS-related materials but varied in terms of sources of IELTS materials (see Appendix 3). The use of different IELTS-oriented materials and the adaptation of activities in commercial IELTS textbooks indicated that teachers might have actually aimed to develop learners' language skills and prepare them to be familiar with the practice of taking the test. This therefore could be perceived as a positive impact of



IELTS on the content of the teaching (i.e. what to teach) as similarly reported in previous research (Cheng, 1997; Hawkey, 2006).

Despite differences in the sources of IELTS materials, the teachers' responses revealed three main factors that contribute to their choice of materials. The most important factor was the learners' expectations and learning goals. As reported above, all IELTS preparation courses were bespoke according to the pop-up demand from the learners who either wished to take an IELTS test or an entry exam with a similar format to IELTS. Thus, the teaching materials needed to reflect IELTS test-oriented characteristics in order to meet student expectations. As noted earlier, all teachers used IELTS Cambridge textbooks as core teaching materials with the addition of commercial IELTS textbooks. This indicates that their teaching content clearly focused on materials that were developed for teaching IELTS.

The second factor was the learners' proficiency levels. With diverse proficiency levels, IELTS preparation courses were designed to match learner levels. These courses targeted different levels, often classified according to the IELTS band score, such as '4.5—6.0 IELTS preparation courses', '6.0—6.5, IELTS preparation courses' or '6.5 and above IELTS preparation courses'. With regard to the level of difficulty, the course objectives and the teaching materials were determined according to the target IELTS band score of each course.

The third factor was teachers' beliefs about choosing materials. Since these IELTS preparation courses were tailor-made, the teachers had autonomy in selecting the teaching materials. That is, although selecting teaching materials to reflect IELTS-oriented exams, the teachers appeared to rely on what they considered effective. As a result, they added different supplementary materials to their core IELTS materials depending on their assessment of the learners' needs. This indicated that the choice of the teaching materials was affected by the teachers' perceptions of whether the materials matched the learners' proficiency level and then tailoring them to learners' individual differences (Burrow, 2004).

### 7.3.2 Perceived impact of IELTS on How to Teach

Although teachers reported that they were focused on using IELTS-related materials in their courses, the teach-to-the-test effects of IELTS on their teaching approach appeared to be minimal. Rather, these teaching approaches were determined by other factors such as their language teaching formal education, beliefs, learners' individual differences, their IELTS test-taking experience, and their accumulated language teaching experience. Specifically, the results showed that teachers partly, or fully, modified activities from the textbooks, and they used a variety of classroom activities such as pair work, group work and whole-class work. The teachers also designed an IELTS lesson full of different activities in a language lesson rather than a coaching or practice-the-test session. These findings indicate that the teachers did not seem to teach to the test; rather, they aimed to develop learners' language skills as reflected in their efforts of varying and self-making materials and activities (Watanabe, 2004). This confirms previous research reporting that the washback effect appeared to be on 'what the teachers teach' rather than 'how they teach' (Cheng, 2005; Wall, 2005).

Another finding was that the effect of IELTS on the teachers' teaching methodology was not strongly driven by the test itself. It was the teachers' modification of the activities from the commercial IELTS textbooks and design of new activities based on the IELTS Cambridge textbooks that were motivated by contextual and individual factors, such as proficiency, learners' interest and engagement, collaboration and class size. As a result, any supplementary materials added to the core teaching materials and the design of the IELTS preparation courses were based on the learners.



These results demonstrate that contextual factors (i.e. learners' characteristics and expectations) and the teachers' experience (i.e. perceptions of language teaching, formal education, learning and teaching experiences) had strongly driven their teaching practice, rather than the test itself, although IELTS also appeared to influence the teaching practice to a certain degree. This suggests that, in order to generate positive impact from high-stakes tests (e.g. IELTS), it is important to focus on the teachers and the learners who might have actually determined whether the degree of washback is intense and whether it was positive or not (Spratt, 2005).

In sum, this study argues that the teachers' approach to teaching was only partly affected by the format and content of IELTS. Instead, the teaching practice was strongly affected by the teachers' beliefs and learners' expectations, which is in line with what Alderson & Hamp-Lyons (1996) have posited. The teachers seemed to tailor teaching activities and their approach to the learners' individual differences to ensure the positive outcome of their teaching (i.e. learners achieving a high IELTS score). It appeared that IELTS was treated as a context in which materials and teaching activities were designed around the test format and content; however, it is argued that this was not a negative teach-to-the-test washback (Buck, 1988). Rather, this design feature helped to meet learners' expectations and matched the teachers' beliefs of effective language teaching. In other words, IELTS was regarded as a context or an anchoring mark that helped frame the teaching approaches, but the outcome was learners' development of language skills as measured through their IELTS score.

## 7.4 Impact of IELTS on teachers' lives

Previous research often focused on the impact of the language test at the micro level such as effects on learning and teaching in the classroom (Cheng, 2005). The results of this study provide evidence that the impact went beyond teaching and into the teachers' broader lives.

### 7.4.1 Positive impact on IELTS teachers' profession

The interview responses show that teachers perceived the teaching of IELTS courses as a tool to maintain and develop their English language proficiency. These results are notable because it is often perceived that the major goal of teaching these courses is to prepare learners for achieving a high IELTS score. However, teachers in this study claimed their own proficiency as an extra benefit of teaching the courses. For example, Nam (junior full-time university lecturer) explained that he treated IELTS preparation courses as an opportunity to maintain his high English language proficiency due to the fact that he could not enhance his language skills with the low proficiency English classes he was teaching at his university. Meanwhile, Hung (senior full-time university lecturer and administrator) stated that he benefited significantly from teaching these courses because his English language proficiency improved significantly as a result.

Another positive impact was in providing teachers with a self-learning opportunity to develop their teaching skills and knowledge. For instance, Nam reported that IELTS preparation courses were the testing site where he could apply what he had learned in his TESOL Master's program and practice classroom and time management, because he had autonomy in choosing the materials and teaching approach without being controlled by a curriculum. He perceived this as a self-learning opportunity and one of the ways to search for the best teaching practice. Similarly, Son (senior university lecturer) and Sa (junior freelance English teacher) said they could develop and fine-tune their teaching approach and knowledge through their IELTS preparation courses. These benefits are notable because they demonstrate that these private IELTS preparation courses function as a platform for practicing and developing language teaching skills and testing teaching beliefs.



Another benefit of these IELTS preparation courses was that all the teachers were highly motivated and devoted when designing and teaching these IELTS preparation courses. Hoa (associate professor) said she was very motivated to constantly modify her teaching approach and stay current with changes to the IELTS test structure to make sure her teaching effectiveness was high as reflected by her students' IELTS scores. Similarly, Sa (junior language centre IELTS teacher) and Hung (university lecturer) expressed that they always invested in their teaching by creating enjoyable English classes and/or paying closer attention to students' needs to tailor to individual differences. They all stated that the main reason for this was to retain and recruit learners. As a result, all teachers self-learned and reinforced their teaching for the purpose of increasing learner engagement in classroom activities and increasing learner achievements. These results indicated that teaching IELTS preparation courses was perceived as a driving force for the teachers' desire of professional development.

In addition, the results revealed that the teachers all wanted to remain popular as effective IELTS teachers in their areas. While teachers' perceptions of themselves as being popular seem subjective, their ability to recruit learners and maintain their IELTS classes over time could be seen as evidence of their 'popularity'. In addition, the teachers perceived their popularity as an important to their identity. For instance, Son (university lecturer) said it was easy for language teachers to start teaching IELTS preparation courses due to a high demand; however, it was more difficult to retain the students if the courses failed to meet expectations. Thus, they all invested in their teaching more seriously than expected. The teachers said being able to teach effective IELTS preparation courses and remain popular with learners established a good image of themselves among colleagues, who often believed that those who are able to teach IELTS preparation courses are competent language teachers. Thus, it appears that the teaching of the IELTS preparation courses creates a 'brand name' for the teachers who believe this is an indicator of their teaching effectiveness.

It should be noted that these teachers appeared to have a favourable opinion of IELTS and their own skills in IELTS training. They might have intended to generate a narrative which might help to sell the image of a reliable and popular IELTS trainer (even to the researchers) and most of them described themselves using the term "popularity" in many shades of its meaning. The fact that most IELTS trainers want to persuade more learners to join their team and thus maximise the chance to sustain the business might have led to the belief that they outperformed their colleagues and that they were popular among certain groups of learners. It could be true that, behind the stories they recounted on their IELTS training, there existed a subconscious tendency to think about potential customers, to the extent that, instead of showing the genuine unstable and inconsistent nature of being part-time IELTS trainers, they have put on the mask of a bright and "very popular" persona to the researchers. Whether this observation is valid or not cannot be drawn from the current body of study data, yet it is an undeniable preference to use positive terms and to popularise the skills and knowledge gained from IELTS training experience.

#### 7.4.2 Perceived benefits to IELTS teachers' lives

Apart from positively affecting the teachers' professional lives, teaching IELTS preparation courses was reported to impact on their lives outside the classroom. The first impact was the financial contribution – all teachers admitted that the income from these courses was higher than other general English classes. In addition, despite having a full-time job at their institutions (e.g. high schools and universities), all teachers taught IELTS preparation courses in order to gain a second income.



As reported above, Nam (junior university lecturer) stated that the income from teaching IELTS preparation courses helped as the income from his main job as a university lecturer was not sufficient to cover living expenses. These results show that the washback effect of IELTS went beyond the teaching in the classroom to the social aspect of the teachers' lives.

The second social impact from teaching IELTS preparation courses was in establishing a respected 'social status' for the teachers. All teachers reported that they earned high respect from their learners, learners' parents and colleagues through teaching these courses. Specifically, after their learners succeeded in obtaining high IELTS scores, they and their parents rated the teachers highly and recommended their excellent teaching skills to others. The teachers also said they created a circle of social relationships with their past IELTS learners and their parents (see Nam's comments above). These results indicated that the teaching of the IELTS test impacted positively on their social relationships in which teachers, learners and learners' parents became more socially connected, and this status contributed to their development of social capital which gave them a variety of benefits (Bourdieu, 1986).

Finally, teaching IELTS preparation courses enabled teachers to experience a sense of achievement. As reported above, a majority of learners who took part in these courses wanted to achieve their personal growth goals, such as entering a prestigious high school, applying for a job, getting promoted or studying abroad. Thus, these IELTS teachers perceived their teaching as a means of helping their learners achieve these goals. As the learners succeeded in their goals, the teachers often expressed satisfaction and considered it as their achievement too. In addition, the sense of achievement was not only from seeing the learners' success but also from the teachers' satisfaction of their own personal goals. For example, Sa (junior language centre IELTS teacher) created a private language centre to use income from the IELTS preparation courses to fund charitable activities, such as teaching sign language to deaf children.

In sum, this study provided evidence that the washback effect (i.e. dimensions of consequential validity) of IELTS was not limited to the teaching materials and teaching approach but expanded to the teachers' lives outside the classroom. Therefore, this study suggested that it is important to document the social impact of the language tests, especially those high-stakes tests, in order to fully understand the consequential validity of a test and teachers' perceptions of those tests both inside and outside the classroom (Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Messick, 1996). It would be interesting for future research to compare the views of teachers who have taught students to sit for different international high-stakes tests such as IELTS, TOEIC and TOEFL. This would help IELTS stakeholders, such as IELTS providers, in terms of policy and strategic planning for further increasing the popularity of IELTS.



## 8. Conclusion

This study attempted to provide a general landscape of the teaching of IELTS preparation courses in Central Vietnam, specifically focusing on describing characteristics of IELTS teachers and the impact of IELTS on their teaching practice, as well as life outside the classroom. The results revealed an overall positive impact of IELTS on the teachers in several aspects such as language proficiency, teaching skill and knowledge and continuing professional development, as well as on their finances and their lives.

With regard to the impact within the classroom, IELTS appeared to affect teaching content and partially teaching approaches. However, it should be noted that this effect was mediated by the teachers' autonomy and learners' individual differences (e.g. goals, proficiency, age and expectations). That is, IELTS preparation courses were the testing and practising site where teachers could experience and use whatever they believed was effective for language teaching and learning, which was not something they could undertake in their institutions due to the limitations of the curriculum. The results also provide evidence of the important role of IELTS as a gatekeeper for many individuals.

In essence, the study shows that IELTS has been quite popular in the general language assessment landscape in the context of Vietnamese society as reflected in its various uses of the test results, and that the teachers embrace the positive impact of IELTS on their teaching practice and their lives, both inside and outside the classroom.



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## Appendix 1: SURVEY (PHIẾU ĐIỀU TRA)

Dear Colleagues,

This survey is part of a funded research project which aims to explore the impact of the IELTS test on the Vietnamese IELTS teachers in Vietnam. The purpose of the study is to present the profile of IELTS teachers, identify the washback effect of the IELTS on teaching practices and their professional development and social lives.

If you are an English teacher who has or is currently teaching IELTS preparation courses in Central Vietnam, we would like to invite you take part in this survey. These IELTS courses may run in any form, such as your self-run courses or courses organised by an established institution or language centre.

This is not a test so there is no “right” or “wrong” answer and all the information you provide will be kept strictly anonymous. The survey will take about 45 minutes to complete.

Thank you very much for your participation!

### Statement of consent:

By clicking NEXT to proceed with the survey, you agree to voluntarily take part in the survey and for the data you will provide to be used for research purposes.

Kính gửi quýThầy/Cô,

Bảng câu hỏi này là một phần của dự án nghiên cứu nhằm tìm hiểu tác động của kì thi IELTS đối với giáo viên đang giảng dạy luyện thi IELTS tại Việt Nam. Mục tiêu của nghiên cứu là thống kê một số đặc điểm chung của giáo viên dạy IELTS ở Việt Nam, xác định ảnh hưởng của bài thi IELTS đối với việc giảng dạy của giáo viên, và nghiên cứu tác động của việc dạy luyện thi IELTS đối với sự phát triển chuyên môn của giáo viên.

Nếu Thầy/Cô là giáo viên tiếng Anh đã hoặc đang giảng dạy các khóa luyện thi IELTS tại Việt Nam, chúng tôi muốn mời Thầy/Cô tham gia khảo sát này. Các khóa học IELTS mà Thầy/Cô đang dạy có thể bao gồm nhiều hình thức, chẳng hạn như khóa học do Thầy/Cô tự mở tại nhà hoặc các khóa học do các trường đại học hoặc trung tâm ngôn ngữ quản lý.

Đây không phải là một bài kiểm tra vì vậy không có câu trả lời nào là ‘đúng’ hoặc ‘sai’. Mọi thông tin do quý Thầy/Cô cung cấp sẽ được giữ bí mật và chỉ dùng cho mục đích nghiên cứu.

Bảng câu hỏi này sẽ mất khoảng 45 phút để hoàn thành.

Rất cảm ơn sự hợp tác của quý Thầy/Cô.

### Part A. About yourself

#### Phần A. Về bản thân bạn

1. Your name (Tên của bạn)
2. Your age (years old) (Độ tuổi)
  - A. 15 – 17
  - B. 18 – 21
  - C. 22 – 25
  - D. 26 – 30
  - E. 30 – 35
  - F. Over35 (trên 35)



3. Your gender (giới tính)
  - A. Male (nam)
  - B. Female (nữ)
  - C. Other (khác)
  
4. Your original province of birth (Nơi sinh)
  - A. Hue
  - B. Da Nang
  - C. Nghe An
  - D. Quang Binh
  - E. Quang Tri
  - F. Quy Nhon
  - G. Phu Yen
  - H. Central Highlands area (các tỉnh Tây Nguyên)
  - I. Other (please specify) – Khác (xin nêu rõ)
  
5. Your highest qualification (Bằng cấp cao nhất)
  - A. PhD (Tiến sĩ)
  - B. Master (Thạc sĩ)
  - C. BA (Đại học)
  - D. Studying for a Bachelor at the time of data collection
  - E. Other (Khác)
  
6. Your qualification specialization (Chuyên môn)
  - A. TESOL or English teaching (Giảng dạy tiếng Anh)
  - B. Applied linguistics
  - C. English literature studies
  - D. International relations
  - E. Business administration
  - F. World history
  - G. Accountancy
  - H. Social development
  - I. Language studies (major in other languages)
  - J. International studies
  - K. Educational studies
  - L. English interpretation
  - M. Philosophy
  - N. Applied Science
  - O. Others (Khác) (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Your total IELTS band score (if relevant) (Điểm tổng IELTS nếu có)
  - A. 8.5 or above (8.5 hoặc cao hơn)
  - B. 8
  - C. 7.5
  - D. 7
  - E. 6.5
  - F. 6
  - G. had not taken IELTS before
  
8. Your TOEFL iBT, TOEFL paper-based, TOEFL ITP or TOEIC score (if relevant).  
Please specify the test and provide the score.  
Điểm các bài thi tiếng Anh khác (nếu có). Vui lòng nêu rõ loại bài thi và điểm tổng cộng.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_



9. Other English proficiency certificate (Bằng cấp/chứng chỉ tiếng Anh khác)

- A. Yes (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- B. No

10. Your teaching location (Nơi đang công tác)

- A. Hue
- B. Da Nang
- C. Nghe An
- D. Quang Binh
- E. Quang Tri
- F. Quy Nhon
- G. Phu Yen
- H. Central Highlands area (các tỉnh Tây Nguyên)
- I. Other (khác) (please specify)

11. The institution/school/centre where you are working now  
(Cơ quan/Trường/Trung tâm bạn đang làm việc hiện tại)

Please provide the name and the location  
(Vui lòng cung cấp tên và địa chỉ) \_\_\_\_\_

12. Your position at the institution? (Vị trí hiện tại ở cơ quan bạn công tác)

- A. Full-time language teacher
- B. Full-time academic manager
- C. Full-time academic manager and teacher
- D. Part-time language teacher
- E. Part-time academic manager/officer
- F. Others (vị trí khác) \_\_\_\_\_

13. Number of years you have been teaching English (Số năm kinh nghiệm dạy tiếng Anh)

- A. Less than a year (ít hơn 1 năm)
- B. 1– fewer than 2
- C. 2– fewer than 3
- D. 3– fewer than 4
- E. Over 4 years

14. Number of years you have been teaching IELTS

(Số năm kinh nghiệm dạy luyện thi IELTS)

- A. Less than a year (ít hơn 1 năm)
- B. 1– fewer than 2
- C. 2– fewer than 3
- D. 3– fewer than 4
- E. Over 4 years

15. Which IELTS modules have you been teaching?

(Loại bài thi IELTS nào bạn đã và đang dạy?)

- A. Academic (Học thuật)
- B. General training (Tổng quát)
- C. Both (Cả hai)

16. Have you been trained as an examiner for IELTS?

(Bạn đã từng tham gia tập huấn để làm giám khảo cho kì thi IELTS chưa?)

- A. Used to participate
- B. Never participated

If yes, please describe the training course (e.g., nature of the course, trainer, course provider etc.) (Nếu có vui lòng mô tả khoá tập huấn (ví dụ, nội dung của khoá tập huấn, người tập huấn, cơ quan cung cấp và tổ chức tập huấn v.v.) \_\_\_\_\_



17. Have you been trained as an IELTS teacher?

(Bạn đã từng là tham gia tập huấn để dạy luyện thi IELTS chưa?)

- A. Used to participate
- B. Never participated

If yes, please describe the training course (e.g., nature of the course, trainer, course provider etc.) (Nếu có vui lòng mô tả khoá tập huấn (ví dụ, nội dung của khoá tập huấn, người tập huấn, cơ quan cung cấp và tổ chức tập huấn v.v)\_\_\_\_\_

18. Have you been trained as an examiner for other international proficiency test(s)?

(Bạn đã từng tham gia tập huấn làm giám khảo cho các kỳ kiểm tra kỹ năng ngoại ngữ khác chưa?)

- A. Yes (Có)
- B. No (Không)
- C. If yes, please describe the training course (e.g., nature of the course, trainer, course provider etc.) (Nếu có vui lòng mô tả khoá tập huấn (ví dụ, nội dung của khoá tập huấn, người tập huấn, cơ quan cung cấp và tổ chức tập huấn v.v)\_\_\_\_\_

19. What are your primary motivations for teaching IELTS preparation courses?

(Động lực chính của bạn khi dạy các khoá luyện thi IELTS là gì?)

- A. Financial purposes (tài chính)
- B. Personal development (phát triển cá nhân)
- C. Required by your institution or employer (theo yêu cầu của cơ quan công tác)
- D. All of the above (Tất cả các điều trên)
- E. Other (khác - vui lòng ghi chi tiết) (Please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

## Part B. About your students (Về học viên IELTS của bạn)

Please tick all that apply. (Xin vui lòng chọn tất cả các câu trả lời phù hợp với bạn.)

20. Age range of your IELTS students (years old) (Độ tuổi của học viên IELTS của bạn)

- A. 10 – 15 years
- B. 16 – 18
- C. 19 – 22
- D. 23 – 25
- E. 26 – 30
- F. 31 – 35
- G. 36 – 40
- H. Over 40 years

21. Their current studying status (Tình trạng học tập của học viên IELTS của bạn)

- A. Secondary school students (Học sinh Cấp 2)
- B. High school students (Học sinh Cấp 3)
- C. University students (Sinh viên đại học)
- D. Workers or employees (Người đi làm)  
If so, please specify their current job/working status (Nếu vậy, vui lòng cung cấp thông tin về công việc hay vị trí hiện tại của học sinh IELTS của bạn\_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other (khác vui lòng ghi chi tiết) (Please specify)



22. Your IELTS students' highest qualification  
(Trình độ học vấn cao nhất của học viên IELTS của bạn)
- A. Secondary education (Trung học)
  - B. High school education (Phổ thông trung học)
  - C. BA (Đại học)
  - D. MA (Thạc sĩ)
  - E. PhD (Tiến sĩ)
23. What countries do your IELTS students intend to apply for studying admission?  
(Học sinh IELTS của bạn dự định đi du học ở nước nào?)
- A. Australia (Úc)
  - B. USA (Mỹ)
  - C. Canada
  - D. European countries (Các nước Châu Âu)
  - E. UK (Anh)
  - F. Philippines
  - G. Singapore
  - H. New Zealand
  - I. Korea (Hàn Quốc)
  - J. China (Trung Quốc)
  - K. Japan (Nhật Bản)
  - L. Other (Please specify) (Khác - vui lòng ghi chi tiết) \_\_\_\_\_
24. In what form are your IELTS classes delivered? Multiple answers are allowed.
- A. Face to face
  - B. Online (e.g., Zoom, Messenger and Skype)
  - C. Blended (both face-to-face and online)
  - D. One-on-one home tutoring
25. What are your students' main motivation for taking IELTS preparation courses?  
(Động lực chính khi học luyện thi IELTS của học viên của bạn là gì?)
- A. Studying abroad
  - B. Job application (Xin việc)
  - C. Graduation requirement by universities/colleges
  - D. Immigration (Nhập cư)
  - E. Requirement by the employers
  - F. Cross-cultural marriage
  - G. Others (Please specify) (Khác) \_\_\_\_\_

### Part C. About IELTS (Về bài thi IELTS)

26. Does the IELTS test influence your choice of the content of your IELTS preparation lessons (i.e., what you teach)? (Bạn có nghĩ rằng bài thi IELTS ảnh hưởng đến nội dung bài học trong lớp luyện thi IELTS của bạn hay không?)
- A. Yes (Có)
  - B. No (Không)
  - C. Don't know (Không biết)

If yes, please note here how the test influences your decisions on lesson content  
(Nếu có vui lòng mô tả bài thi IELTS ảnh hưởng thế nào đến việc bạn lựa chọn nội dung bài giảng) \_\_\_\_\_



27. Does the IELTS test influence your choice of methodology (i.e., the way you teach) for IELTS preparation lessons? (Bạn có nghĩ rằng bài thi IELTS ảnh hưởng đến phương pháp hay cách dạy luyện thi IELTS của bạn không?)
- A. Yes (Có)
  - B. No (Không)
  - C. Don't know (Không biết)

If yes, please note here how the test influences your teaching method  
(Nếu có vui lòng mô tả bài thi IELTS ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến phương pháp và cách giảng dạy của bạn) \_\_\_\_\_

28. Do you consider the IELTS test appropriate to students' English proficiency needs? (Bạn có nghĩ là rằng bài thi IELTS là phù hợp để đánh giá trình độ tiếng Anh của học viên không?)
- A. Yes (Có)
  - B. No (Không)

If yes, please specify which levels? (Nếu có, phù hợp cho cấp độ nào)

- A. Undergraduate level (Đại học)
  - B. Postgraduate level (Sau đại học)
  - C. Pre-university level (Dự bị đại học)
  - D. For vocational studies (Học nghề)
  - E. In their professional work (Công việc chuyên môn)
  - F. For immigration purposes (Nhập cư nước khác)
  - G. High school level
  - H. Not appropriate for the above levels
29. Does the IELTS provide positive motivation for your students?  
(Theo bạn, bài thi IELTS có tạo động lực tích cực để học tiếng Anh cho học viên không?)
- A. Yes (có)
  - B. No (không)
  - C. Don't know (không biết)

#### **Part D. About your IELTS preparation classes (Về các lớp luyện thi IELTS của bạn)**

30. Was your IELTS preparation part of a General English course or was it a separate course?  
(Lớp luyện thi IELTS của bạn có nằm trong chương trình dạy tiếng Anh tổng quát không hay là 1 khoá học riêng biệt?)
- A. As a part of general English course (Có, thuộc chương trình dạy tiếng Anh tổng quát)
  - B. As a separate course (Không, là khoá riêng biệt)
31. How frequently do you run the course per week?  
(Lớp IELTS của bạn dạy diễn ra bao nhiêu lần một tuần?)
- A. Once (một lần)
  - B. Twice (hai lần)
  - C. Three times (ba lần)
  - D. Over three times (please specify) (trên ba lần, vui lòng ghi chi tiết) \_\_\_\_\_
32. How long is each of your IELTS session in hour(s)?  
(Mỗi lớp học IELTS của bạn kéo dài trong mấy tiếng?)
- A. 1 hour
  - B. 1.5
  - C. 2
  - D. 2.5
  - E. 3 hours





33. How many students do you often have in one IELTS class? (Multiple answers allowed.)
- A. 1 – 5 .
  - B. 6 -10
  - C. 11 -15
  - D. 16 – 20
  - E. Over 20
34. What are the objectives of your IELTS classes? (Multiple answers allowed.)  
(Mục tiêu của các lớp IELTS bạn dạy là gì; bạn có thể chọn nhiều đáp án)
- A. Develop learners' general English proficiency (Phát triển kỹ năng tiếng Anh nói chung)
  - B. Train learners to take the IELTS test (Luyện học sinh để thi IELTS)
  - C. Others (please specify) (Khác, vui lòng ghi chi tiết)
35. What activities do you often use in your IELTS lessons? (Multiple answers are allowed)  
(Hoạt động nào bạn thường dùng trong lớp dạy IELTS của bạn? Bạn có thể chọn nhiều câu trả lời)
- A. Individual work (hoạt động cá nhân)
  - B. Pair work (làm cặp)
  - C. Group work (làm nhóm)
  - D. Whole-class work (hoạt động cả lớp)
  - E. Other (please describe how they look like) (khác, vui lòng mô tả những hoạt động này) \_\_\_\_\_
36. Do you often use all activities in the IELTS book intended for your IELTS course?  
(Bạn có thường sử dụng tất cả các hoạt động trong sách IELTS mà bạn dùng cho khoá học IELTS của bạn không?)
- A. Use and modify some of the activities from the IELTS books and add self-created or modified materials from other sources
  - B. Use and modify all activities in the IELTS books
  - C. Rarely used the activities in the IELTS books but used self-created or modified materials from other sources.
  - D. Often used all activities and also add additional material

*Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire.*

If you are interested in taking part in a follow-up interview, please provide your email address here. The interview will last for an hour at a place, time, and format (face-to-face or online) that are most convenient for you.

**Thank you!**

## Appendix 2: Interview questions prompts

### Part 1. Micro impact

#### *Impact on teaching approach*

1. What are the objectives of your IELTS classes?
2. What is your approach or teaching method in IELTS lessons?  
Please describe and give examples to illustrate.
3. What activities do you often use in your IELTS lessons? Why?
4. To what extent is your teaching methodology driven by the format of the IELTS test or other factors? Why?
5. Can you briefly describe your typical IELTS class (e.g., lesson plans)?
6. Do you focus on the content and format of the test to design and teach your IELTS lessons? Why?
7. In your IELTS lessons, do you teach all integrated skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) together or separately? Why?

#### *Impact on teaching content and materials*

1. What are the main materials/books used in your IELTS classes? Why?
2. Do you often use all activities in the IELTS book intended for your IELTS course or skip/change/adapt some? Why?
3. Were there any kinds of materials that you consistently and deliberately delete or miss out in IELTS textbooks? Explain which ones, why and how?
4. To what extent do the materials/books that you use reflect the actual IELTS tests? Explain how?
5. If you brought in supplementary materials, what skills did you hope to develop?
6. What are the attractions of the commercial publications that you are using?
7. How much influence do you feel the actual IELTS test has on the way you choose the content of your IELTS preparation courses? Explain why?

### Part 2. Macro impact

#### *Financial well-being*

1. What was/has been your main motivation for becoming an IELTS teacher?
2. What is the most important gain you have had since teaching the IELTS?
3. To what extent does teaching IELTS have an impact on your financial well-being?
4. How satisfied are you with the financial gain you have from teaching IELTS courses?
5. To what extent does this financial gain influence your professional well-being (e.g., how likely you are to stay in the teaching job; how motivated you are as a teacher, etc.)

#### *Professional and social status*

1. To what extent do you see yourself as similar and different from other English teachers who do not teach IELTS? Can you give us an example/situation when this happened?
2. To what extent do you think your students might see you differently because you teach IELTS courses? Can you give us an example/situation when this happened?
3. To what extent do you think your colleagues might see you differently because you teach IELTS courses? Can you give us an example/situation when this happened?
4. To what extent do you think parents/others in the society might see you differently because you teach IELTS courses? Give us an example/situation when this happened?
5. In general, how do you feel about being an IELTS teacher?

#### *Professional development and career prospects*

1. What do you do to become better at teaching IELTS courses? What professional activity has been most useful for you to improve your IELTS teaching?
2. To what extent does teaching IELTS courses have an impact on your overall development as an English teacher?
3. To what extent does teaching IELTS courses impact on your desire to self-develop as an English teacher? Does it push you to read more PD materials or look for more teaching materials etc.?



## Appendix 3: Commercial IELTS textbooks used in IELTS preparation courses

- Aish, F., & Tomlinson. (2012). *Grammar for IELTS*. Collins: English for IELTS.
- Allen, M., Powell, D. & Bolby, D. (2006). *IELTS Graduation: Student's book*. London, UK: Macmillan Education.
- Aucoin, B., Chawhan, L., Hiraishi, S., & Tholet, J. (2013). *IELTS Preparation and Practice: Reading and Writing* (2nd ed.). South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press.
- Bin, L. Y. (2017). *Basic IELTS Listening*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.
- Brook-Hart, G., & Jakeman, V. (2013). *Complete IELTS (Bands 4–5)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cole, V. (2012). *IELTS introduction study skills pack*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Cullen, P. (2008). *Vocabulary for IELTS*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- French, A., & Jakeman, V. (2014). *The Official Cambridge Guide*.
- Gang, D. H. (2011). *15 Day's Practice for IELTS Reading*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.
- Geyte, E., & Snelling, F. (2019). *Reading for IELTS*. Collins: CoBuild.
- Harrison, L., & Hutchison, S. (2013). *Bridge to IELTS: Pre-intermediate – intermediate band 3.5 to 4.5*. Hampshire: National Geographic Learning.
- Hopkins, D., & Cullen, P. (2006). *Cambridge Grammar for IELTS*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Humphreys, P., & Cullen, P. (2006). *IELTS Express*. London: Thompson.
- Jakeman, V., & McDowell, C. (1996). *Cambridge practice tests for IELTS 1*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Jakeman, V., & McDowell, C. (2008). *New insights into IELTS*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Jakeman, V., & McDowell, C. (2004). *Step Up to IELTS Self-study Student's Book*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Juan, Z. (2019). *Basic IELTS Reading*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.
- Lougheed, L. (2016). *IELTS strategies and tips*. New York: Barron's Educational Series.
- Lougheed, L. (2012). *Barron's IELTS practice exams*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.
- Marks, J. (2017). *IELTS advantage speaking and listening skills*. London: Delta Publishing.
- New Oriental Education & Technology Group IELTS Research Institute. (2017). *Lessons for IELTS: Advanced writing*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.



New Channel International Education Group. (2013). *IELTS listening recent actual test*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.

O'Dell, F., & McCarthy, M. (2017). *English Collocations in Use: Advanced*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ping, X. L., & Ting, H. (2011). *15 Days Practice for IELTS Listening*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.

Preshous, J., & Preshous, A. (2012). *IELTS foundation: Student's book*. London: Macmillan Education.

Rogers, B., & Kenny, N. (2016). *The complete guide to IELTS: student's book band 5.5–7+*. Boston, US: Cengage Learning.

Thorner, N., & Rogers, L. (2016). *Foundation IELTS Masterclass: Student's book*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2019). *Cambridge IELTS Tests 14*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2017). *Cambridge IELTS Tests 12*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2009). *Cambridge IELTS Tests 7*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2007). *Cambridge IELTS Tests 6*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2006). *Cambridge IELTS Tests 5*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2005). *Cambridge IELTS Tests 4*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2002). *Cambridge IELTS Tests 3*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2000). *Cambridge IELTS Tests 2*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Xi, W. Y. (2017). *Basic IELTS Writing*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.

Xia, W. H. (2011). *15 Days Practice for IELTS Writing*. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: The Ho Chi Minh General Publishing House.

Williams, A. (2012). *Writing for IELTS*. London: HarperCollins.

Williams, A. (2012). *Vocabulary for IELTS*. London: HarperCollins.

Wijayatilake, C., Hutchison, S., Crosthwaite, P., & De Souza, N. (2017). *Mindset for IELTS: Student book 1*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wyatt, R. (2013). *Complete IELTS Band 6.5–7.5*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Young, D., Liew, N., Doornbusch, A., & Treasure, M. (2013). *IELTS preparation and Practice: Listening and Speaking* (3th ed.). South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press.



## Appendix 4: Tables of descriptive survey data

**Table 1: Specialisation of the teachers' formal education**

Specialisation	Frequency	%
TESOL or English teaching	113	82.4
Applied linguistics	8	5.8
English literature studies	4	2.9
International relations	2	1.4
Business administration	1	0.7
World history	1	0.7
Accountancy	1	0.7
Social development	1	0.7
Language studies (major in other languages)	1	0.7
International studies	1	0.7
Educational studies	1	0.7
English interpretation	1	0.7
Philosophy	1	0.7
Applied science	1	0.7

**Table 2: Teachers' formal education**

Highest qualification	Frequency	%
PhD degree	12	8.7
Master's degree	74	54.0
Bachelor's degree	49	35.7
Studying for a Bachelor at the time of data collection	2	1.4

**Table 3: Teachers' English language proficiency**

Average IELTS band score	Frequency	%
8.5 or above	9	6.5
8	19	13.8
7.5	29	21.1
7	29	21.1
6.5	28	20.4
6	3	2.1
Not yet taken IELTS before	20	14.0

**Table 4: Participants' main employment type**

Status	Frequency	%
Full-time language teacher	99	72.2
Full-time academic manager	16	11.6
Full-time academic manager and teacher	2	1.4
Part-time language teacher	19	13.8
Part-time academic manager/officer	1	0.7

**Table 5: IELTS teachers' training experiences**

	Training for an IELTS teacher		Training for an IELTS examiner	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Used to participate	22	14.0	28	16.0
Never participated	115	85.9	109	83.9



**Table 6: Years of teaching English and IELTS**

Length of language teaching (years)	Teaching English		Teaching IELTS	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Less than a year	2	1.4	6	4.3
1– fewer than 2	18	13.1	51	37.2
2– fewer than 3	7	5.1	17	12.4
3– fewer than 4	8	5.8	17	12.4
Over 4 years	102	74.4	46	33.5

**Table 7: IELTS teaching modules**

Teaching modules	Frequency	%
Academic	94	68.6
General training	15	10.9
Both academic and general training	28	20.4

**Table 8: Age range of IELTS students and their formal education**

Range in age (years)	Frequency	%
10 – 15 years	29	6.4
16 – 18	96	21.1
19 – 22	109	24.0
23 – 25	91	20.0
26 – 30	67	14.7
31 – 35	37	8.1
36 – 40	17	3.7
Over 40 years	7	1.5

**Table 9: IELTS learners' education and studying/working status**

Formal education			Studying / working status		
	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Secondary education	21	10.2	Secondary school students	48	13.4
High school education	50	24.3	High school students	104	29.2
BA	72	35.1	University students	113	31.7
MA	46	22.4	Workers or employees	91	25.5
PhD	16	7.8			

**Table 10: Teachers' report of learners' motivations for learning IELTS**

Motivation	Frequency	%
Studying abroad	126	80.3
Job application	75	20.8
Graduation requirement by universities/colleges	62	17.2
Immigration	46	12.8
Requirement by the employers	43	11.9
Cross-cultural marriage	7	1.9



**Table 11: Target countries for overseas studies**

Target country for overseas study	Frequency	%
Australia	110	22.7
USA	101	20.9
Canada	65	13.4
European countries	45	9.3
UK	44	9.1
Philippines	30	6.2
Singapore	28	5.8
New Zealand	25	5.1
Korea	19	3.9
China	4	0.8
Japan	3	0.6
Others	9	1.8

**Table 12: Teaching mode of IELTS preparation course**

Teaching mode	Frequency	%
Face-to-face	108	70.1
Online (e.g., Zoom, Messenger and Skype)	18	11.6
Blended (both face-to-face and online)	24	15.5
One-on-one home tutoring	4	2.6

**Table 13: Design of the IELTS preparation courses**

Design	Frequency	%
As part of a general English course	26	18.9
As separate courses	111	81.0

**Table 14: Facts about IELTS preparation courses**

Class size	%	IELTS sessions	%	IELTS session length	%
1 – 5 students	37.0	Once a week	3.8	1 hour	1.4
6 – 10	35.2	Twice a week	44.1	1.5	42.9
11 – 15	15.2	Three times	42.6	2	45.1
16 – 20	5.2	Over three times	9.3	2.5	3.7
Over 20 students	7.0			3 hours	6.6

**Table 15: Objectives of the IELTS courses from the teachers' point of view**

Objectives	Frequency	%
Develop learners' general English proficiency	53	38.6
Train learners to take the IELTS test	113	82.4
Other	3	1.7



**Table 16: Perceived appropriateness and reliability of the IELTS test for assessing English proficiency**

Teachers' perceptions	Frequency	%
Appropriate and reliable for assessing English proficiency	111	81.0
Appropriate for assessing proficiency at:		
Undergraduate level	102	74.4
Postgraduate level	84	61.3
Pre-university level	62	45.2
For vocational studies	19	13.8
In their professional work	49	35.7
For immigration purposes	54	39.4
High school level	2	1.4
Not appropriate for the above levels	2	1.4

**Table 17: Teachers' reports of positive motivation by the IELTS test**

Positive motivation created by the IELTS test	Frequency	%
Yes	110	80.2
No	15	10.9
Don't know	12	8.7

**Table 18: Perceived impact of the IELTS test on language teaching**

Perceived impact on:	Frequency	%
Teaching content	115	83.9
Teaching methodology	100	72.9
Everyday IELTS lessons	117	85.4

**Table 19: Use of activities in the commercial IELTS books**

Type of use	Frequency	%
Use and modify some of the activities from the IELTS books and add self-created or modified materials from other sources	83	61.0
Use and modify all activities in the IELTS books	14	10.2
Rarely used the activities in the IELTS books but used self-created or modified materials from other sources.	12	8.8
Often used all activities and also add additional material	27	19.8

**Table 20: Activities often used in the IELTS lessons**

Type of work	Frequency	%
Individual work	114	83.2
Pair work	93	67.8
Group work	73	53.2
Whole-class work	67	48.9

**Table 21: Skills in which supplementary materials were added**

Type of activity	Frequency	%
Writing	78	56.9
Vocabulary	78	56.9
Listening	73	53.2
Speaking	69	50.3
Reading	68	49.6
Grammar	67	48.9
Pronunciation	4	2.9