

IDENTIFYING READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES OF IELTS LEARNERS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract: A widely accepted indicator of English competence, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) evaluates applicants in four essential language skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Of these, many test-takers find the reading component to be particularly difficult. This study aims to pinpoint the typical reading comprehension issues that IELTS test takers encounter and offer workable solutions. The study collects qualitative and quantitative data from IELTS test takers and teachers using a mixed-methods methodology. Lexical restrictions, ineffective reading techniques, inferencing difficulties, and time management problems are the main difficulties noted. In order to address these issues, this research investigates instructional strategies like cognitive skill development, strategic reading training, and organized vocabulary enhancement. The results help to enhance IELTS preparation strategies and provide useful advice for teachers and students alike.

Keywords: IELTS, reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, skimming, scanning, test-taking strategies

1. Introduction

The IELTS exam evaluates reading comprehension, a crucial ability that requires applicants to comprehend and evaluate difficult materials within time limits. A variety of abilities are assessed in the reading portions of the IELTS Academic and General Training exam, including as recognizing implicit meaning, comprehending logical reasoning, scanning for details, and skimming for important concepts (Alderson, 2000). Deficits in one or more of these areas, which frequently result from linguistic, cognitive, and psychological impediments, make it difficult for many test-takers to obtain high band scores (Grabe, 2009).

The most common reading comprehension issues that IELTS test takers encounter will be examined in this study, along with their underlying causes and evidence-based remedies. The following research questions serve as a guide for the study:

1. What are the main reading comprehension issues that IELTS test takers face?
2. What cognitive and linguistic elements play a role in these challenges?
3. What tactics can be used to raise reading scores on the IELTS?

By addressing these issues, this study offers information that can guide better IELTS training plans and language learner teaching strategies.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are used in this study's mixed-methods approach. Data from IELTS students and teachers was gathered by surveys, structured interviews, and reading evaluations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). A thorough grasp of reading comprehension issues and their root causes is made possible by the combination of both data types.

2.2

Participants

Thirty IELTS teachers with expertise tutoring students for the reading section and 150 IELTS test-takers at different skill levels participated in the study. To evaluate differences in comprehension difficulties, the students were divided into groups according to their initial IELTS reading band scores. Online forums and IELTS preparation facilities were used to find participants.

2.3 Data Collection Methods

Several data collection tools were used to produce a solid dataset:

1. **Surveys:** In order to determine self-reported reading comprehension issues and test-taking techniques, participants filled out prepared questionnaires (Dörnyei, 2003). To guarantee depth of understanding, the poll had both closed-ended and open-ended questions.
2. **Reading Assessments:** To gauge comprehension skills and identify problem areas, IELTS-style reading passages were given out. To identify patterns in areas of poor performance, scores were examined.
3. **Interviews:** IELTS teachers participated in semi-structured interviews that provide light on typical student difficulties and successful teaching techniques. Teachers were questioned regarding typical errors, gaps in instruction, and suggested teaching strategies.

2.4 Data Analysis

In order to identify patterns of difficulty, statistical procedures like descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were used to evaluate quantitative data from reading evaluations. To find reoccurring problems and solutions, theme analysis was applied to qualitative data from surveys and interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Validity and dependability were established by cross-examining the results.

3. Results

3.1 Common Reading Comprehension Difficulties

3.1.1 Vocabulary Limitations

A sizable percentage of interviewees said they had trouble understanding complicated jargon, especially technical and academic phrases. Slower reading rates and lower comprehension accuracy were linked to a lack of vocabulary (Nation, 2001).

3.1.2 Problems with Time Management

Many participants found it difficult to meet the 60-minute time limit for answering 40 questions in the

IELTS reading section. Incomplete responses were frequently the consequence of poor time management (Weir, 2005).

3.1.3 Skimming and Scanning Deficiencies

Numerous students found it difficult to effectively scan for specific information and skim for important ideas, which resulted in ineffective reading practices and an excessive amount of time spent on individual sections (Grabe & Stoller, 2019).

3.1.4 Challenges with Inferencing
Answering True/False/Not Given and Matching Headings questions, which call for comprehension of implicit meanings rather than explicit details, was challenging for test-takers with poor inferencing skills (Kintsch, 1998).

3.1.5 Difficulty with Complex Sentence Structures

For students, reading passages with intricate syntactic structures presented difficulties that frequently resulted in misunderstandings and inaccurate responses (Alderson, 2000).

3.2 Factors Contributing to Reading Comprehension Difficulties

3.2.1 Lack of Exposure to Academic Texts

It can be challenging for many IELTS test takers to comprehend complex concepts and language since they are not used to reading academic-style literature (Hyland, 2009).

3.2.2 Not Enough Instruction in Reading Techniques
According to the majority of test-takers, ineffective reading habits resulted from a lack of formal teaching in critical reading strategies like scanning, inferencing, and skimming (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

3.2.3 Psychological Barriers and Test Anxiety
Stress from exams had a detrimental effect on reading performance; many students reported having trouble focusing because of anxiety and time constraints (Horwitz et al., 1986).

3.2.4 Interference of First Languages
Decoding complex sentence patterns was more challenging for learners whose original languages differed greatly from English in syntax and grammar (Ellis, 1997).

4. Discussion

4.1 Strategies for Overcoming IELTS Reading Difficulties

4.1.1 Vocabulary Development

Learners should read widely and make use of resources like vocabulary diaries and spaced repetition systems (SRS) to overcome vocabulary gaps. High-frequency IELTS terms and collocations should be highlighted by teachers (Nation, 2013).

4.1.2 Training in Skimming and Scanning
Reading efficiency can be improved with targeted instruction on how to scan for specific information

and skim for important ideas. Learners can improve their accuracy and speed using timed practice sessions (Grabe, 2009).

4.1.3 Putting Inferencing Skills into Practice
By completing tasks that call for understanding logical linkages within texts, separating truth from opinion, and identifying suggested meanings, learners can be educated to infer meaning from context (Kintsch, 1998).

4.1.4 Contact with Diverse Text Formats
Frequent exposure to a variety of academic and general training texts, including newspaper stories, research papers, and opinion pieces, can improve comprehension skills and acquaint learners with various writing styles (Hyland, 2009).

4.1.5 Handling Test-Related Stress
Deep breathing and mindfulness are two relaxation methods that can help lower test anxiety. Test-takers' confidence and performance can also be enhanced by teaching them time management skills and how to prioritize easy questions first (Horwitz et al., 1986).

5. In conclusion

This study identifies the main reading comprehension issues that IELTS test takers encounter and offers workable solutions. IELTS reading performance can be considerably raised by addressing vocabulary deficiencies, developing strategic reading techniques, and controlling exam anxiety. Future studies should examine how well adaptive learning platforms and digital reading aids might improve IELTS applicants' reading comprehension abilities.

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