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Japanese Stakeholders' Perceptions of IELTS Writing and Speaking Tests
and their Impact on Communication and Achievement



Noriko Iwashita, Miyuki Sasaki, Annita Stell and Megan Yucel

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The English language curriculum in Japan has been revised to focus on enhancing the four skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing), and it is proposed that universities accept the results of commercial standardised proficiency tests, such as IELTS. This study explored the level of familiarity with IELTS among Japanese high school teachers, university lecturers and first year university students, and how IELTS is perceived among these stakeholders, with special attention paid to the impact of its inclusion in university entrance exams in the near future. The study allows further insights to be gained from these perceptions into the usefulness of IELTS in terms of students' readiness for L2 communication in an academic setting.

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Introduction

This study by Iwashita, Sasaki, Stell and Yucel 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 130 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), 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.

The research study documented in this report centres on test impact, looking at stakeholder perspectives on IELTS within the context of the Japanese educational system. In particular, views on IELTS acting as a bridge between high school English language education and communication for university study are explored, with a particular focus on speaking and writing skills. As the use of IELTS as a university entrance test is expected to grow in Japan, it is imperative that stakeholders understand what the test involves, and what part it can play in the educational transition for students (from school to subsequent study). Exploring what teachers and students know about IELTS – and how they perceive the test – forms a key part of this research. Using a mixed methods design, the study probed the views of university students, university teachers and high school teachers; including questionnaires and interviews with each group of informants.

So what did the research find? There appeared to be a discrepancy between teachers and students in terms of IELTS knowledge, with the former group found to be more informed than the latter overall. This was perhaps to be expected, particularly as many teachers will have taught courses as preparation for multiple high-stakes entrance tests, and will be more familiar with major tests as a result. Participants believed that IELTS assessed both speaking and writing adequately – a positive indictment of its use as a university entrance test considering that English communication is intended to be a key part of the student experience (as directed by recent Japanese government initiatives).

Furthermore, various perspectives on the use of IELTS as a university entrance test were discussed, with existing gaps between the current high school curriculum and English skills for university noted. The potential for positive washback was also observed by some participants, who viewed the IELTS test as being capable of acting as a conduit for Japanese high school curriculum modernisation and change. This would include updated language skills of particular relevance for contemporary learning and English communication, for example – a move that may be overdue.

These findings highlight the positive impact that IELTS can have, not just on test-takers but also on earlier stages of educational development. As IELTS continues to grow in Japan, it would be of particular use if students at the high school stage of learning English could be better aligned with what is subsequently required of them at university.

This research highlights the need to ensure that education is viewed as a continuous trajectory, and that each stage along the way should be sufficiently coordinated to allow English language students to gradually develop. The role IELTS can play in that trajectory, particularly as it expands further into the Japanese context, should not be overlooked.

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Japanese Stakeholders' Perceptions of IELTS Writing and Speaking Tests and their Impact on Communication and Achievement

Abstract

With the rapid movement to globalisation, a good command of English as the international language of the world has become essential. In response to this trend, the current English language curriculum in Japan has been revised to focus on enhancing the four skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing). In 2017, the Japanese Ministry of Education proposed that all universities should accept the results of commercial standardised proficiency tests, such as EIKEN, IELTS, and TOEFL.

In English language assessment research, there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of considering the views of stakeholders, such as students, teachers and administrators, in order to understand the social impact, current market focus and ethical implications of the test (e.g., Coleman et al., 2003; Hyatt, 2013). Consequently, many studies have investigated the impact IELTS has on IELTS preparation courses and academic success through collecting stakeholder perceptions. Most studies, however, have focused on the IELTS Writing Test or IELTS test performance in general, while few studies have examined the IELTS Speaking Test. Students are required to possess good writing and speaking skills to succeed in their academic study and beyond, and also different skills, knowledge and strategies for successful communication in writing and speaking.

For that reason, the current study investigated Japanese stakeholder perceptions of IELTS Writing and Speaking Tests, and their impact on communication and achievement in a given context. In particular, this study explored the level of familiarity with IELTS among high school teachers, university lecturers and first year university students, and how IELTS is perceived among these stakeholders, with special attention paid to the impact of its inclusion in university entrance exams in the near future. The study allows further insights to be gained from these perceptions into the usefulness of IELTS in terms of students' readiness for L2 communication in an academic setting.

In the study, stakeholder perceptions of IELTS were assessed via a questionnaire survey (n=98) and semi-structured interviews (n=19). The analyses of questionnaire survey and interview data show that while most teachers know about IELTS, some student participants had never heard of IELTS until they participated in the questionnaire survey.

Further, most participants found both Speaking and Writing Tasks challenging and beyond what current high school students are required to do in the English curriculum. Nevertheless, they consider IELTS test tasks to assess written and oral communication skills adequately, but their views on the inclusion of IELTS in university entrance exam are mixed. These findings are discussed concerning the interpretation of communication skills, a gap between the current English language curriculum and what is required in the IELTS test, and the potential washback effect on the curriculum.

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1 Introduction

The demand for English has only increased in recent decades as it has become the language of business, the internet, technology, science and even popular entertainment (Nunan, 2001). In response to this demand, English has become a compulsory subject for many students from a young age all over the world, with many being motivated to study and work abroad, thereby transitioning from a second language (L2) learner to user. From the year 2000 to 2012, the number of students traveling overseas for higher education increased from 2.1 million to 4.5 million students (OECD Publishing, 2014). In Australia alone, the number of international students enrolled in higher education increased 15% over the same period (Australian Government, 2018).

In Japan, the forces of globalisation have led to a greater recognition of the importance of cross-cultural communication over the past few years. In particular, preparing for the Tokyo Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games and the increased opportunity for global communication, a good command of English for Japanese people has become essential. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, international travel has slowed down and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo have been postponed, but virtual communication across the globe has not stopped. In fact, especially in the public health field, the sky-rocketing volume of circulation on social media has posed a number of challenges (Ratzan, Sommariva & Rauh, 2020). Many students have been forced to study online because of the travel restrictions. This trend is likely to continue across fields for some time. Therefore, in the post-pandemic era, it is assumed that the demand for effective communication in English will remain high in Japan.

In response to the trend described above, and to take action to address the long-standing concerns about the low English language ability levels of Japanese EFL learners (Sasaki, 2018; Sawaki, 2017), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (the MEXT, henceforth) proposed several initiatives to enhance balanced English language proficiency across the four skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing). One of the MEXT's initiatives is a reform of the current university entrance examination system with an aim to have a positive washback on instruction, especially for the upper secondary school level (MEXT, 2016).

In their initial plan, in 2021, the current Centre Exam for university entrance examinations was to be replaced by the Common Exam across the same subjects, and for English language, it was recommended that universities should consider accepting the results of commercial standardised proficiency tests. Eight commercial standardised tests were chosen. While the new Common Exam has been administered in 2021 as planned, after a number of consultations involving varied stakeholders, the initiative for utilising the commercial tests has been on hold until further notice (Koichi Ogyuda, MEXT, Japan, 1 November 2019, https://www.mext.go.jp/content/1422381_01.pdf). Nevertheless, the importance placed on the balanced development of English proficiency across the four skills has not gone off the agenda. It is expected, therefore, that this reform will have a huge impact on classroom practices in upper secondary schools if the initiative is implemented, as the English subtest of the new Common Exam currently only consists of listening and reading components.

Compared to TOEIC and EIKEN, the number of IELTS test-takers is still relatively small in Japan (<https://www.eiken.or.jp/ielts/en/merit/>), although it is increasing. This is because students and teachers do not seem as familiar with the IELTS testing system as with other commercial tests. However, with the government initiative now including IELTS, the number of test-takers is expected to grow.



To date, IELTS is known as “the world’s most popular English language proficiency test for higher education and global migration...two million tests [were] taken...last year [alone]” (IELTS, 2015). It is designed to assess learners’ L2 abilities on all four language skills – listening, reading, speaking, and writing – in countries where English is used for communication (IELTS, 2007, 2013). IELTS is considered to be a high-stakes test because it can have a significant impact on an individual’s academic and employment opportunities, as well as an effect on educational and social systems ranging from curriculum planning to professional registration (Taylor, 2005). For that reason, various aspects of IELTS and the issues surrounding the use of IELTS are researched continually in order to maintain high levels of validity and reliability.

Of the currently available IELTS studies, a considerable number focus directly on the effect IELTS preparation courses or scores have on academic success (e.g., Allen, 2017; Green, 2007; Schoepp & Garinger, 2016; Yang & Badger, 2015). In addition, there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of considering the views of stakeholders, such as students, teachers and administrators to understand the social impact, current market focus and ethical implications of the test (e.g., Coleman, Starfield & Hagan, 2003; Hyatt, 2013). As a result, many studies investigated the impact IELTS has on IELTS preparation courses and academic success through collecting stakeholder perceptions (e.g., Craven, 2012; Yucel, 2020). Most studies, however, focused on the IELTS Writing Test or IELTS test performance in general, with relatively few examining the IELTS Speaking Test. Students are required to possess effective writing and speaking skills to succeed in their academic study and they need specific skills, knowledge and strategies for successful communication in writing and speaking. For that reason, the present study investigates stakeholder perceptions of the IELTS Writing and Speaking Tests, and their impact on communication and achievement in a given context.

In particular, the study focuses on Japanese L1 students given the increasing number of IELTS test-takers in Japan, Japanese students’ ongoing interest in travelling overseas for study, and the aforementioned government initiative to include IELTS as one of the eight commercial tests to replace the Centre Exam (MEXT, 2019). The purpose of the study is three-fold. Firstly, we aim to understand stakeholders’ familiarity with IELTS and their perceptions of easiness and appropriateness in terms of topic, requirement, and the language that test-takers are expected to use to complete a task. Secondly, we intend to gain further insight into their perceptions of the use of IELTS scores for university entry. Third and finally, we investigate how they believed IELTS affects their academic success. It is hoped that the findings uncover stakeholder views on the usefulness of IELTS, focusing specifically on understanding attitudes towards how the test assesses the productive skills – speaking and writing.

2 Background to the study

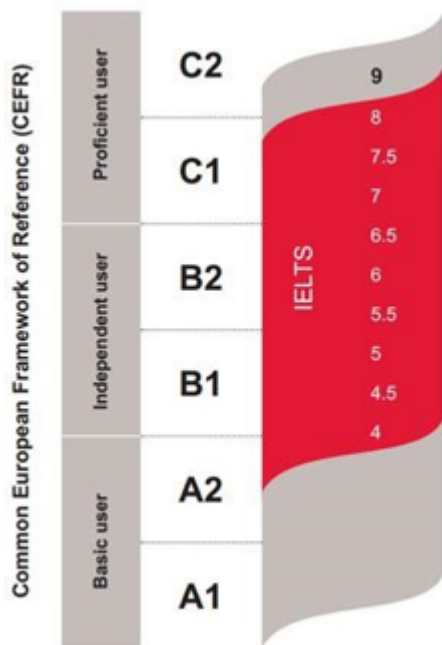
This study focuses on the perceptions and attitudes Japanese students and teachers have towards the IELTS Writing and Speaking Tests, and the effects the tests may have on their academic achievement and ability to communicate in an academic setting. Hence, the literature review focuses on test validity, which investigates the overall evaluation of the test’s appropriateness and adequacy to make inferences based on the test scores (Wainer & Braun, 2013) and considers social consequences of appropriate test use (Messick, 1989). In particular, the review features studies on predictive validity, the extent test scores can predict scores from a different criterion (Oliver, Vanderford & Grote, 2012), and consequential validity, the social consequences of tests and the influence testing has on learning and teaching practices (e.g., Saville & Hawkey, 2004). Washback (e.g., Andrews, 2004; Watanabe, 2004) will also be reviewed.

2.1 Predictive and consequential validity

Through ongoing development and research, IELTS has been considered to provide a good indication of students' ability to use the target language in a 'real life' setting (Badger & Yan, 2012). In particular, the written and/or oral L2 assessment tasks are commonly used to measure learners' ability to communicate in the target language outside the classroom setting (Pillar, 2011). IELTS consists of band scores from 1–9 (non to expert user), which give an indication of the learners' L2 abilities (IELTS, 2013). These tests are designed to prepare students for real-world communication in both spoken and written formats, as shown in the comparative Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) chart (see Figure 1).

The chart provides a general indication of learners' proficiency levels (IELTS, 2017). The speaking test, comprising three parts, assesses learners' ability to share information/opinions and describe events in an interview situation. This provides an indication of the learners' ability to communicate in the target language. The academic writing test (in IELTS Academic) consists of two tasks that aim to assess the learners' ability to organise and interpret information, present and justify views on particular topics in the appropriate writing style. The topics chosen are suitable for students entering university studies and/or professional registration (IELTS, 2007).

Figure 1: Comparing IELTS with CEFR (IELTS, 2017)



A considerable volume of research on IELTS validity has investigated the extent to which IELTS tests scores predict students' success in their university studies (e.g., Dooley & Oliver, 2002; Feast, 2002; Moore & Morton, 2005; Woodrow, 2006). For example, Moore and Morton (2005) analysed the types of writing needed for IELTS and university study. The rubrics for Task 2 of the IELTS Academic Writing Test were compared to a corpus of 155 assignment tasks from two universities in Australia. The findings showed similarities, but also prominent differences between the two writing tasks. Dooley and Oliver (2002) investigated the predictive validity of IELTS tests to determine whether it could be an indicator for future academic success. The students' IELTS scores and semester-weighted averages (SWAs) were used to determine whether there were any relationships. The data analysis revealed that, apart from proficiency level, there were other factors, such as motivation, language background and financial support, which contributed to students' academic success.



These results are similar to the findings of Feast's study (2002) which also investigated the predictive validity of IELTS through examining whether individual differences (e.g., age, nationality, degree), IELTS scores and Grade Point Average (GPA) could be an indicator of future academic success. The additional use of qualitative research methods for both studies might have provided further information on the other factors which influence academic success, but the data analysis was undertaken with quantitative analysis only.

Some research on the predictive validity of tests also explored the relationship certain proficiency and/or placement tests had on stakeholders' communicative competence in various contexts (e.g., Kamiya, 2017; Koys, 2009, 2010; Kramer et al., 2002; Serici & Talento-Miller, 2006; Talento-Miller, 2009). Many of these studies showed promising results for the predictive validity of the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT), which assesses stakeholders' skills in written English for admission to a graduate management program (GMAC, 2016). For instance, Koys (2010) investigated the predictive validity of GMAT for 75 non-U.S. students through analysing the students' academic grades and correlating the GMAT results with the business school's GPA. The findings demonstrated that GMAT was a valid predictor for non-U.S. students' academic performance. Talento-Miller and Serici (2006) also evaluated the predictive validity of GMAT through examining the admissions data and first-year GPA data. It was shown that the GMAT verbal and quantitative scores had significant predictive validity, whereas the GMAT analytical writing scores were low.

A few studies investigated the predictive validity of certain skills tests for academic success (e.g., Kramer et al, 2002; Zierke, 2014). For example, Kramer et al. (2002) examined the validity of a written knowledge test of skills for performance on an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) for postgraduate training practice. The results showed that the knowledge test of skills did reflect the OSCE; however, they also revealed that there was no substitute for direct observations of learners' skills.

In the context of the MEXT's initiative of university entrance examination reform in Japan, Kamiya (2017) investigated to what extent the score of the Centre Exam and TOEFL Junior Comprehensive (JC) (which was listed as one of the prospective commercial English tests of four skills at that time) correlate with each other and to what extent their test constructs overlap from the viewpoint of L2 competence structure. Students in the final year of one of the nine Japanese senior high schools selected for the study took the Centre Exam and JC (n=144). The results showed a high correlation between the Centre Exam and JC, indicating JC could replace the Centre Exam. Further, exploratory factor analyses revealed that the two scores of the reading and listening section of the Centre Exam and four scores of the reading, listening, speaking and writing sections of JC measure a single construct. The result poses the question of whether, in order to assess learners' English proficiency, all four skills are required to be assessed. Nevertheless, Kamiya (2017) cautioned that the findings do not indicate the current format of the Centre Exam (i.e., only reading and listening) is sufficient to measure test-takers' general proficiency. However, if the washback effect of a high-stakes test on the secondary school curriculum test tasks is considered, the inclusion of all four skills for the university entrance examination should be recommended to foster communicative skills in a balanced manner.



2.2 Stakeholder perceptions

There has been growing interest in research on different stakeholder perceptions (i.e., teachers, students, test administrators) to determine the consequential and predictive validity of tests and training courses. Stakeholders can provide a strong insight into the overall predictive validity of a test, along with how improvements can be made to maintain effective communicative competence in various academic (and professional) settings (Lee & Greene, 2007).

A few validation studies on proficiency tests focused on a country-specific perspective. These studies aimed to evaluate how different tests can impact the language education in different countries. Incorporating stakeholder views was well suggested in the literature drawing on the unitary concept of test validity (Messick, 1989) and argument-based approaches to test validation proposed by Bachman and Palmer (2010) in relation to impact and consequence of test use.

For example, an earlier study by Hyatt and Brooks (2006) investigated stakeholder perceptions of IELTS as an entry requirement for higher education in the UK. The study aimed to determine the impact IELTS had on the university admissions process and to gain further insight into the stakeholders' perceptions. The interview data revealed that many of the respondents did not have a clear understanding of the content and process of IELTS, emphasising the need for awareness-raising. There were a number of concerns raised by the staff about the increasing workload and time pressure for teaching and marking. Some respondents also mentioned how the test may be scored unfairly as the rubrics require a qualitative value of judgement.

Moore, Mahony and Stroupe (2012), on the other hand, examined the impact IELTS had in Cambodia through the perspective of various stakeholders on a larger scale. Questionnaire data were collected from 200 test-takers, 100 test preparation students, and 10 teachers, while interview data were collected from five (5) examiners, five (5) parents of test-takers, 10 embassy staff, 10 local employers and 10 Cambodian graduates. There were also observations made of three IELTS preparation classes. The findings revealed the Cambodian students completed IELTS for overseas study and more world knowledge, but there were also issues related to equity, as the IELTS test was too expensive for the majority of test-takers. The teachers interviewed were also teaching the IELTS preparation courses, so they provided insight into how learning content aligned with the goals and objectives of the IELTS test. While this study examined a less-researched context, the stakeholders were all closely connected with the IELTS test, which made it difficult to gain the perspectives of the general population in Cambodia.

More recently, Green (2014) investigated stakeholder perceptions of the Test of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) (<https://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/association/products/>) with a nationwide survey administered to 3,868 students and 423 teachers at upper secondary schools and 19 lecturers at a private university in Japan. TEAP is an academic English language proficiency test developed by the same organisation which developed EIKEN, in collaboration with a private university in Japan. The four-skills test aims to assess the academic English skills which are required at university. It has two modes: TEAP CBT (computer-based test) and TEAP pen-and-paper format for reading and listening, but the format of speaking and writing are the same. As both TEAP and TEAP CBT are geared toward Japanese secondary school students, their test constructs follow the MEXT guidelines for the English language curriculum (Taylor, 2014).



Green's study was a part of a validation study of a new standardised commercial EAP test for university admissions. The findings of the survey and interviews revealed several important insights into the current status of ELT at the upper secondary school levels and introduction of the TEAP test for university entrance examination. The findings included: 1) the enhancement of reading skills was prioritised in current EFL practice at the upper secondary school level due to the skills included in the Centre Exam; 2) both secondary school teachers and students recognised the importance of developing four skills in a balanced manner for their future study at university; 3) overall, stakeholders were positive about the MEXT initiative to reform the current university entrance examination to include four skills; and 4) the potential positive impact of the entrance examination reform on current practice. Considering the format of TEAP and its purpose and construct, TEAP appeared to have a lot of commonalities with the IELTS test. The study findings have some implications for IELTS, as IELTS has been listed as one of the eight commercial tests which could be used for university admission in place of the Centre Exam if the MEXT initiative is implemented. However, compared with TEAP, IELTS was less known in Japan, and it was not clear whether similar findings to this study may be yielded for the IELTS test.

Sawaki (2017) investigated university lecturers' views on the use of L1 and L2 and language activities involving reading, listening, speaking, and writing in English in content courses and on a four-skill English language test for student admission. Six lecturers who teach or have taught mathematics and earth sciences at a private university in Tokyo were invited to participate in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The qualitative analyses of the interview data revealed that the lecturers in the two disciplines shared similar views on the importance of reading ability for satisfactory completion of content courses and language use tasks requiring listening, speaking and writing at the undergraduate level. They also believed the requirement for advanced academic English demands the involvement of all four skills at the graduate level. On the whole, the participants were positive about the MEXT initiative of introducing four-skill English language assessment to the university entrance examination.

In relation to IELTS tests, an increasing amount of research has been conducted on the relationship between IELTS scores and academic achievement, along with the use and interpretation of IELTS (e.g., Humphreys et al., 2012; Rea-Dickins, Kiely & Yu, 2007). Some studies also explored the views of students or teachers to determine the test validity; this was notably conducted through a combination of mixed research methods (e.g., Coleman, Starfield & Hagan, 2003; Humphreys et al., 2012; Hyatt, 2013; Lloyd-Jones, Neame & Medaney, 2012; Mickan & Motteram, 2009; Rea-Dickins et al., 2007).

Saville and Hawkey (2004) conducted an IELTS impact study which is an example of an ongoing test consultation and validation program that investigates washback on teaching materials. It was conducted to help the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) identify the social consequences of the test and understand the different roles, responsibilities and attitudes involved in the test. This was done to identify targets for change in IELTS teaching material development. Understanding stakeholder views on teaching materials provided an insight into the validity of the test. The authors focused on discussing the development of the instruments (i.e., survey) used for data collection over the various stages and phases of the continuous project. It provided early washback and impact evidence from the pilot tests conducted, which evaluated test practice and language teaching books. These findings highlighted how stakeholder perceptions can provide constructive feedback on how IELTS teaching and preparation materials can be developed.



Coleman et al. (2003) conducted a large-scale survey with an additional small-scale interview to gain the views of university students and staff on IELTS. Data were collected from students and staff in Australia, the UK and China; it was noted, however, that Chinese participants were not interviewed. The survey was used to collect factorial and perceptual information about the participants in relation to the overall IELTS test; interviews were conducted to obtain further insights into the themes found in the surveys. The findings revealed the similarities and differences in student and staff beliefs about the test and university cut scores.

Rea-Dickins et al. (2007) focused on successful IELTS students' views on the impact IELTS had on shaping their linguistic and learning identity. This study focused on the academic and affective impacts of IELTS for postgraduate students in the UK. Academic staff interviews (n=16) were also conducted to obtain different perspectives on the topic. Instead of surveys, learning journals were used to provide further insight into student perspectives. The findings showed a connection between IELTS profiles and success at university.


Humphreys et al. (2012) conducted a large-scale study in Australia examining first semester international students' perspectives through data gathered from IELTS test scores and group interviews. The students' GPA results and biodata were also taken from the university database. The IELTS tests and interviews were conducted at the beginning (Test 1) and end of the semester (Test 2) to obtain a better indication of the participants' level of proficiency in English. The findings revealed student perspectives of each section of the IELTS test, as well as how these views slightly changed from the beginning to end of semester. Strong correlations were also found between the receptive skills tests (listening and reading) and students' GPA in predicting academic success.

2.3 Impact of IELTS Writing

Most studies introduced above also focused on determining the predictive or consequential validity of certain sections on IELTS, such as Speaking and Writing through collecting perceptions of different stakeholders (e.g., Green, 2007; Moore & Morton, 2007; Rao, McPherson, Chand & Khan, 2003).

Moore and Morton (2007) examined the validity of IELTS Writing Task 2 by comparing it with a range of university assignments from undergraduate and postgraduate courses. In total, 155 assignment tasks were analysed and compared with 20 IELTS Task 2 items. Additional interviews were conducted with academic staff to gain an alternative view, as well as their feedback on the suitability of IELTS Writing Tests. The findings revealed different writing requirements across (and within) different courses. Interviews with students who had completed IELTS could have provided another view on the issue, but they were not conducted in the study.

Green (2007) investigated the views of students on IELTS Academic Writing to compare the washback from different IELTS preparation courses designed for UK university entry. Data were collected from 476 participants who completed both IELTS Writing Tasks before and after the preparation course. To make a comparison, the different classes were categorised into three types of preparation courses for all participants: IELTS preparation, pre-sessional EAP and combination of the two. An IELTS test was administered twice and used as the pre- and post-test. Their scores were then compared and triangulated with the data obtained from the questionnaire survey and course papers to determine washback. The findings revealed no significant improvements by the students in any preparation course.



Similarly, Allen (2017) and Rao et al. (2003) investigated the effect that preparation courses had on students' IELTS performance. Allen (2017) collected data from 190 first-year Japanese undergraduates' performance on the IELTS test to examine the factors that influenced this performance. The results revealed a strong washback effect of current university entrance exams that helped explain the jagged profiles (skills imbalance) identified from the IELTS test. The test-taker perceptions also showed that the preparation course motivated them to practise writing and speaking which were found to be much weaker than reading and listening. Although these findings are very useful for preparing Japanese students for an IELTS exam, the investigation was only concerned with the washback effect of the participants' learning experience and preparation course, not L2 communication. Rao et al. (2003) however, focused on IELTS preparation for both the IELTS Writing and Reading Tests. An IELTS test was administered to 60 L2 learners with different native languages and professional backgrounds, twice before and after completing the course to determine the course effect. To obtain their views on the program, a questionnaire was given to students at the start and an open-ended interview session at the end. It explored the learners' views on the effect preparation courses had towards their learning. Overall, the findings of these two studies showed the preparation course made a positive difference to test performance.

To summarise, many studies introduced above focused particularly on the impact IELTS and other tests, such as GMAT, have on the success of university studies (e.g., Coleman et al., 2003; Dooley & Oliver, 2002; Moore & Morton, 2007; Rea-Dickins et al., 2007). Some were also concerned with the impact IELTS preparation courses or teaching materials had on IELTS scores (e.g., Allen, 2017; Green, 2007; Rao et al., 2003; Saville & Hawkey, 2004; Yucel & Iwashita, 2016). It was also reported that most studies above focused on the IELTS Academic Writing test or IELTS in general, especially when investigating stakeholder opinions. A few studies investigated the predictive validity (Kamiya, 2017) and stakeholder views on the four-skills test in response to the MEXT initiative for university entrance examination reform, as well as the required skills for university study (Green, 2014; Sawaki, 2017). Considering the importance of both speaking and writing in an academic setting and also the approach to teaching English language skills in an EFL country like Japan (Sasaki, 2018), as well as the knowledge and strategies required for writing and speaking, collecting stakeholder views on both tests would provide a broader view of the impact IELTS has on students' L2 communication and their study in an academic setting.

3 Research questions

Building on previous research, this study aims to investigate the impact that the IELTS test might have on students' communication in an academic setting and their success in the context of MEXT's initiatives in university entrance examination reform. In an attempt to address the gap in the current literature, the study addresses the following research questions.

1. What are the Japanese students and teachers' level of familiarity with IELTS?
2. What are the perceptions of the IELTS Speaking Test tasks among the Japanese students and English language teachers in terms of their difficulty and their appropriateness for assessing communication skills?
3. What are the perceptions of IELTS Writing Test tasks among the Japanese students and English language teachers in terms of their easiness and their appropriateness for assessing communication skills?
4. To what extent do teachers and students view the IELTS Speaking and Writing tests as an appropriate measure for assessing communication?
5. What are teachers and students' views on the suitability of IELTS as an alternative to the current nationwide examination?

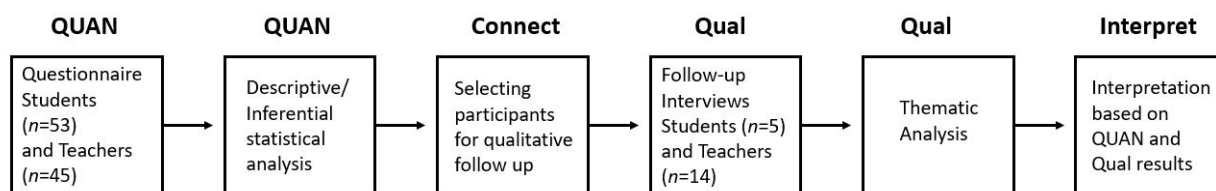
4 Methodology

The research questions were examined through soliciting stakeholder perceptions of the IELTS Writing and Speaking tests via a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. As past studies highlighted, stakeholder perceptions can provide insights into the impact of IELTS Writing and Speaking tests, as well as useful information on how IELTS can be developed further (e.g., Allen, 2017; Lloyd-Jones et al., 2012; Rao et al., 2003).

4.1 Research design

The study followed an explanatory design in order to increase our understanding of perceptions of the IELTS Writing and Speaking tests and their impact in the Japanese educational context. Figure 2 illustrates the research design for both quantitative (Quan) and qualitative (Qual) methods.

Figure 2: Explanatory design procedures



4.2 Participants

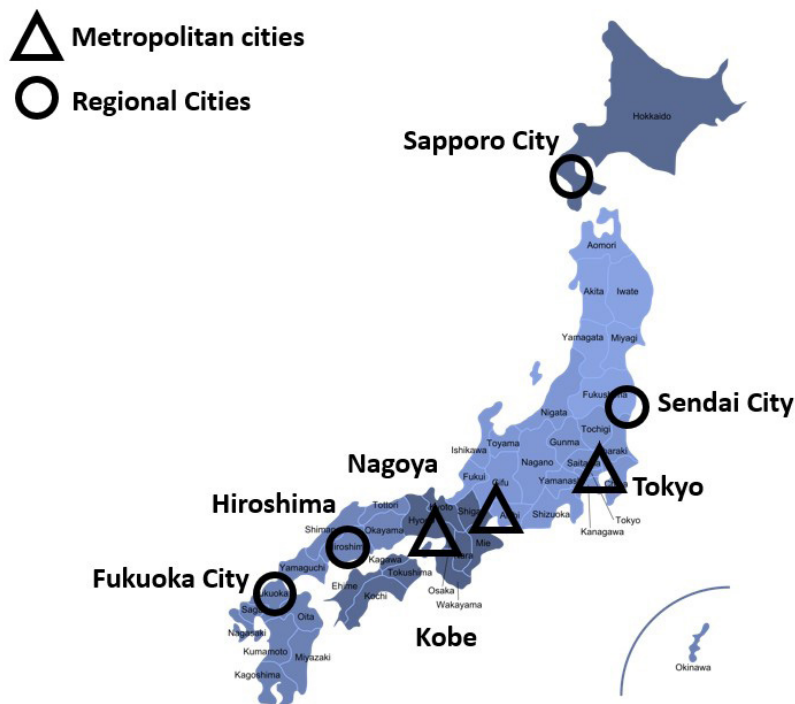
Participants comprised 53 native Japanese university students and 45 English language teachers from educational institutions in Japan. The English teachers were all Japanese citizens. In total, 31.63% of participants were male and 68.37% female, ranging in age from 15–25 years for students, and 31–45 years for teachers.

The native Japanese students (n=53) study at a public university in a large city in Japan. All participants were between 15 and 25 years. Of the 45 teachers, 40 had studied overseas, with the majority having studied in the US (45%) and Australia (40%). Appendix A presents more information about where they studied internationally.

For recruitment of teacher participants, invitations to secondary school teachers and university lecturers were sent through the authors' contacts. While secondary school teachers were expected to share their perspectives of IELTS as a test to assess communication skills in relation to the current English language curriculum and the MEXT initiative of university entrance examination reform, university lecturers were able to comment on the skills required to study at university. The English language teachers (n=45) had experience in a range of school settings: middle school (n=8, 15.56%), senior school (n=18, 33.33%), a combined junior and senior high school (n=13, 24.44%) and university (n=14, 26.67%). The regions varied for the teachers, from metropolitan cities (n=29, 54.55%) and regional central cities (n=2, 4.55%) to regional core cities with less than 300,000 people (n=11, 20.45%), and regional cities with less than 100,000 people (n=11, 20.45%). Figure 3 illustrates the areas where the different metropolitan cities and regional central cities are located.



Figure 3: Location of schools in both metropolitan and regional cities for teachers



Fifteen secondary school teachers and five students were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview (please refer to Appendix B for more detail).

4.3 Data collection procedure

As shown in Figure 2 above, data were collected in two stages (i.e., Questionnaire survey in Stage 1 and Semi-structured Interview in Stage 2). The purpose of the semi-structured interview was to gain further insights into stakeholder familiarity with, and views' on, the IELTS Speaking and Writing Tests.

4.3.1 Stage 1: Questionnaire Survey

Participants answered questions on the IELTS Speaking and Writing (Academic) tests. For those readers unfamiliar with these tests, a brief summary follows. The Speaking test is a three-part interview between a candidate and an examiner. Both short and long turns are elicited from the candidate over a period of 11–14 minutes. The Academic version of the Writing test is in two parts. In the first part, candidates are required to describe a visual, such as a graph, table, or diagram. The second part consists of a short essay written in response to a prompt.

All participants (n=98) were given a link to one of the online questionnaires through the survey creator, Survey Monkey. Before they started answering the question, they were asked to sign the consent form on the first page of the online survey. To avoid misunderstanding, the questionnaire was administered in Japanese. The average amount of time taken to complete the survey was approximately 12 minutes.



The purpose of the questionnaire was to examine the stakeholders' attitudes towards IELTS for everyday and academic use. To establish validity of the survey items, the questionnaire survey was designed through discussion with research team members before being translated into Japanese and piloted by a group of visiting Japanese teachers and students in Australia. Written and verbal feedback led to further revisions before the questionnaire survey for the main study was finalised.

Consisting of 45 items, the final version of the survey had 14 biodata items, and a combination of closed-ended, dichotomous "yes/no", Likert scale and check boxes questions. Options to provide open-ended short answers were included with the check boxes to give participants the chance to elaborate or share their opinions further.


The piloting and consultations with visiting Japanese teachers showed how many respondents had the same responses for the open-ended items. To reduce the duration of the survey, the open-ended items were revised into check boxes items; this was where the respondents were given the option to tick as many responses as they wanted and/or provide their own response in the "other" checkbox.

A variety of questions were included to gain an understanding of the teachers and students' views on IELTS. Yes/no items and check boxes questions focused on the stakeholders' familiarity with the format and content of IELTS. Likert scale questions, on the other hand, provided information on how IELTS Speaking and Writing tasks adequately assess test candidates' communication skills. These survey items provided further insight into how stakeholders perceive the communicative effectiveness of IELTS in comparison with other tests. For participants who were not very familiar with IELTS, sample writing and speaking tasks were shown to give them the opportunity to comment on the tests. The questionnaire with English translation is shown in Appendix C.

4.3.2 Stage 2: Semi-structured Interviews

After completing the questionnaire survey, five (5) students and 14 teachers from the same cohort (2 university lecturers, 11 secondary school teachers and 1 specialist school teacher) were interviewed to provide a further understanding of their views on the impact of IELTS. All participants who completed the questionnaire survey were invited for interview, and all participants who expressed their interests were interviewed. Since each interview was audio-recorded, participants were given pseudonyms and informed that all information provided would remain confidential to encourage them to share their past and current IELTS preparation and test-taking experiences, along with their perceptions of the IELTS test format and content. The interviews were 30 to 45 minutes in duration. Interviews were conducted in Japanese by the two authors who are native speakers of Japanese (Iwashita and Sasaki).

The question prompts were developed by the researchers first in English before being translated into Japanese. The questions included if respondents had taken an IELTS test and other commercial tests: IELTSについて知っていることを教えてください。(Please let me know what you know about IELTS.) IELTSの他にどんな英語能力試験を知っていますか。(What other commercial tests are you familiar with?) IELTSを受験したことがありますか。(Have you ever taken an IELTS test?) (see Appendix D). We asked questions related to commercial tests other than IELTS tests because the pilot study showed that many participants were not familiar with IELTS and often mentioned other commercial tests as a reference point in talking about IELTS. Questions such as "What other commercial tests are you familiar with?" were not intended to solicit participants' opinions about IELTS in comparison with other commercial tests.



After the interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim following the transcription guidelines (see Appendix E). In addition, a sub-group of students (n=7) at a public university in a large city, Japan, were invited to take an IELTS test to provide further insights into the impact of IELTS on their perception about written and spoken communication. They were third-year students taking an English Teacher Training course. All of them were planning to take teacher recruitment exams in their fourth year in order to become English teachers. These students also participated in the questionnaire survey referred to in the last section before and after they took IELTS, but their survey data were not included in the main analyses. The seven pre-service teachers completed an earlier version of the survey, although the questions asked were broadly similar. The data collected from these seven pre-service teachers were used to examine whether or not their experience of taking IELTS supported the data from the other participants.

4.4 Data analysis

The following sections describe the data analysis procedure used to address the five research questions. All five research questions were examined through the analyses of the survey and semi-structured interview data collected from all 98 participants.

4.4.1 Questionnaire survey

Descriptive statistical analysis (M, SD, range) was conducted on the close-ended responses, whereas the open-ended questions were coded and categorised according to the two main areas of communication which emerged from the data, English for academic and everyday use. For instance, while everyday use of language was connected to basic communication strategies and the ability to express personal opinions in different social settings, academic use of language referred to logical reasoning and formal registers. Excerpts 1 and 2 show examples of academic and everyday use found in the open-ended question responses in the questionnaire survey.

Excerpt 1 presents an example of how a statement was categorised as academic use, even though the participants did not explicitly focus on English. This participant, a teacher, focused on how the types of prompts associated with academic writing were presented in Task 1 of the IELTS Writing Test and how it would determine the difficulty of the task. These writing prompts are associated with academic writing. The teacher explained:

"グラフの要約と何かのプロセスの図の説明では、難易度が異なっていると思う。前者はすべての特徴を述べる必要がないので、何がmain featureかの判断力が必要だが、後者はプロセスをもれなく述べるだけのように感じるので比較的平易。" (*I think the difficulty level is different between the summary of the graph and the explanation of the diagram showing some process. The former does not need to describe all the features but requires to identify what the main features are. However, the latter is relatively easy because it feels like you are just describing the process completely.*)

Excerpt 2, however, can be categorised as everyday use. The student respondent focused on how discussion topics were relatable for Japanese students. Emphasis was placed on how the question could be answered based on their general knowledge about Japanese values. The student stated:

"昔と今で価値観の違いが日本においては生じていると思うので、思いつきやすい内容なのかと考えました。" (*I assume that there is a difference in value between the past and present in Japan, and so I thought it would be easy to think of [something to say for this topic].*)



4.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

For the transcribed semi-structured interview data (621 mins in total), each participant was assigned a code for confidentiality purposes. A thematic analysis was done on the transcribed data, where the interviews were coded and categorised by the first author (Iwashita) according to the themes identified in the questionnaires, along with any new themes found in the data, following the method reported in Yucel and Iwashita (2017). This method entailed analysing the responses qualitatively using content analysis (Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2016) in order to uncover the respondents' feelings about the test. From the data, responses linked by a common theme or idea were identified and placed into categories. This categorisation was inductive, with the coded categories coming directly from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) rather than from the literature. After a period of reflection, we re-read the transcripts, revised the codes and then recoded. To check the reliability of the coding while it was progressing, the second coder (Yucel) went through the codings. This additional check was used as a triangulation method to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the thematic analysis of the interview data. The categories that had been produced were re-examined and grouped conceptually before the data were loaded. After processing the data, comments that came under each code could be seen, which allowed themes to be identified in the interpretation of the data.

Seven overall themes were derived upon completion of the thematic analysis as shown in Table 1. These findings were triangulated with the questionnaire findings to gain a further understanding of this topic. The interview excerpts were translated and checked by a Japanese native speaker.

Table 1: Themes and codes identified in the interview data

Theme	Code
IELTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity (name and content) • Experience in taking an IELTS test • View on Speaking/Writing test tasks • Skills required to do well at IELTS Speaking/Writing tests • IELTS as a test to assess communication skills • Projected level • Preparing for an IELTS Test
Commercial tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity (name and content) • General comment on commercial tests • Experience in taking other commercial test(s) • Usefulness of commercial tests • Preparing for a commercial test
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of communication skills • Academic communication
Secondary school students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General language proficiency • Communication skills • Students' priority and/or interests
The MEXT initiative of reforming the current university entrance examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with the initiative • Possible inclusion of the eight commercial tests • Impact on the current English language curriculum • Social impact • A gap between commercial tests (incl. IELTS) and the current English language curriculum
The current English Language Curriculum for upper secondary school students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus
Other	

5 Results

5.1 RQ1. What are the Japanese students' and teachers' level of familiarity with IELTS?

Figure 4 shows that, in response to Question 15 (IELTSの存在についてご存じですか。 *Have you heard about IELTS?*), most students were less familiar with IELTS than teachers. Of the students, 88.67% stated that they were not familiar with IELTS, while only one teacher stated that he/she was unfamiliar. Based on the biodata, there was a strong correlation between studying abroad and being familiar with the IELTS test ($r = .772$).

Figure 4: Familiarity of IELTS for Japanese teachers and students (Q15)



5.1.1 Participants' views on IELTS

The participants who responded to Question 15 IELTSの存在についてご存じですか。 (*Have you heard about IELTS?*) with "yes" ($n=51$) were asked several additional IELTS-related questions to gain insights into their initial views on IELTS as a proficiency test. Figure 5 illustrates the mixed responses to the statement in Question 16 IELTSのテストの内容についてよく知っている。 (*I am very familiar with the content of the IELTS test*) amongst the 51 participants who affirmed their familiarity with IELTS in Question 15 – 46.67% of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar with the content, while 28.89% disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for teachers' and students' familiarity with IELTS (Q16)

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
Teachers	45	3.19	1.24	1	5
Students	6	2.17	0.89	1	4



Figure 5: Japanese teachers' and students' familiarity with the contents in IELTS (Q16)

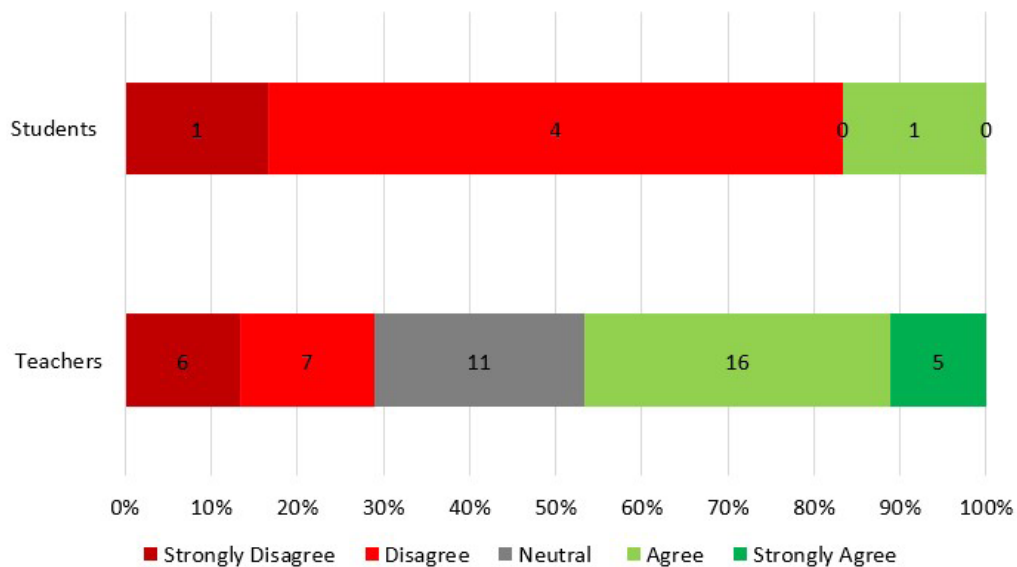


Table 3 summarises the responses from 47 out of 51 participants, who were familiar with IELTS. The frequency of statements for Question 17 (IELTS テスト、特にスピーキングとライティングテストについて、どんなことを知っていますか。What do you know about IELTS, in particular, Speaking and Writing tasks?) were presented with the total percentage for both teachers and students. On the whole, participants who were familiar with IELTS had a good understanding of various aspects of it, as approximately 40% of the participants who were familiar with IELTS ticked many of the statements in Question 17. It was also revealed that most respondents chose a number of statements to describe the different features of an IELTS test, while four only described IELTS as either a test that measures all four skills or communication skills.

Table 3: Summary of teachers and students' understanding of IELTS (n=47) (Q17)

Q 17	Statements to describe IELTS	Teachers (n= 45)	Students (n=2)	Total % (n=47)
	IELTS is a test that measures all four skills	28	2	63.83
	IELTS is a test that measures communication skills	23	2	53.19
	IELTS is a test needed when you study abroad	30	1	65.96
	IELTS is a test measures a candidate's overall English level	18	1	40.43
	IELTS is a test taken in a metropolitan examination centre	18	1	40.43
	IELTS is a test that has topics that range from professional to everyday	18	1	40.43
	The IELTS Speaking test is completed in an interview format with an interviewer	22	1	48.94
	The IELTS Speaking test has three parts	9	1	21.28
	The IELTS Speaking test requires more than everyday conversation to achieve a high score 18	18	1	40.43
	The IELTS Speaking test includes different length questions about a given topic	17	1	38.3
	The IELTS Speaking test requires you to express your own opinions in a logical manner	20	2	46.81
	The IELTS Writing test has two parts	20	1	44.68
	The IELTS Academic Writing has two tasks	15	1	34.04

The IELTS Academic Writing test gives you the opportunity to write English sentences	22	1	48.94
In the IELTS Writing test, you are required to understand and explain the contents of graphs and tables	16	1	36.17
In the IELTS Writing test, you must explain the process or procedure of things	13	1	29.79
In the IELTS Writing test, you are required to understand and explain the contents of graphs and tables	17	1	38.3
Other	4	0	8.51

It was revealed that fewer teachers knew what was included in the three parts of the IELTS Speaking Test (Question 17h) than in the IELTS Writing Test (Question 17i). The survey results were based on their personal experience of taking an IELTS test, as the nine teachers who did in fact know about the different parts in both the IELTS Speaking and Writing tests also selected "Yes" for taking an official IELTS test in the past (Question 19) (模擬試験以外の正規のIELTSを受験したことがありますか。Have you taken an official IELTS test (not a mock test)?). There was a slight contrast with the IELTS Writing Tasks, as an additional five teachers who had taken the IELTS test and six teachers who had not, were also familiar with the two writing tasks.

The semi-structured interview provided further information that studying or planning to study overseas was one of the main reasons for some teachers to know about the IELTS test. Also, some secondary school teachers had heard about it because of the inclusion of IELTS as one of the commercial tests that will be an alternative to the current Centre Exam.

IELTS seemed the least familiar test for most teachers and students. When they were asked what commercial test they were familiar with, almost everyone (regardless of their overseas study experience) said EIKEN, followed by TOEIC, and other tests developed in Japan such as GTEC. This is largely because many of our interview participants had taken EIKEN or another commercial test before, as shown in the excerpts below.

えーとね、名前を、知ったぐらいで、本当、あ、それがその英語の試験だっていうことを、その名前を聞いたときに分かったぐらいで、あとは、ほとんど知らなかったですね。内容とかについては、これもアンケートでお答えした以外は、知らなかったです。

(Well, I knew the name, but understood it is an English test, but that's all that I knew. I did not know anything about its content till I participated in the survey.)
(ID13_Secondary school teacher)

・・・イギリスの留学の時に必要だという、知識はあるんですけども、ただ、私イギリスに留学してたんですけど TOEFLでよかったので、はい。TOEFLを受験しました。内容については、すみません。はい。何も知りません。

(I knew IELTS is required to study in UK. Actually, I studied in UK, but TOEFL score was accepted and so I did take TOEFL. As for the content of IELTS, I am sorry, I don't know anything about it.) (ID15_University lecturer)

Compared with teachers (regardless of the level at which they taught), most student participants except those who were planning to study in the UK/Australia/NZ, had never heard of IELTS, although most were familiar with EIKEN and TOEIC. Out of the five first year university students who participated in the interview, four had never heard of IELTS until then, but had taken EIKEN or/and TOEIC and/or GTEC. The student who had heard of IELTS was planning to go to NZ as a working holiday maker, as can be seen below.

・・・なんかその、IELTSの存在を知ったのが、・・・夏休みぐらいかな。IELTSを、取った方が、その、仕事とかの中で、使えるからって言われて、・・・そこで知ったんです。(I heard of IELTS during summer holidays. I was told that if I took an IELTS Test, it would be helpful for me to find a job. That's why I learned about IELTS.)
(ID19_Student)

The responses from both teachers and students show that the IELTS test is associated with opportunities related to studying and/or working in English speaking countries.

5.2 RQ2. What are the perceptions of IELTS Speaking test tasks among the Japanese students and English language teachers in terms of their difficulty and their appropriateness for assessing communication skills?

To answer the question, all participants were asked to rate the degree of agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral, 5 = strongly agree) on the two statements in Questions 20, 22, and 24: 1) Part 1/2/3はやさしい。(Part 1/2/3 task is easy) 2) Part 1/2/3は適切である。(Part 1/2/3 task is appropriate). These two statements were intended to solicit participants' view on the level of easiness and appropriateness for assessing communication skills in terms of topic, requirement, and the language that test-takers are expected to use to complete tasks in each group¹. Table 4 summarises the results of the three speaking tasks (Parts 1–3). Figures 5 and 6 present the distributions of the participants' degree of agreement on the two statements visually (Question 20, 22 and 24). The teachers and students shared similar views on the level of easiness and appropriateness of the test.

Both teachers and students found Part 1 is easiest as shown in the highest degree of agreement on the easiness of the test (3.54 for teachers; 3.25 for students), and Part 3 the most challenging (2.41 for teachers; 2.90 for students). It should be noted, however, that the same score for Parts 2 and 3 was found (i.e., 2.9) in the student rating. While teachers' agreement on the easiness was higher in Part 1 and Part 2 than students', this was the opposite in Part 3. The student rating (2.9) was considerably higher than the teacher rating (2.41). More teachers than students agreed that Parts 1 and 2 are easy, but more students agreed on the statement that Part 3 is easy compared to teachers.

As for appropriateness, compared with the score of easiness of all three parts, the score was higher. That is, as shown in Figures 6 and 7, for all three parts, more teachers and students chose 'agree' in the appropriateness rather than in the easiness. As shown in the average rating of the easiness in Table 4, both teacher and student participants expressed a similar view across the three parts of the speaking test.

1. The questions intended to solicit participants' view on the level of difficulty and appropriateness of the test tasks as in the RQ, as the wording of the question is 'easy' instead of 'difficult' and therefore in reporting the results, we used the word 'easiness' instead of difficulty.

Figure 6: Teachers' views on the three parts of the IELTS Speaking Test (Q20, 22 and 24)

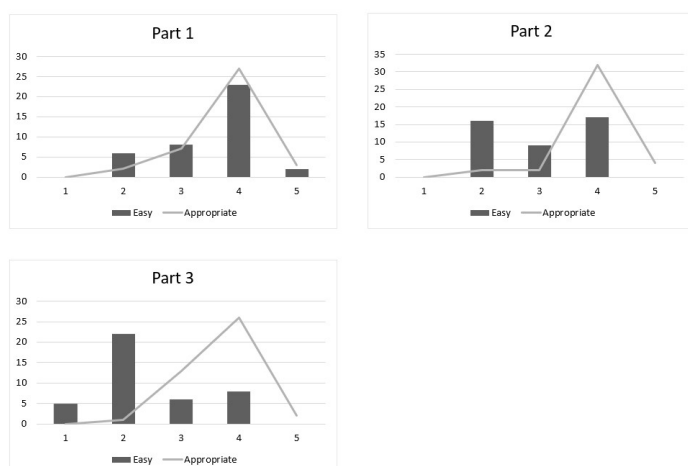




Figure 7: Students' views on the three parts of the IELTS Speaking Test (Q20, 22 and 24)

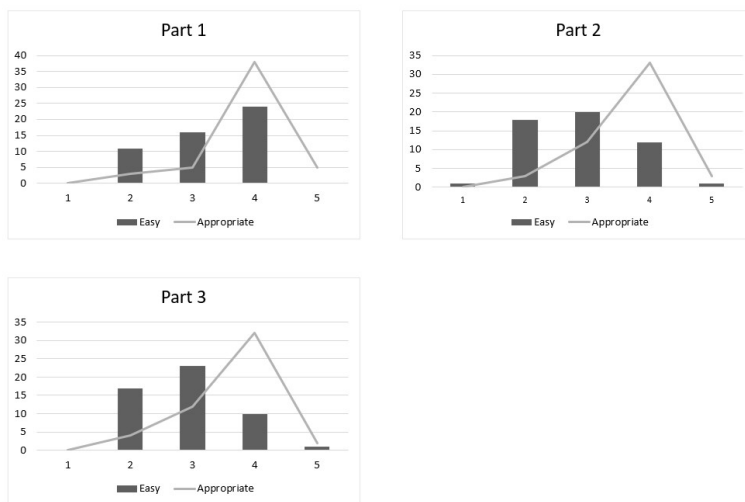


Table 4: Descriptive statistics for teachers' and students' views on the difficulty and appropriateness of the IELTS Speaking Test (Q20, 22, and 24)

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
Part 1					
Easiness	Teachers	3.54	0.86	2	5
	Students	3.25	0.79	2	4
Appropriateness	Teachers	3.76	0.65	2	5
	Students	3.88	0.65	2	5
Part 2					
Easiness	Teachers	3.02	0.89	2	4
	Students	2.90	0.85	1	5
Appropriateness	Teachers	3.95	0.62	2	5
	Students	3.71	0.67	2	5
Part 3					
Easiness	Teachers	2.41	0.94	1	4
	Students	2.90	0.77	2	5
Appropriateness	Teachers	3.69	0.60	2	5
	Students	3.64	0.69	2	5

Questions 21, 23, and 25 asked participants to justify their degrees of agreement on the statements given in Questions 20, 22 and 24. Table 5 provides a summary of the teachers' views. The findings showed how certain aspects of a speaking test stood out to the teachers and students more than others when they were asked to comment on the level of easiness and appropriateness. Each of the three parts in the IELTS Speaking test is discussed in more detail below.

Table 5: Summary of teachers' and students' views on the easiness/ difficulty and appropriacy of the IELTS Speaking Test (Q21, 23 and 25)

	n	Part 1		Part 2		Part 3	
		Teachers (n= 43)	Students (n= 51)	Teachers (n= 42)	Students (n= 51)	Teachers (n= 44)	Students (n= 51)
a	Topic is familiar	41 (95.35%)	36 (70.59%)	30 (71.43%)	15 (29.41%)	10 (22.72%)	11 (21.57%)
b	Topic is technical	1 (2.32%)	1 (1.96%)	1 (2.38%)	1 (1.96%)	6 (13.64%)	6 (11.76%)
c	Topic is abstract	3 (6.97%)	7 (13.73%)	14 (33.33%)	15 (29.41%)	28 (63.64%)	15 (29.41%)
d	Difficult vocabulary and expressions are required to carry a conversation	29 (67.44%)	34 (66.67%)	27 (64.29%)	31 (60.78%)	26 (59.1%)	35 (68.63%)
e	Complex grammatical structures are required to carry a conversation	15 (34.88%)	8 (15.68%)	16 (38.1%)	15 (29.41%)	17 (38.64%)	16 (31.37%)
f	Sentence composition required to carry a conversation	16 (37.21%)	8 (15.68%)	22 (52.38%)	19 (37.25%)	21 (47.72%)	21 (41.17%)
g	Long preparation time needed	8 (18.61%)	8 (15.68%)	18 (42.86%)	13 (25.49%)	11 (25%)	9 (17.65%)
h	The examiner's explanation is detailed	2 (4.65%)	-	5 (11.91%)	5 (9.8%)	2 (4.45%)	2 (3.92%)
i	The examiner can support you if you have trouble	-	1 (1.96%)	-	1 (1.96%)	1 (2.27%)	1 (1.96%)
j	The task requires you to state your opinion logically	2 (4.65%)	9 (17.64%)	20 (47.62%)	7 (13.73%)	24 (54.55%)	12 (23.53%)

5.2.1 Part 1

As explained above, the majority of teachers and students agreed that the requirements for Part 1 of the Speaking test were easy enough for students, and that these requirements were appropriate for this task as shown in the average ratings in both groups and reflected in the excerpts below.

うん。そうですね。これぐらいだったらできるかもしれないですね。
(Yeah, let me see. For this level of the task, (my students) may be able to do.)
(ID13_Secondary school teacher)

However, the degree of easiness and appropriateness may depend on how much test-takers were expected to speak as shown in the excerpt from the responses to the open-ended question section of the survey shown below:

どれぐらいの長さの答えを求めているかによって判断が分かれる。
(It depends on how much we are expected to answer the question.)
(Response to the open-ended question by a teacher participant).

Most teachers and students agreed on the familiarity of the topic to explain the easiness and appropriateness of the task. An overwhelming majority of the participants in both groups (i.e., 41 teachers out of 43, 36 students out of 51) selected Statement (a) *Topic is familiar*.

多分これはできるんじゃないかなって思いますね。Topicがこう、身近だなあって思うし、このぐらいだったら、自分のこと言えばいいので、高校生でも、できるとは思いますね。
(I think I can probably do this. As I think the topic is familiar, with this level, you can do the task by talking about yourself, therefore, I think it is doable for senior high school students.) (ID14_Student)

Although both teachers and students thought the topic familiarity made the task achievable, some felt it depended on the topic presented in the IELTS Speaking Task, as shown below.

・・・んー、話すこと、内容がなくて黙ってしまうかもしれないです。What kind of places っていうと、こうなんか、日本語でも答えづらくないですか。英語ってこういうのよくあると思うんですけど、なんかIt's veryなん、なん、自分でも、正直答えるの難しくて、なんかこう、・・・どう、言ってることはきっと分かると思うんですけど、どうやってdescribeしようかな、とか、何を話せばいいのかな、っていうのが、詰まってしまう、
(hmmm, they may stay silent not knowing what they can say. Don't you think it's difficult to answer the question "what kind of places" even in Japanese? I think there are many questions like this, but I find it hard to answer honestly. I know the intent of the question, but I become hesitant thinking how to describe what I should talk about etc.)² (ID_21 Secondary school teacher)

2. Prompt questions of this speaking task referred to are:
Let's talk about your hometown or village. What kind of places are the most interesting parts of your town?

Similarly, a student participant commented on how the familiarity of the topic during the interview determined the level of the difficulty and appropriateness of the Speaking test. Unlike the teacher who negatively commented on the topic, she thought the topic (house) was doable as shown below:

んー、なんか、身近だから、・・・その、・・・話題が。考えやすいかなとは思いますが。なんか、英検だと、・・・カードを見て、やるとか、そういう、・・・あまり自分に関係ないことだったので、
(hmm, topic is familiar, and so I think it may be easier to think what I am going to talk about this. For EIKEN, the topic given in a card was not familiar to me.)
(ID19_Student)

The excerpt below indicates that even if the topic was seen as simple, some interviewees found it challenging.

・・・ぜっ、できないですね、私多分。めちゃくちゃ時間かけないと、できないと思います。なんかその緊張感の中で絶対頭回らないし。
(I am sure that I won't be able to, perhaps unless I have a lot of time to prepare, I won't be able to do. Also, because I will be very nervous, I won't be able to think.)
(ID18_Student)

The same student (ID18) explained why she did not think she could do the task because of nervousness as shown above, but she responded more positively in response to the interviewer's questions when she said she might be able to do it if the topic were more familiar to her present circumstances, as shown below.

Interviewer: ああ、じゃあ、今住んでいることについて話してくださいとか言われたら、ちょっとは話せる (If you are asked about the place, can you talk a bit?)

ID18: ちょっとは話せると思いますけど (Yes, I can talk a bit.)

Interviewer: どのぐらい、何文ぐらい話せそう? (How long, how many sentences?)

ID18: 何分?・・・どうだろう。(How many minutes? Let me think)

Interviewer: 2, 3文とか、なんか、もうちょっととか (2-3 sentences or a bit more?)

ID18: いや、3分は話せないと思います。(No. I cannot talk for three minutes.)

Interviewer: ああ、分ですね。センテンスはどうですか。(Do you mean 'minutes'? How about sentences?)

ID18: あ、文?あ、そういうことか。・・・3文ぐらい (Oh, sentence, perhaps three sentences?)

Following familiarity of the topic (Statement a), the second most frequently chosen statement to explain the participants' degree of agreement on the easiness and appropriateness was Statement (d) *Difficult vocabulary and expressions are required to carry out a conversation*. More than 65% of the participants chose this statement to justify their rating. This indicated that the difficulty of the task is due to the range of vocabulary required to carry out a conversation for Part 1 even though the topic is familiar. The excerpt below illustrates this point.

んーとー、・・・なんかやっぱ、語彙力は、要るかなって。その、自分が、思ってる、・・・ことを、その、伝えようとするときに、私が結構、単語が思い浮かばなくて、止まっちゃったりするから、・・・んー、語彙力は要るかなって。
(*hmmm, I need good vocabulary. When I want to say what I am thinking, I often don't know the words, and then stop talking. I need vocabulary.*) (ID19_Student)

Although many did not choose Statement h (*Long preparation time needed*) to explain the degree of easiness and appropriateness that they chose, a few commented on the preparation time both in response to the open-ended question and interview as shown below.

普段考えないような内容なので話を組み立てるのに時間がかかる。
(*It would take time to structure what I want to say because the content is not something I normally think about.*)
(Response to the open-ended question by teacher)

A similar point was made in the interview sessions when a university lecturer commented on the need to get used to the limited timeframe:

・・・まあ、まずは、簡単でしょうけども、これを、・・・理解する、力と、ちょっとなんか、・・・もう、あとは、・・・その、2分の中で、1つ目のとこだけで、1分30秒かけちゃやっぱだめだろうから、その辺り、時間配分の練習っていうんですかね。例えば、*You should say*っていわれてるコメントごとに、どれぐらいの、ことを言うとか、15秒話すとこれぐらいかかっちゃう、のことが言えるとか、なんかってそれはやっぱり何回かやってみないと、わかんないじゃないでしょうかね。そういう練習がちょっとあった方がいいのかなって思いました。
(*Yeah... first, though easy, it requires the ability to understand the question, then, ummm, we cannot spend 90 seconds to talk about the first part within the two minutes, and therefore, it requires to plan how long spent on the first part etc. For example, considering the instruction "You should say", how many seconds to talk for each instruction. We won't know unless we try. So, I think we need practice to plan.*) (ID16_University lecturer)

A few participants also commented on the level of difficulty in relation to the strategies that were required in answering the interviewer's question.

What kind of place is it? や What do you like about living there?などの質問が抽象的で、答えの幅が大きいため、受験者がどう答えていいのか迷う可能性がある
(*Since the questions are abstract, there [could be] a wide range of answers, so the candidate may wonder how [they should] answer.*)
(Response to the open-ended question by student participant)

・・・んー、・・・あとはもう、言えない、ことは、諦めるか、paraph、言い換えるか、そこの潔さも要だと思えます。悩んで、「ああ、どうしよう、どうしよう、なんて、『陶器』っていいんだけど、なんていうのかな、ああ!って悩んでしまうとこ、『瀬戸物』っていえば、どういえばいいのかな」って思った時に、potteryとかいうのは諦め、は、やめて、cupとか、
(*[If a test-taker does not know,] it is important to decide whether he/she gives up or paraphrasing. For example, after agonising (not knowing what to say), I want to say 'pottery', but I am worried because I don't know the word, what word should I use the word to refer to 'china', I should give up the word 'pottery', but should use the word 'cup'.*) (ID21_Secondary school teacher)



To summarise the findings above, the majority of the participants agreed that the familiarity of the topic in Part 1 task made the task less challenging, but as shown in the excerpts above, a familiar topic did not always make the task easy to complete. Other issues such as vocabulary, preparation time, and affect have an impact on their decisions on the easiness and appropriateness of the task. On the whole, both teacher and student participants shared similar views on the easiness and appropriateness of the task.

5.2.2 Part 2

As reported above, both teachers and students agreed less on the statement Part 2 はやさしい。 (*Part 2 task is easy*) in Question 22 than Part 1, but found Part 2 more appropriate 2) Part 2は 適切である。 (*Part 2 task is appropriate*) than Part 1, as shown in the lower scores (i.e., Part 1 – 3.54 and Part 2 – 3.02 for teachers; Part 1 – 3.25 and Part 2 – 2.9 for students). The interview excerpt shown below illustrates the difficulty of the task.

結構難しいと思います。しゃべれない。なんか、んー。…そもそもこの、何かを考えるのに、時間がかかるといやでも、2分もしゃべるっていうのが、
(*I think this is quite difficult...No, I can't speak. Hmm it takes time to think what I am going to say. I have to speak two minutes.*) (ID17_Student)

A few interviewees commented on the level of difficulty by referring to their experience of taking EIKEN as shown in the example below:

これはなかなか難しいですね。これ英検1級の感じじゃないですか、これ。
(*This is quite difficult, isn't it? It looks like the first grade of EIKEN.*)
(ID13_High school teacher)

While some participants thought the task was challenging, they also reported it as being achievable, as shown below:

発話の構成要素が与えられているので、論理的に話しやすい。なので比較的易しいタスクであると思う。
(*As this task provides the components of the utterance, it is easy to talk logically. So, I believe that it is a relatively easy task.*)
(Response to the open-ended question by teacher participant)

…んー…どうでしょう。できる子は、なんとか、なんとか…んー、そうですね、なんとか話す、ここに書いてる項目くらいのことは、一言、ずつ、しゃべってくれたら、ああ、よくできたって思いますし、
(*Hmmmm, let me think. Able students, yeah, will try hard to speak. If they can say each word one by one with the topic written here, they will feel it is good enough.*)
(ID21_Secondary school teacher)

なんか言えそう。自分にとって大切なもの、だから、それパッと出てくれば、…それについての説明、…しかもここにも、ちょっと、それが書いて、条件が書いてるし、
(*Yes, I feel I can say something because the topic is about an important thing in my life. If I can come up with an idea, and explanation...Also, some explanation and requirement in the instruction may help.*)³ (ID20_Student)

3. The prompt question for Part 2 is: *Describe something you own which is very important to you.*

To comment on the level of difficulty and appropriateness both teachers and students focused on different aspects in Part 2 from Part 1. In other words, while a substantial number of teachers and students selected Statement a (*Topic is familiar*), similar to Part 1, many teachers and students believed that a wide range of vocabulary was required to carry on a conversation about a familiar topic as shown in the numbers of participants who selected Statement d (*Difficult vocabulary and expressions are required to carry on a conversation*), (27 teachers out of 42; 31 students out of 51).

Furthermore, in addition to Statement d, a substantial number of both teachers and students chose Statement e (*Complex grammatical structures are required to carry on a conversation*) and Statement f (*Sentence composition required to carry on a conversation*) to explain the degree of difficulty and appropriateness. The following excerpts illustrates the points here.

内容を考えて、んー、やっぱ単語、と、あとは、・・・なんかまとめる、文章をまとめる
(*Think about the content...Well, after that, I'm going to put together a word, and I'm going to put together a sentence.*) (ID17_Student)

んー、・・・なんか、・・・素早く、問題、を、問題の意図というか、言うべきことの要点を考えて、で、それに沿うように、ちゃんと、文章というか、を組み立てる能力、ですかね。
(*Well...something, quickly, the problem, or the intention of the problem, thinking about the point of what should be said, and, along with it, properly, or sentences, or the ability to assemble, is it?*) (ID20_Student)

Compared with Part 1, a considerable number of teachers and students ticked Statement g (*Long preparation time needed*). It was felt that the one-minute preparation time was short and talking for two minutes was too long, as shown below.

なんかまず、2分speechっていうのが、ちょっと、まあ、長いし、準備が1分間っていうのは、あんまりなんか授業でも、1分だけ準備してやるよとか、あんまりない。少なくとも、まあ、少なくとも、5分から10分ぐらい、多分、用意されちゃってるから、多分あんまりこういうのやったことない感じが。ちょっと難しいかなって。
(*First of all, two-minute speech, well, is long, and we haven't heard about one-minute preparation time even in class activities. At least, at least five to 10 minutes are given. Perhaps as we haven't done this type of task before, I find it a bit difficult.*)
(ID14_Student)

In the interview sessions some teachers thought the task required skills other than English, but also further commented how the broad topics encourage students to share their personal beliefs. The excerpt below shows an example of how some teachers believed that these views would not be influenced by their English language, but also their personal experiences.

こういうことについて一度も考えたことない人は、すぐに対応するのは難しいと思うので、そうですね。うんー、・・・どういふふうに変ったか・・・英語力だけじゃダメですね。ちょっとこう、・・・んー、..自分の、属している文化について、・・・歴史的視点から見たことがないとかダメだと思いますので、んー。・・・「自分の理解力」ですか。
(*If you've never thought about something like this, I think it's difficult to respond right away, so yes. yes, I don't know how it's changed...To do this task well, test-takers are required to have skills other than English. I think that it is not good unless I don't see things from historical and cultural point of view. Is it "my understanding ability"?*)
(ID15_University lecturer)

In summary, as shown in the degree of agreement on the two statements in Question 22, many participants – both teachers and students – found Part 2 more challenging than Part 1. However, some participants thought that with clear instructions to structure the talk, this task would be achievable. As in Part 1, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary required to complete the task made them think the task challenging. In addition, some commented that the short preparation time would make it more difficult, and also felt skills other than English language were required to complete the task successfully. The differences in the rating of the degree of agreement on the easiness and appropriateness of the task in the two groups were mostly reflected in what teachers and students focused on to explain their initial rating. That is, while students focused on the language issues (i.e., vocabulary and grammar), teachers thought the skills required to complete the task made the task challenging.

5.2.3 Part 3

The majority of the participants thought Part 3 most challenging as shown in the degree of agreement on the statements in Question 24: 1) Part 3はやさしい。 (*Part 3 task is easy*); 2) Part 3は 適切である。 (*Part 3 task is appropriate*) as reported above. That means more participants chose 'disagree' on the statements: *Part 3 task is easy/appropriate*. This finding was supported by the interview data. The student who said able students can do Part 2 felt only a few can do Part 3, as shown below:

問題があるので、多分今までのやつより一番難易度が、高いかなって思うんですけど。…えー、英語が得意な子ぐらいしかできないのかなって思います。
(*Because this task provides a proposition, I think this is the most difficult of the three. Hmm, only a few able students can do the task.*) (ID14_Student)

A teacher participant also agreed, explaining that test-takers are required to know what was happening in society today and had their own opinion.

…すごく…んー、これは、…できる人が、…数名?かなって思うの思いました。まずあの、質問が抽象的、なので、こう今まではこう具体的なものがある、それをdescribeするのとなら、まだこう頑張れると思うんですけど、凄く抽象的なので、なんか、まず、何、どう価値観がどういふうに変ったか、なんか具体例教えてって言われたときに、「は～～」っていう、日頃から自分、社会のこと考えてないと言えないし、そこが難しいかなって思いました。
(*Umm, for this task, I thought only a few can do this task. As the question is abstract, students are able to make efforts to describe concrete items, but the question is so abstract that hmm it is hard to explain how people's value have changed...Without having thought about the current issues in the society, they cannot say anything. That's why I thought this task is very demanding.*) (ID21_Secondary school teacher)

Nevertheless, the same teacher participant was not entirely negative about the task, and further elaborated her initial response by adding that the task could be done with the interlocutor's assistance. The excerpt shows that the participant was not aware that examiners were expected to follow a script for reliability reasons.

ええ、もう、言ってくれたら、「おー！」ってでもそっから、なんとか、試験官が引っ張って、こう、nice質問をしてくださったら、続いていくかもしれない。「それどういうこと」とか、あ、「あなたが言ったのこういうことなのね」とか、という風にこう、要約してもらった後に、「じゃあ、ここはどう?」とか、そうやってやってくれたら、話せる、と思います。
(*If the interviewer shows his/her empathy and tries to ask further questions, the student may be able to continue. Interviewer's questions such as "What do you mean?" or "Is this what you mean?" following paraphrasing the interviewee's response may help the interviewee continue to talk.*)
(ID21_Secondary school teacher)

In comparison with the first two parts of the IELTS Speaking Test, the majority of teacher participants believed that the topic for Part 3 task was more abstract, as 28 out of 44 teachers ticked Statement c (*Topic is abstract*). The example below indicates that the university lecturer thought the difficulty of the task lay in the abstractness of the topic, and accordingly test-takers may not understand the topic. Further, it was also noted that test-takers were required to express their own opinion with adequate vocabulary as shown as below.

これ自体がやっぱり理解できるのだけでもかなりハードル高いないかと思うし、やっぱり抽象的だから、それが価値観だとか、そうですねー。…それわかってさ、なおかつ自分の意見を言うっていうになると、本当に少ないんじゃないかと思いますがねえやっぱり語彙みたいなものを理解する、力、かなり高度なものが必要なんじゃ(笑)ないかなと。

(I think the level of this task is very high considering the topic itself because it is abstract. Also, it involves values. Test-takers are not only required to understand the topic, but also express their own opinion. Only a few can do this, as high levels of English are required to understand vocabulary.) (ID16_University lecturer)

As commented in the excerpt above, a considerable number of teachers also ticked the Statements d (*Difficult vocabulary and expressions are required to carry a conversation*), e (*Complex grammatical structures are required to carry a conversation*), and f (*Sentence composition is required to carry a conversation*) to explain the difficulty and appropriateness of the task.

The example below shows that vocabulary and sentence composition were important in respondents' perspectives to complete Part 3 tasks. They explained the need to focus on basic grammar when it came to formulating speech.

高度なこれは、・・・もちろんSpeaking力だと思うんですけど、まず自分が言いたいことを表現するための、文法の力、が、私はいると思います。やっぱ言ってることわかんなくなってきたので。こう、言ってる、何を言いたいか考えるためには、文法、もう、それくらいは、基礎、それくらいはしゃべれてないと、多分処理しきれなくなっちゃうだろうと思ったので、それと、・・・相手が質問、やり取りするんだったら、相手が何を聞いてるかとか、自分が言ったことにどこに興味をもったかっていうのを、やっぱこう、ちゃんと、捉えられるような、力も必要だなって野も思いました。

(I think this is a high level of speaking ability, of course, but first of all, I need to have good understanding of grammar to express what I want to say. (Without it) I don't seem to understand what I am saying. So, to think about what I'm saying and what I'm trying to say, with grammar, that much, the basics, I thought that if I didn't talk that much, I probably wouldn't be able to handle it. Also, if the other person asked me a question or exchanged, I thought I need a skill to be able to see what the other person was listening to and what part of my talk the other person was interested.) (ID21_Secondary school teacher)

Compared with teacher participants, many students did not choose Statement c (*Topic is abstract*) to explain the difficulty of Part 3. Nevertheless, similar to teachers' justifications for the easiness and appropriateness of the task, many student participants chose Statement d (*Difficult vocabulary and expressions are required to carry on a conversation*) (35 out of 51) and Statement f (*Sentence composition is required to carry on a conversation*). The example below illustrates this point.

・・・えー、やっぱ、んー、ちょっと難しい、感じの質問でも、・・・聞き取って、理解するのも、大事だし、やっぱ一緒に、ボキャブラリー
(Well, well, it's a little difficult, even if it's a question asking a feeling, it's important to listen and understand, and it's just the same, vocabulary.) (ID19_Student)

At the interview, student participants largely focused on what skills were required to do well at this task rather than explaining the difficulty of the task. They also focused on different strategies to use while they were trying to process the prompt questions. In many of the excerpts related to interpreting the question, the students focused on understanding and selecting the appropriate vocabulary. For example:

まず、聞き取って、まあ、質問の内容を理解できるか、っていうのと、・・・さっき、やっぱ組み立てて、頭で、すぐ英語、話せ、・・・る、力。
(What skills are required to answer the question is) first of all, whether I can comprehend, well, and whether I can understand the contents of the question, and whether I can assemble the structure of the sentence, in the head, can speak English immediately.) (ID14_Student)

内容も、あるので、なんか、普段から、そのことについてのなんか、考えておかないといけない、なあという、印象がありますあー、なんか、日本語で、考えて、その、なんかそれを伝えることに必要な、関連のなんか英単語というか、そういうのも知っておかないと、いけないかなあって、思います。

(Because there is a content, I have an impression that I have to think about something about it, oh, I have to think about it in Japanese, and I think that I have to know some related English words or something necessary to convey it.)

(ID20_Student)

いや、難しいと思いますすぐ考えるのと、あとなんか、説得力。あと、やっぱ、なんか自分の国、のことは知ってないといけないかなって。んー。なんかそういう、社会のこと調べるとか。あとは、・・・さっき出した、自分のテーマ、を、なんか、自分でちゃんと、その後に考えると、か、毎回、・・・っていう。

(Well, I think it difficult. I have to think immediately, and then persuasiveness is required. Also, I have to know about my own country. Hmmm I mean I need to study about the current society. Also, I have to give some thoughts on the topic...)

(ID17_Student)

To summarise the findings above, both teacher and student participants found Part 3 the most difficult task of the three speaking tasks as only a few students could understand the topic and try to speak, possibly with some support from the examiner. While both teachers and students agreed that sophisticated vocabulary was required to complete the task, teacher participants thought the abstractness of the topic made the task challenging and student participants thought understanding the topic and persuasiveness were required to do the task.

5.3 RQ3. What are the perceptions of IELTS Writing Test Tasks among the Japanese students and English language teachers in terms of their easiness and their appropriateness for assessing communication skills?

As in the Speaking test, we investigated the teachers and students' views on the easiness and appropriateness of the test for assessing communication skills in terms of topic, requirement, and the language that test-takers are expected to use to complete tasks. All participants were asked to rate the degree of agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral, 5 = strongly agree) on the two statements in Questions 30 and 32: 1) Task 1/2はやさしい。 (*Task 1/2 task is easy*) 2) Task 1/2は適切である。 (*Task 1/2 is appropriate*). As in the Speaking task, these two statements were intended to solicit participants' view on the level of easiness and appropriateness of the two writing tasks in each group.⁴ Table 6 presents a summary of the participants' degree of agreement on the two statements in Questions 30 and 32. Figures 8 and 9 present the distributions of the participants' degree of agreement on the two statements visually (Question 30 and 32) (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral, 5 = strongly agree).

While teachers found Task 1 easier than Task 2 as shown in the higher degree of agreement on the easiness of the test (2.76 for Task 1; 2.49 for Task 2), students found the opposite (2.88 for Task 1; 3.20 for Task 2). Students' ratings for both Task 1 and 2 were higher than the teachers'. That means more students agreed with the statements.

As for appropriateness, the score was higher than agreement on the easiness of the tasks in both groups, which was similar to the findings for the IELTS Speaking Tasks reported earlier. As shown in Figures 8 and 9, for both tasks, teachers and students chose 'agree' in the appropriateness more than in the easiness. The score difference between students and teachers was not large, but more teachers agreed on the appropriateness of Task 2 than Task 1, and it was the opposite for students. That is, while teachers thought Task 2 was more difficult than Task 1, Task 2 was viewed as more appropriate than Task 1.

4. As explained in the previous section, the questions intended to solicit participants' view on the level of difficulty and appropriateness of the test tasks as in the RQ, as the wording of the question is 'easy' instead of 'difficult' and therefore in reporting the results, we used the word 'easiness' instead of difficulty.



For students, Task 1 was perceived to be more difficult than Task 2, but Task 1 was considered more appropriate than Task 2.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for the teachers' and students' views on the easiness/difficulty and appropriacy of the IELTS Writing Test (Q30 and 32)

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
Task 1					
Easiness	Teachers	2.76	0.85	1	4
	Students	2.88	0.79	1	4
Appropriateness	Teachers	3.67	0.64	2	5
	Students	3.29	0.82	2	5
Task 2					
Easiness	Teachers	2.49	0.83	1	4
	Students	3.20	0.79	2	5
Appropriateness	Teachers	3.76	0.53	3	5
	Students	3.51	0.94	1	5

Figure 8: Teachers' views on the two parts of the IELTS Writing Test (Q30 and 32)

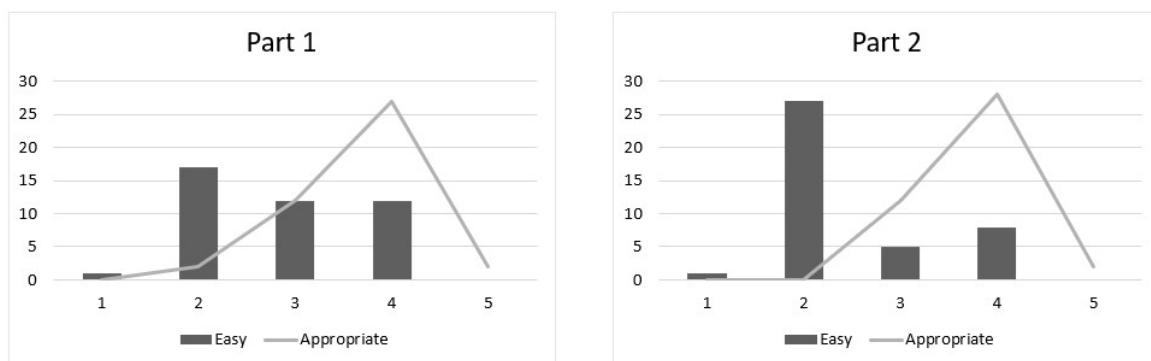


Figure 9: Students' views on the two parts of the IELTS Writing Test (Q30 and 32)

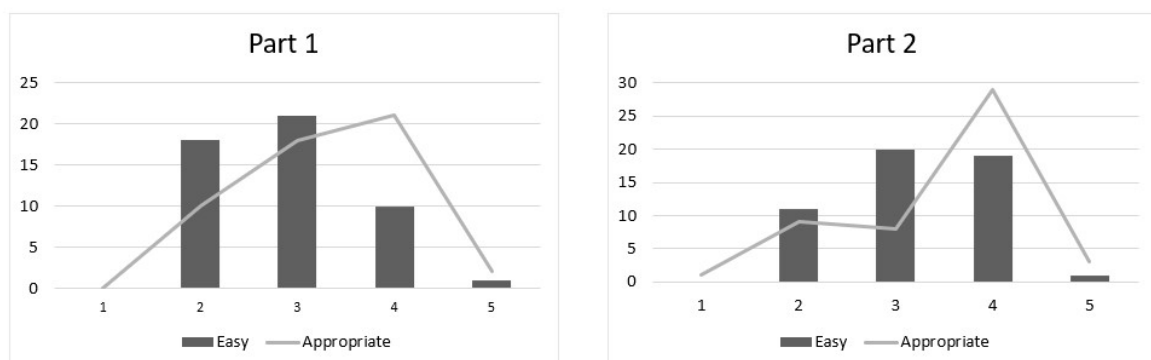


Table 7: Summary of teachers' and students' views on the two tasks of the IELTS Writing Test (Q 31 and 33)

	n	Task 1 %		Task 2 %	
		Teachers (n= 44)	Students (n= 50)	Teachers (n= 43)	Students (n= 50)
a	Topic is familiar	11 (25%)	9 (18%)	12(27.91%)	15 (30%)
b	Topic is professional	16 (36.4%)	14 (28%)	11(25.58%)	2 (4%)
c	Topic is abstract	5 (11.36%)	1 (2%)	12(27.91%)	3 (6%)
d	The word limit is too high	2 (4.54%)	12 (24%)	3 (6.97%)	5 (10%)
e	The word limit is too low	6 (13.64%)	2 (4%)	3 (6.97%)	3 (6%)
f	The time limit is too long	3 (6.82%)	5 (10%)	2 (4.65%)	8 (16%)
g	The time limit is too short	7 (15.91%)	10 (20%)	4 (9.3%)	5 (10%)
h	Requires the ability to use the appropriate vocabulary	39 (88.64%)	32 (64%)	30(69.77%)	30 (60%)
i	Requires the ability to use the appropriate grammatical structure	33 (75%)	28 (56%)	17 (39.54%)	14 (28%)
j	Requires the ability to write in a well-organised manner	17 (38.64%)	10 (20%)	30 (69.77%)	16 (32%)
k	Requires thought and judgement to make it logical	34 (77.27%)	15 (30%)	41 (95.35%)	22 (44%)
l	Requires the ability to explain one's opinion	2 (4.55%)	2 (4%)	38 (88.37%)	20 (40%)
m	Other	4 (9.09%)	1 (2%)	1 (2.33%)	3 (6%)

5.3.1 Task 1

As reported above, teachers' degree of agreement (i.e., 2.77) on the easiness of the task was slightly lower than the students' (i.e., 2.88). As reflected in the lower degree of agreement on the easiness of the task, the majority of the interview participants found this task challenging, but one student participant thought this task easier than the Speaking tasks as shown below.

・・・んー。・・・なんか、しゃべるよりも書く方が、なんか、考えながらできるから、・・・で、さっきよりはできると思います。

(Hmmm, unlike speaking, writing can be done while I am thinking, and so I can do this better than [speaking].) (ID18_Student)

As mentioned above, many students focused on the language issues to explain the easiness and appropriateness of the task, although one student highlighted the relative easiness of understanding the content and extracting information from the graph as shown below in the excerpt from the responses to the open-ended question.

主張を要約し、そして比較もすることに関してどちらも似た内容になってしまうと思い、少し考えにくいと思ったものこの問題の内容自体は専門的で理解できないこともなくグラフも読み取りにくいような難しいものには感じられなかったから

(I thought that both would end up similar contents in terms of summarising and comparing the claims, and therefore, it would be hard to come up with different ideas, but the content of this proposition itself is technical and is not incomprehensible, and so I didn't feel the graph is difficult to comprehend.)

(Response to the open-ended question by student participant)

As shown in Table 7, many participants in both teacher and student groups chose Statements h (*Requires the ability to use the appropriate vocabulary*) and i (*Requires the ability to use the appropriate grammatical structure*) to explain the easiness and appropriateness of the task.

In the interviews, the students elaborated more on the need for good grammar and structure. The following excerpts show how they focused on different aspects of language.

とりあえずまずReading、・・・で、理解した上で、・・・私もやっぱ一回日本語で考えちゃうと思うので、やっぱそこから、また、英語に、ま、なるべく正しいの使った方がいい、とは思うので、さすがに。さすがに。だからまあ、正しい文法を使ったり、なんか、こう、こういうなんか、わかりやすく書くためのなんか、対比とかの、その、なんていう、熟語？熟語っていうか、そういうの、を知っていた方が書きやすいかなと思う。比較するような、文法とかを、ある程度なんか、知っておいた方がいいかなと。

(First of all, after I read and understand the prompt...I think I will think (what I am going to write) in Japanese, and I think that it is better to use English as much as possible. As expected, so, well, use the correct grammar, or something like this, something like this, something to write in an easy-to-understand, or contrast, what is that idioms? I think that it is easier to write if you know idioms or something like that...I think it's better to know the grammar to some extent to make comparisons.)
(ID14_Student)

んー、なんか、ちゃんと文章を作るっていうか、組み立てる、時の、・・・単語、単語って、使う用語をちゃんと、知っておくとか。

(Well, I'm going to make a sentence properly, or build it up, and then I'm going to know the terms I use, such as words and words.) (ID17_Student)

・・・結構なんか英語で、・・・英語でその順序立てて、書くっていうの、結構、難しいと思うので、・・・なんだろう、・・・なんか、凄い、同じ言い回しになっちゃったり、なんか、長い文書いると、・・・話が、前後しちったりとか、・・・繋がりがなんかおかしかったりとか。接続語とかだから、結構大事かなって。

(It's pretty difficult to plan and write in English, so...I end up writing with the same wording, or something, if you're writing a long sentence, argument is reversed, or the flow of argument is odd. Therefore, a connective word is quite important.)
(ID_19 Student)

Many teacher participants focused on structures of the composition, but one teacher thought it important to possess relevant expression and vocabulary as shown below.

んー、・・・まずは私もこれちょっと書けるか不安なくらい、なんですけど、書く、やっぱまず比較の書き方とか、これ、the number of なんちゃらとか、そういう言い方とかが知りたいなって思います。で、こう、・・・どれ、増えてるときの言い方とか、decreaseとかincreaseとか、こういうのをdescribeするときに必要な語彙を、まず、知りたいと凄く思うし、んー、

(Hmmm, first of all, I myself am not sure if I can do this task...but, first, I think I would like to know how to compare, also phrases such as "the number of" etc. Also, I would like to know the expression and necessary vocabulary to describe 'increasing' words such as 'decrease' or 'increase.) (ID21_Secondary school teacher)

Further, in addition to the ability to use the appropriate vocabulary and grammar, both teacher and student participants reported that the challenge lay in understanding the instructions written in English and eliciting appropriate information from the graph. They thought that other skills such as extracting information from the graph were required to do this task.

うん、これ読むのも大変ですよ。まずこれ読まないといけませんもんね。ちょっと忘れてました。

(Yes, it would be difficult to read and understand the prompt. First, we have to read and understand. I forgot about it.) (ID21_Secondary school teacher)

それはなかなか、難しいと思います。まず、分かんない単語が、・・・多くある。なんか。そう。そこから、それを読み取るっていう力は、凄く大事だと思うんですけども、そうですね。それは英語だけではなくて、ということになりますよね。

(I think this task is quite challenging first because there are a lot of unknown words. I agree that it is important to have a skill to comprehend the text even if there are unknown words, but this skill is beyond English language ability.)

(ID13_Secondary school teacher)

As for the instructions in English, one student participant (ID14_Student) said “正直見ただけでなんかウエって感じ” (*Honestly, I felt like vomiting to see the instructions in English*) responding to the question, “what do you think about all instructions written in English?” Initially, she felt the instruction written in English was overwhelming, but she thought she could do the task as long as she knew how to read the graph. She went on to explain that she did not think it necessary to understand the prompt as shown below.

まず、問題が私はあまり分からなかったので、この、文、が読めないといけないっていうのと、でも、ある程度なんか知識があれば、なんかこの、表だけ見ただけでも多分できるかなってのは思うので、なんか、教養(笑)じゃないですけど、そういうのもある程度あった方がいいかなとは思っています。

(First of all, I didn't understand the prompt well, and so I thought I have to understand it. However, I think if we have a certain knowledge/skill (to elicit information from a graph), I think I can do looking at the graph (even I don't understand the prompt). I think this type of skills may be helpful.) (ID14_Student)

Similarly, several participants commented on the skills required to extract information from the graph and compose:

あー。それから、それを、・・・か、なんだろう。書く練習、というか、その表から読み取れることとかを、書く練習とかですかね、やっぱり。

(Oh. And I wonder if it's...The practice of writing, or rather, the practice of writing that can be read from the table, after all.) (ID18_Student)

なんか、普通に図を見て、なんか、何書くか、考えて、なんか、・・・書くことをまとめてから、なんか、それ、で、ちゃんと、頭で文章、を組み立てていく力、みたいな、・・・英語力も確かに大事なんですけど、なんか、ちゃんとグラフ見て、正確に、なんかグラフを分析するというか、なんか、ちゃんと見るっていうか、そういうことも大事だなって、思いました。

(Somehow, looking at the diagram normally, something, thinking what to write, something, after summarising what I am going to write in my head, something, it, and, properly, the ability to assemble sentences with the head...English ability is certainly also important, something, but I thought it important to look at the graph properly, or analyse something accurately graph, or something, or something.)

(ID20_Student)

要約する力は、ちょっともう英語だけでなんとかなる力じゃないので、若干諦めてるところもあるんですよ。これはちょっと教科で鍛える、よりも、今までこれまで培ってきた力プラス、国語とか、うん。って思ってしまうのはあります。まず日本語だったら、「日本語でもいいから書いてみて最初は」みたいなことをきつと言い出す気がします。

(Summarising skill required more than English language ability, and therefore in some ways I have given up (expecting my students to acquire). Rather than enhancing this type of skills in a specific subject, general skills...Hmm. For example, I might suggest “why not to try to write in Japanese first”.) (ID21_Secondary school teacher).

Although a relatively small number of participants (both teachers and students) ticked Statement d (*The word limit is too high*), at the interview, a few participants mentioned that writing 150 words was demanding.

でも、難しいなって凄く思いました。150語。・・・なんか、結構日本語でやるのも難しい・・・と思うので、・・・結構、厳しいかなあ・・・。半分ぐらい。あー。んー、どうなんだろう。
(However, I thought this is very difficult. 150 words. Even in Japanese this will be challenging. Hmm. I may be able to do a half. I wonder what about.) (ID_19 Student)

150語かける自信はあんまりないです。んー、・・・100語、いくかいかないぐらい。
(I am not confident about writing 150 words, I might be able to write 100 words.)
(ID20_Student)

150、書けるかなあ・・・150はちょっと無理かもしれないですけど、みんな頑張ってる、0はいないんですよ。0はいないので、1、2分みんな書くんですけど、もう、・・・なんか、書けない、なんか、途中でネタ切れしちゃうか、どこに注目すればいいかとか、っていうの、もちろんですし、そういうなんか、なんていうんですか、情報、キャッチする、プラス、あと、この、比較の表現とかが、自分の言いたいことをどうやって書けばいいかわかんなかったり、で、考え込んで、書けなくなるパターンの、生徒なので、こう・・・どうしようって。
(150 words, could they write? 150 words might be too challenging. My students will try hard and will write something. We have no one who does not write anything. As there is no one who does not write anything, they will write for one or two minutes. Then they may run out of ideas, and start wondering where to focus, also, how I can say, information, grasp and understand it. In addition, they may not know appropriate expressions such as expressions to compare, to write what they want to say. They are the type of students who may end up feeling that they cannot write not knowing what to do after thinking a lot.) (ID21_Secondary school teacher)

To summarise the discussion above, though the degrees of the agreement on the easiness and appropriateness of Task 1 were slightly different between the two groups, both groups explained their degree of agreement on the easiness and appropriateness of the task in a similar manner in terms of vocabulary, expression, skills to interpret graphs, instructions written in English and the required number of words.

5.3.2 Task 2

As reported above, interestingly students' degree of agreement on the easiness of this task was higher than Task 1 (i.e., Task 2.88, Task 2 – 3.2), which was the opposite for teacher rating. Also, more students agreed on the statement "Task 2 is easy" than teachers (i.e., teachers – 2.4, students – 3.2). The survey results were reflected in the interview excerpts below. The two students below found Task 2 achievable as long as they could think of examples and/or what to write.

これの問題だったら、・・・周りの例とかが、思い出すことができれば、結構すんなり書けちゃうんじゃないかなと。
(For this task, as long as I could think of some examples, I feel I can do it without much difficulty.) (ID14_Student)

はい。・・・なんかその、書く内容が思い浮かべば、・・・自分に合った問題なら、書けるかなって思うんですけど。
(Yes, if I can think about the content that I write and if the topic suits me, I think I will be able to write.) (ID19_Student)

A student participant agreed that Task 2 was difficult considering the requirement, but what was expected in this task was similar to what students have to do at university.

この内容について自分で考え、理由とともに答えなければならないので難しいと思いました。ただ大学で議論する際にこの程度の内容について扱われることはよくあると思うので適切な難易度だと思います。

(I thought that it was difficult because I had to think about this content by myself and answer it with the reason. However, I think that it is an appropriate difficulty because I think that this is often the way content is treated when it is discussed at the university.) (Response to the open-ended question by student)

In contrast, a university lecturer did not think the task was very demanding as shown below.

うんー。・・・これは、なんかこう、これに関しての自分の意見を述べるよとかってのは、なんか、比較的簡単なのかなとは思ってますよ。僕の勝手な、急に、説明しなさいっていうふうのよりは、こっち側ってのは、その中のTopicが変わっても、なんか、なにかについて、・・・ Pro, Conのどちらかを挙げて、それ、・・・の理由を2つとか3つ挙げればいいとか、なんかってパターンがあれば、Topicにはあまり影響は受けずに、英語である程度書くってことはできるのかなと思うので、これもいくつか、いいsample questionsと、それからSample Answersみたいなのがあれば、・・・これら (Task 1) のようなのより書きやすいんじゃないかなとは、思います。

(Hmmm...I think it relatively easy to express one's own opinion about the given topic. This may be my selfish (opinion)...Rather than asking to explain without much information, if there is a pattern or guidelines explaining how to write, such as providing pros and cons, and examples, I think we can write in English regardless of the topic. I also think sample questions and answers would help. For this reason, this task is more doable than Task 1.) (ID16_University lecturer)

The majority of teachers said that it was important to organise thoughts and opinions in a logical manner as well as have the ability to use the appropriate vocabulary. That is, to explain their degree of agreement on the easiness and appropriateness of the task, an overwhelming number of teachers chose Statement k (*Requires thought and judgement to make it logical*) followed by Statement l (*Requires the ability to explain ones' opinion*) and Statement j (*Requires the ability to write in a well-organised manner*) while many also selected the statement about vocabulary in Statement d (*Requires the ability to use the appropriate vocabulary*). On the other hand, for students, Statement d (*Requires the ability to use the appropriate vocabulary*) was most frequently chosen to explain the easiness and appropriateness of Task 2 (Table 7) while a substantial number chose statements referring to the ability to organise thoughts and opinions in a logical manner the (i.e., Statement j, k, and l). The following excerpt provides further insights into this.

まずは、慌てずに、何を言うかと、どういう論理構成でいくかを考えようとして欲しいので、その、論、なんかそのessay writingってかこう、論理的に組み立てる、計画を立てれる、っていうのと、それやっぱり訓練だなんていうの思います。あとは、言いたいことを文法で書くのはもちろんそうですし、あと、何を聞、ま、その2つ、が大事なかなというのは思いました。

(First of all, I would like them to think what they are going to write, and how they structure their writing, therefore, hm, about essay writing, to be able to construct a logical argument and plan etc. I think some training is required. Also, of course to use an appropriate grammar to write what they want to say (is important). Hmm, I think these two (i.e., construct argument and ability to use appropriate grammar) are important.) (ID21_Secondary school teacher)

As reported above, the student participants seemed to put more emphasis on the ability to use appropriate grammar and vocabulary, but some recognised it is important to organise thoughts and opinions in a logical manner:

やっぱりなんか、これが、実際になるのかっていうのを、ちゃんとなんか社会のこと、とかを知っておくこととか、あとはそれに自分の意見を、それに対する意見を、持って、おくこと、が、大事だと思えます。なんか、結構長い文章になるので、ちゃんと、その構成が、ちゃんと最、初めから、説得力があるように、順番が、組み立てられたり、とか、あとやっぱり、こういう専門的、割と、なんか難しいような単語も、ちゃんと知っておく、っていうこと。

(I think it is important to recognise whether the topic given in the task becomes reality, to be aware of what is going on in the society, and to form my own opinion about what is happening in the society. Because it becomes a considerably long sentence, (it is important) the composition is appropriately structured so that it is persuasive from the beginning, and, after all, such a specialised, anything difficult word is known properly.) (ID17_Student)

ん一、ちゃんと自分の、意見を、なんか、伝えるだけじゃなくて、なんか、その、なんか、根拠
というか、なんか、ちゃんとした理由みたいな、のも、ちゃんと、伝えられるような、文章、を、
考えある力、ですかね。

(Well, it's not just about conveying your own opinions, but it's about providing the rationale, or something like a proper reason, it's also a certain ability to think about the sentences that can be conveyed properly, isn't it?) (ID20_Student)

To summarise the findings of Task 2 above, it seemed that the basis on which teachers and students assess the easiness/difficulty of the task was different. For students, easiness/difficulty of the task depended on whether the topic was familiar to them or not. On the other hand, teachers assessed the easiness of the task depending on the skills and language required to complete it.

5.4 RQ4. To what extent do teachers and students view IELTS Speaking and Writing tests as an appropriate measure for assessing communication?

In order to answer the question, participants' responses were analysed with reference to the appropriateness of the IELTS test for assessing two aspects of communication: general and academic communication skills. This was where participants were asked to rate the degree of agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral, 5 = strongly agree) with the statement in the following two types of questions (i.e., Question 26 and 34).

Table 8 summarises the descriptive statistics for teacher and student views on IELTS for general communication and academic skills from 1 to 5 on IELTS Speaking and IELTS Writing. In terms of appropriacy to assess general communication skills (Questions 26 and 34), both groups had similar views as shown in the average rating close to or above 4.0 in both Speaking and Writing. There was only one student who disagreed with IELTS Speaking being useful for assessing general communication as shown in Figure 10. These findings also showed that teachers agreed on average that both tests were appropriate for assessing communication skills, while students considered the Writing test to be more appropriate than the Speaking test.

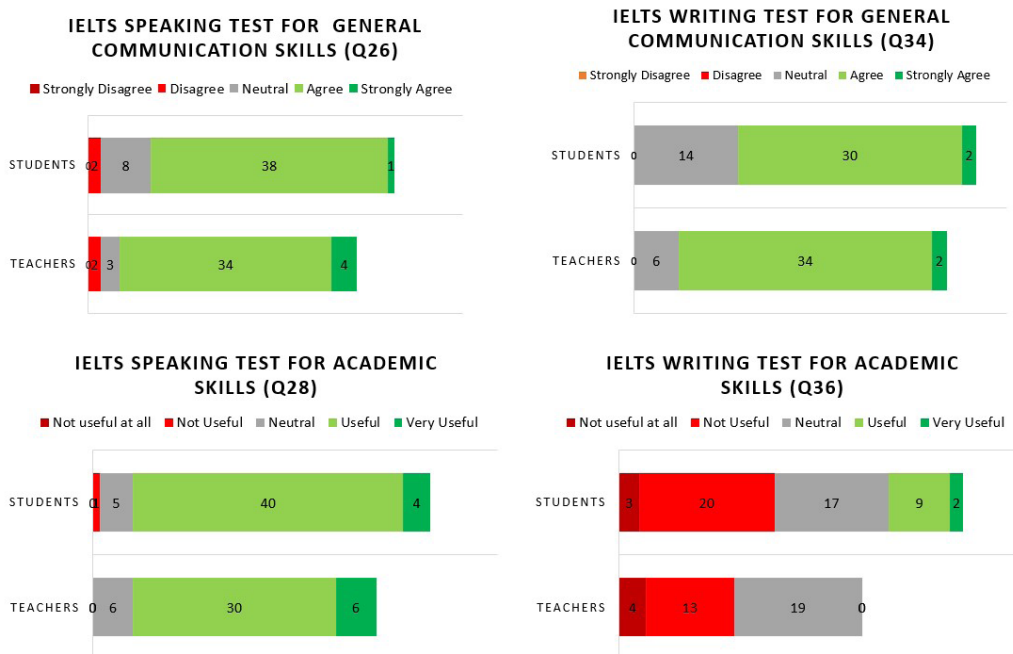
The teachers and students also showed a similar result when they were asked about the usefulness of IELTS preparation for developing academic communication skills (Questions 28 and 36). Their average ratings were also close to or above 4.0 for IELTS Speaking, but the rating dropped for IELTS Writing with an average close to 2.5, showing that most respondents disagreed that preparing for IELTS Writing help with academic skills; 6 of the 43 teachers also skipped Question 36 on IELTS Writing for academic skills.

Table 8: Descriptive statistics for the appropriateness of IELTS Speaking and Writing tests as an assessment for communication skills (Q26 and 34) and usefulness for enhancing academic skills (Q28 and 36)

	General communication (Q26 & 34)					Academic skills (Q28 & 36)				
	n	M	SD	Min.	Max.	n	M	SD	Min.	Max.
IELTS Speaking										
Teachers	43	4.02	0.54	3	5	42	4.03	0.55	3	5
Students	51	3.92	0.52	2	5	50	3.90	0.57	2	5
IELTS Writing										
Teachers	43	4.09	0.36	3	5	36	2.42	0.68	1	3
Students	51	4	0.44	3	5	51	2.75	0.94	1	5

Further, Figure 10 visually presents the distributions of the participants' degree of agreement on the appropriateness of IELTS Speaking (Question 26) and IELTS Writing (Question 34) Test tasks as an assessment for general communication skills. The majority of the participants chose 'agree' for the statements in Question 26 and 34 indicating the appropriateness of the IELTS Speaking Test to assess Japanese EFL students' general communication skills. However, in terms of the usefulness of IELTS Speaking and Writing Test preparation for developing academic skills, the lower rating given to the Writing Test, indicates that both teachers and students found the Speaking Test useful, but this was not the case for the Writing Test.

Figure 10: Teachers and students' views on the appropriateness of IELTS Speaking and Writing Tests as a test for communication skills (Q26, 34) and usefulness for enhancing academic skills (Q28 and 36)



To further understand the teachers' and students' views on IELTS as a measure of general communication and its usefulness for developing academic communication skills when preparing for the Speaking and Writing Tests, as in other questions, both groups were instructed to select the appropriate statements. Similar instructions were given to each of the four questions: Q 27/29/34/36 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか当てはまる項目を 全部 クリックして 下さい。(What was the deciding factor when you answered Q27/29/34/36? Please click on all the items that apply.) Respondents were asked to choose any statements that they felt were pertinent to their ratings for Questions 26, 28, 34 and 36.



The findings are summarised separately for Speaking (Table 9) and Writing (Table 10).

5.4.1 Speaking

The majority of teachers and students had similar views on the IELTS Speaking Test in terms of the appropriateness to assess general communication skills and usefulness for developing academic skills. Both groups found specific features of IELTS given in the statements in Q27 and 29 more important than language-specific issues to explain their degree of agreement on the statements in Q26 and 28. As the findings from Question 27 show in Table 9, the majority of respondents believed that the IELTS Speaking Test encouraged students to practice interview style questions (Q27a), and there were aspects of the test that encouraged the students to share their opinions (Q29a) and respond quickly to the interviewer (Q29b).

As for the appropriateness of IELTS Speaking tasks as an assessment of general communication skills, both teachers and students considered face-to-face communication with the examiner (Q27a) as important to assess communication skills. Also, more than half of the participants thought the IELTS Speaking Test measured conversational ability in daily life (Q27b). Many teachers believed the IELTS Speaking Test measures academic communication skills as shown in the statement (Q27c). As for development of academic skills (Q29), both teachers and students found preparing for IELTS helpful as IELTS tasks require the ability to make themselves understood (Q29a) and to think and respond quickly (Q29b). Further, the majority of teachers believed persuasiveness (Q29c) and constructive logical responses (Q29d) were also fostered by preparing for the IELTS test.

Table 9: Teachers' and students' views on the appropriateness and usefulness of the IELTS Speaking Test (Q27 and 29)

	Statements	Teachers (n= 44)	Students (n= 51)	Total % (n= 96)
Q27	IELTS Speaking for General Communication			
a.	Have an actual conversation with the examiner in the form of an interview.	37 (84.09%)	33 (64.71%)	70 (72.92%)
b.	It measures conversational ability in daily life.	28 (63.64%)	27 (52.94%)	55 (57.29%)
c.	It requires that you understand and judge the opinions of the other party and give a logical and convincing opinion about the question.	35 (79.55%)	22 (43.14%)	57 (59.38%)
d.	You will be required to use appropriate vocabulary and expressions for conversations and long turns	27 (61.36%)	25 (49.02%)	52 (54.16%)
e.	You will be required to use the appropriate grammatical structure for conversation and speech.	19 (43.18%)	10 (19.61%)	29 (30.21%)
f.	Other	4 (9.09%)	2 (3.92%)	6 (6.25%)
Q29	The usefulness of IELTS Speaking for developing academic skills (thinking, judgement and expression)			
a.	You need the ability to speak so that the other person can understand your intentions.	37 (84.09%)	34 (66.67%)	71 (73.96%)
b.	You need the ability to think and respond quickly.	37 (84.09%)	34 (66.67%)	71 (73.96%)
c.	You must give a compelling opinion to the question.	32 (72.73%)	24 (47.06%)	56 (58.33%)
d.	You must express your opinion frankly and logically in response to the question.	36 (81.82%)	25 (49.02%)	61 (63.54%)

e.	You need the ability to speak in grammatically correct sentences.	16 (36.36%)	14 (27.45%)	30 (31.23%)
f.	Ability to use vocabulary and expressions according to the task is required.	31 (70.45%)	24 (47.05%)	55 (57.29%)
g.	You need the ability to use grammatical structures that are in line with the task.	16 (36.36%)	12 (23.53%)	28 (29.17%)
h.	You must be familiar with international current affairs.	12 (27.27%)	7 (13.73%)	19 (19.79%)
i.	Other	3 (6.82%)	-	3 (6.82%)

The following interview excerpts provide further insight into how the IELTS Speaking test was seen to provide opportunities for students to develop their everyday communication:

ID06: とても実用的で 日常生活に 基づいている と思います。
(*I think that it is very practical and is based on daily life.*)

Interviewer: じゃあこれを 勉強することによってやっぱりコミュニケーションというか 英語で話せるようになるってことですか。
(*Then, do you mean by studying this, referring to communication, you become able to speak in English?*)

ID06: そう思いますし、例えばIELTSで 高得点を取れる人がいるとしたら 英語圏でちゃんと暮らしていけるんじゃないかっていう気がします。
(*I think so, and I feel that if there are people who can get high scores in IELTS, for example, they will be able to live a life without difficulty in the English-speaking country.*) (ID06_Teacher)

More respondents, however, focused on how specific features of spoken communication were not clearly assessed in the IELTS Speaking Test. These teachers and students believed that social interactions should be natural in the sense that both parties were engaging in the conversation. One university lecturer provided insight into what influenced his response on IELTS for assessing communication. As a general proficiency test, he believed that it assesses the general abilities needed at university:

いや、・・・パッと拝見して、試験としてはすごくよくできてるなという印象で。内容把握ですね。・・・大学で、必要な能力だと思しますので、そこをきちんと問うているのは、すごく良いことだと思いました。
(*No, I had a quick look and got the impression that it was a very good test. It is a content grasp...I think it's a necessary ability at university, so I think it's very good to ask that question properly.*) (ID15_University lecturer)

A similar comment was made about the natural responses between two parties in a number of excerpts:

ディベートかディスカッションのような感じだとは私がアイエルトを受けた上での感想でいうとあまり役立つとは思いません。やっぱり面接官との会話と自分が言ってることに対していくつかの質問は返してくれるんですけど、やっぱりそれに自然なコミュニケーションとは言えないし、トピックもトピックであまり実用的ではないからあまり役立つなと思います。
(*I don't think it's very useful in my impressions of taking IELTS that it feels like a debate or a discussion. After all, in the conversation with the interviewer the interviewer asks a few questions responding to what I say, but it is not natural communication, and the topic is not very practical and so, I don't think it very useful.*) (ID02_Secondary school teacher)

受検者から意見を述べるだけであり、試験官の意見を聞いて、考えるものではないので、コミュニケーションと呼べるかは疑問である。

(I'm not sure if this can be called communication, since the examinee is only required to express his/her opinions and not to listen to to the examiner's opinions and think.) (Response to open-ended question by teacher)

Although both teachers and students were generally positive about the IELTS Speaking Test as an assessment of communication skill, there were mixed views from the teachers about the use of interviews for their students. One secondary school teacher (ID09) believed that the interaction with an interviewer made the test more like everyday conversation, especially when the examiner asked further questions, as shown below.

えっと、やっぱり、他の試験に比べると、あの、他の英語の能力試験に比べると、やっぱりスピーキングとかも 一対一なので それは あるかなとは思いますが。そうですね、コンピューターに吹き込むだけっていうよりは やっぱり 面接官の方が 私の言ったトピックに対してですけど さらに掘り下げる質問がこう返ってきてそれを返すっていうのは よりリアルな会話に近いかなという感じはしますね。

(In response to the question, whether the IELTS speaking test assesses communication skills?) Yes, compared with other tests, um other English proficiency tests, face-to-face interview helps assess communication skills...Let me see, I think rather than recording in the computer, an interviewer asking further questions on the topic I talked about makes the interview sound closer to real conversation.)

(ID09_Secondary school teacher)

However, some teachers expressed concerns about the interview format of the IELTS Speaking Test. One teacher focused on how students would practise together to prepare for the interview sessions. There was an emphasis on how the interactions would be awkward for the students when they first began as shown in the example below.

それこそなんちゅうの、英語でしゃべるっていう時に、隣の日本人同士でね、こうやって英語でしゃべることには、それこそ18歳のねえ、多感な青少年が、それはちょっと、恥ずかしいんじゃないって、自分ももし、やれって言われたら、真っ先にそう言うと思う。

(That's what it is, hm what to say, when you talk in English, with the Japanese person next to you... [when you] talk in English like this, to an 18 year-old sensitive youth, it's a bit embarrassing. I think I'll say that first of all if I'm told to do it.)

(ID13_Secondary school teacher)

Another secondary school teacher pointed out how having an interviewer was important, especially when the students were expected to structure their responses without knowing what the interviewer would ask or say next. This interviewee also commented that interviewer behaviour should be consistent throughout.

なぜならコミュニケーションで 実際相手が どういう反応するか 分からない中で 会話を構築していく力も 大事ななと 思ったりするので。面接官は必要であるかな。面接官もばらつきがないように人によって態度が、変わらないでほしいかなと思いますね。

(Because I think it's important to have the ability to build conversations in a situation where I don't know how the other person actually reacts in communication. Is the interviewer necessary? I hope that the interviewer does not change their attitude by the person.) (ID05_Secondary school teacher)

In the following excerpts teachers and students acknowledged that the IELTS Speaking Test assesses academic communication, as they explained that the questions could not be answered instantly without logical reasoning.

会話力というよりは論理的に自分の意見を述べる力が求められる

(Rather than [focusing on one's] communication skills, the ability to express one's opinion logically is more important.) (Response to open-ended question by student)

機械的でなく、かなり思考力を要する問題である。
(*The problem requires a lot of thought not mechanical.*)
(Survey open-ended response from teacher)

In the excerpt below, in addition to commenting on the appropriateness of IELTS as a test to assess communication skills, the teacher thought the advantage of the IELTS Speaking Test was that it covered a wide range of content requiring a range of skills, including carrying out everyday conversation and academic communication.

正確に査定している。でも非常に一つのジャンルにこだわらずにと言うか。例えばすぐ TOEFLと比べてしまうんですけど TOEFLであればもう本当に大学で通用する英語能力があるかっていうアカデミックな世界で生きていけるかっていうを試しているのがすごくわかるんですけど IELTSは、そういう意味では、日常生活から、若干論理的思考が必要な中程度のものから大学で通用するかなというか そういう意味ではまんべんなくカバーされてる内容ですので 何て言うんですかね。まだ力がそこまで付いてない子が受けても ある程度力を発揮してもらえらるテストだなというふうに個人的には思ったんですけど 答えになってるんですか。

(*I agree that IELTS accurately assesses students' communication skills [responding to the question if an IELTS test assesses communication skills or not], but not focusing on one area. For example, answering this type of question, I often end up comparing with TOEFL, anyway, in the case of TOEFL, I understand whether test-takers have an adequate English proficiency to cope with the study at university and survive in an academic environment. For IELTS, I think, the test covers the content to assess a wide range of communication skills from daily lives to academic environment where a certain level of logical thinking is required. In that sense, how can I say, personally I think students who have not attained to the level where logical reasoning is required can still demonstrate their ability. I am not really sure if I am answering the question.*) (ID04_Secondary school teacher)

5.4.2 Writing

As shown in Table 10, teachers and students had a similar view on IELTS as an appropriate test to assess written communication, with the majority of teachers and nearly half of the students choosing Q34c and a substantial number of both teachers and students choosing Q34a. The statements given in Question 35 do not explicitly explain the appropriateness of the IELTS Writing Test as an assessment for communication skills, but shared a general view of the writing test to assess communication skills (Q35 a, b) and what was expected as an assessment for communication skills (Q35c, d).

As for questions related to the usefulness of the test to develop academic skills, the findings showed a slightly different view between teachers and students on the IELTS Writing Tests. The majority of respondents agreed that the IELTS Writing Tests encouraged students to express their opinions in texts (Q34c). In relation to communication, while teachers considered it important to express their opinions clearly and logically, students focused on the need for a variety of vocabulary and expressions to provide a strong opinion.

Table 10: Teachers' and students' views on the appropriateness and usefulness of the IELTS Writing Test for communication and academic Skills (Q34 and 36)

	Statements	Teachers (n= 43)	Students (n= 51)	Total % (n= 95)
Q34	IELTS Writing for general communication			
a.	Writing is one of the appropriate means of measuring communication skills.	30 (69.77%)	22 (43.14%)	52 (54.74%)
b.	Writing is not appropriate for measuring communication skills.	3 (6.97%)	16 (31.37%)	19 (20%)
c.	It is communication ability to understand and judge given questions and information, and to express one's opinion logically in writing.	38 (88.37%)	25 (49.02%)	63 (66.32%)
d.	It is an important communication ability to express one's opinion in writing about the current world information.	16 (37.21%)	15 (29.42%)	31 (32.63%)
e.	Other	2 (4.65%)	1 (1.96%)	3 (3.16%)
Q36	The usefulness of IELTS Writing for developing academic skills (thinking, judgement and expression)			
a.	You need the ability to write in a composition that is most easily communicated to the other party.	37 (86.05%)	28 (54.90%)	65 (68.42%)
b.	You need the ability to write grammatically correct sentences.	21 (48.84%)	17 (33.33%)	38 (40%)
c.	You need the ability to use vocabulary and expressions that are in line with the task.	36 (83.72%)	33 (64.71%)	69 (72.63%)
d.	You need the ability to use grammatical structures that are in line with the task.	22 (51.16%)	11 (21.57%)	33 (34.73%)
e.	You must give a compelling opinion to the question.	35 (81.39%)	29 (56.86%)	64 (67.37%)
f.	You must express your opinion frankly and logically.	36 (83.72%)	24 (47.06%)	60 (63.18%)
g.	Various knowledge other than English is required.	29 (67.44%)	21 (41.17%)	50 (52.63%)
h.	You need the ability to think and respond quickly.	27 (62.79%)	23 (45.09%)	50 (52.63%)
i.	Other	1 (2.32%)	-	1 (1.05%)

In the responses to the open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews, both teachers and students acknowledged the appropriateness of IELTS Writing Tests as an assessment of communication skills, referring to what was expected of test-takers and/or the skills required in future, and/or comparing Task 1 and 2. The excerpt below featured comments on the appropriacy of the test, considering what was required to complete the test successfully.

トピックへの親しみが内容の精度を変えてしまう点は少し問題があると思うが、複数の理由と具体的な根拠を示して意見を展開することはアカデミックな文脈だけではなく必要なコミュニケーション力だと思うため、とても適切なタスク。

(I think that there is a little problem that familiarity with the topic changes the accuracy of the content, but I think that skills to develop arguments with multiple reasons and concrete grounds is useful, not limited to the academic context, but also a necessary communication skill in general, so it is a very appropriate task.)

(Response to the open-ended question by teacher).



In the two excerpts below, the participants commented on the appropriacy of the IELTS Writing Test in terms of the skills required in the Writing Tasks. The first example focuses on how IELTS Writing could be used to assess communication, while the second focuses on the meaning of each response (either through speech or writing).

自分の考えを言葉に表すことができ対する相手にも自分の意見を伝えることができと思うのでコミュニケーションに必要な能力だと考えます。

(I consider that it is a necessary ability for communication because I think that I can express my idea in words, and I can express my opinion to the other party.)

(Response to open-ended question by student)

ただ単に長い文章を書いたりとか すごく長い間 喋る、自分の考えをしゃべるとかではなくて やっぱり 簡潔に相手に 分かりやすい文章力が求められているのかなと思います。
(The test requires not just to write long sentences, talk for a very long time, or sharing your own thoughts, but I think that the other person's ability to write comprehensible sentences concisely is required.) (ID03_Secondary school teacher)

Many believed that the IELTS Writing Test requires different skills to those in their own classroom learning content as shown below.

ライティングに関しても論理的に文章を構成する力が すごい問われるので かなりアカデミックな能力が必要かなと思う。

(As for writing, the ability to compose sentences logically is required, so I wonder if it is necessary to have a fairly high level of academic skills.)

(ID12_Secondary school teacher)

Comparing the two writing tasks, some respondents believed that Task 2 focused more on communicative skills. Others thought the test useful when considering future target language uses. In the excerpt below, the teacher focused on how Task 2 encourages students to share their own opinions, on topics which would be natural for people to think about.

ライティングに関してはタスク2のフリーライティングもやっぱり 自分の意見をゼロからクリエイトするっていうのは もちろん コミュニケーション ツールだからもっと大事なかなと思います。数字で測ることはできると思う。ちょっとだけトピックが 難しかったことは僕は感じました。特にタスク1の方。タスク2は一応 実生活で触れる機会もありそうな内容だったので。タスク1に関しては 今後一切考えることが ないであろう内容だったので。

(Regarding writing, I think that free writing in Task 2 is very important because it is a communication tool to create your own opinions from scratch. I think it's possible to assess with numbers. I felt that the topic was a little difficult. Especially for Task 1.

Task 2 was something that I could have a chance to relate to my daily life. As for Task 1, it was something that I would never think about in the future.)

(ID06_Secondary school teacher)

Most participants acknowledged the academic skills required to perform the Speaking and Writing tasks successfully, but whether preparing for IELTS enhances communication skills was questioned as shown below.

直結はしてないかなっていうのが、第一印象で。あれだけのなんかこう、結構リーディングとかもすごい。専門的なことが書かれていたりするので確かにアカデミックな知識をつけるという意味では必要なスキルなのかなって思うけどIELTSを受けたからといってIELTSのための勉強が直接的にコミュニケーション能力にダイレクトにつながるかというもまたそれはちょっと違うのかなというのはいいますね。アカデミックしか受けたことがないのであのジェネラルでしたっけ。もう一個の方がちょっとわかんないんですけどアカデミックの限りだとやっぱりものすごいやっぱ大学留学に特化したものかなという感じはします。

(My first impression is that preparing for IELTS would not directly enhance communication skills. The amount of reading and its technical content may enhance academic skills, but even if I take an IELTS test, I am not really sure if preparing for IELTS would enhance my communication skill directly. I have only taken an Academic IELTS, and therefore I don't know about IELTS General. However, I think IELTS is really for people who are preparing for studying overseas.)
(ID09_Secondary school teacher).

Similarly, the excerpt below comments on appropriateness in relation to the students' intentions for taking the IELTS Writing Test.

このことがコミュニケーション能力測定に相応しいかどうかという設問に対しては適切な解答ではないと思えるが、実際問題アカデミックモジュールを受験する人は、大学や大学院での留学を考えている人だと思うので、その点に関しては妥当性はあると思える。
(It seems that this is not an appropriate answer to the question of whether this is appropriate for measuring communication skills, but I think that the person who actually takes the academic module is a person who is thinking of studying abroad at a university or graduate school, so I think that there is a validity in that respect.)
(Response to open-ended question by teacher)

While the majority of teacher participants supported appropriateness of the IELTS Writing Test for assessing communication skills, one teacher who strongly disagreed on how IELTS Writing could help develop academic skills stated in the responses to open-ended questions, IELTSは学習指導要領に沿っていない (IELTS is not in line with the course of study). This shows how teachers found gaps in the focus of IELTS Writing Tasks for teachers and students.

5.4.3 Different definitions of communication

While Table 8 and Figure 8 show most respondents believed that IELTS Speaking and Writing Tests are an appropriate measure for assessing communication (in RQ4 above), there were mixed opinions shown in the open-ended survey and interview responses about how communication should be defined or whether the definition in the survey was clear. These findings were reflected in the results for Q43 (あなたにとって、「コミュニケーション能力」とは何だと思いますか。当てはまる項目をクリックして下さい。 (What do you think "communicative competence" is? Please click the applicable item) in Table 11, where the teachers and students selected different responses for what communication means to them. This was where 26 of the teachers believed that communication was about being able to understand, judge and express oneself through speech and writing (Q43 a) while the same number of students believed that communication was about being able to communicate to others in general (Q43 b).⁵

5. For Q43, participants were able to choose only **one** statement that they thought most appropriate to justify their degree of agreement asked in Q42. This is unlike Questions 17, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37 and 39, where participants were able to choose as many statements as they wished to justify the degree of agreement when they were asked about easiness or appropriateness of IELTS Speaking or Writing Test.

Table 11: Teachers' and students' definition for communication (Q43)

Q43	Statements	Teachers (n= 33)	Students (n= 50)	Total % (n= 83)
a.	Ability to understand and judge what the other person is saying and to express one's opinion verbally or in writing logically.	26 (78.78%)	9 (18%)	35 (42.17%)
b.	Ability to communicate what you want to say to others.	2 (6.06%)	26 (52%)	28 (33.74%)
c.	Ability to have daily conversation.	1 (3.03%)	9 (18%)	10 (12.05%)
d.	Ability to express persuasive opinions, verbally or in writing.	-	3 (6%)	3 (3.61%)
e.	Ability to think about how to effectively convey one's intentions.	2 (6.06%)	1 (2%)	3 (3.61%)

f.	Ability to verbally give presentations in front of people what you want to convey.	0	2 (4%)	2 (2.41%)
g.	Other	3 (9.09%)	1 (2%)	4 (4.82%)

A few respondents also emphasised that communication required different abilities (and it was difficult to just pick one). For example, one teacher commented in the responses to open-ended questions, 一つしか答えられないのですか…? (*Can you answer only one...?*) while another stated, 上記すべて (*All of the above*). The following two respondents elaborated on what areas they believed were needed for communication:

口頭もしくは書面で、必要に応じて(話す相手や状況によって)語彙や文法を適切に運用できる能力

(*Ability to appropriately use vocabulary and grammar as needed (depending on the person or situation you speak to) verbally or in writing*)

(Response to open-ended question by teacher).

複数選択ができなかったため、以下に3点記述します。「伝えたいことを相手に口で伝えられる能力」「伝えたいことを、人前で口頭発表できる能力」「口頭もしくは書面で、説得力のある意見が述べられる能力」

(*Since multiple selections were not available, I point out three aspects: "The ability to communicate what you want to convey to others," "The ability to verbally announce what you want to convey in public," and "The ability to express convincing opinions verbally or in writing"*) (Response to open-ended question by student).

Further comments in both the open-ended question responses and interview data showed that they were unsure how IELTS defined (or characterised) communication. Therefore, they found it difficult to decide whether IELTS Writing and Speaking Tests would assess communication skills appropriately, as shown in the excerpts below.

コミュニケーション能力の定義が不明瞭なため、これで「コミュニケーション能力」を図れるのかどうか分からない。

(*Because the definition for "communication ability" is unclear [in this survey], it is unclear whether or not this [test] can improve communication ability.*)

(Survey open-ended question by teacher)

コミュニケーション能力の定義がわからないので、答えるのが難しい。

(*It is difficult to answer because I do not know the definition of communication ability.*) (Survey open-ended question by teacher)

そもそもここでいうコミュニケーション能力とはなんですか？文章によるコミュニケーション？

(*In the first place, what is the communication ability here? Written communication by sentences?*) (Survey open-ended response from Teacher)

To further explain the closed-ended survey responses (Questions 26 and 34), there were a few positive open-ended responses about how the IELTS Speaking Test assesses communication skills through interaction with examiners, as shown in the excerpt below.

それはすごいいいなどと思う。人と人と会ってコミュニケーションする。それが評価されるっていうのはいいと思いますし。

(*I think it's great. Meet and communicate with people. I think it's good that it is evaluated.*) (ID12_Teacher)

5.4.4 Comparing to other commercial tests to make a judgement

Along with their personal understanding of communication skills, many of the respondents referred to other commercial tests when they were trying to determine whether IELTS was an appropriate test for assessing communication skills. Comparing the topics or questions found in IELTS with those in EIKEN or TOEFL were common in the interviews.

役に立つのは絶対立ちますよね。アイエルツだろうが 英検だろうが TOEFLだろうが 資格試験の方が すべての技能を問うので 勉強するのはコミュニケーション能力は上がっていくと思う。

(It's definitely useful, isn't it? Whether it's IELTS, EIKEN or TOEFL, the qualification exam asks all skills, so I think that preparing for the exam will help you improve communication skills.) (ID12_Teacher)

そうなんですよね。なんかだから、そういう努力するとか、そういう、力を測りたいなら、その、今のままでもいいのかなと思うんですけど、・・・その、社会、・・・的な(笑)、なんだろう。能力、コミュニケーション能力とか、・・・しゃべる、んー、なんだろう。伝える力とか、・・・そういう、仕事ができるとか、なんかそんなとこまで広がらないですけど、そういう力を測りたいなら、IELTSの方が、いいのかなっていうのは思います。

(That's right. So, if you want to make such an effort or measure your strength, I think it's okay to keep it as it is, but...that, society...(laughs). Ability, communication ability, etc...Talking, hmm, what is it? The ability to communicate, such as being able to get a job that requires communication skills, does not extend to that level, but if you want to measure that kind of ability, I think that IELTS is better.) (ID19_Student)

そうですね。ただ私も1つ1つの試験だけで 測れるかっていうと やっぱ難しいなって思います。何種類か受けて同じくらいのバンドになっていれば、やっぱいわゆる、とか中 上級っていうレベルなんじゃないかなって思うので アイエルツも測っているとは思うんですけども アイエルツだけで測れるかと やっぱすごく対策してる人ってやっぱどの試験でもいると思うので そうですよ。IELTSはものすごく取れるけど英検になると分からないみたいな人も多分いると思うので。

(Let me see. However, I also think that it is difficult to measure (communication skills) with just one test. I think that if I take several types of communication test, and then my score is in a band of the same level, I think that my level is a so-called intermediate or advanced level, and so I acknowledge that IELTS measures communication skills, but I wonder if my ability can be measured only with IELTS. I think that there are people who think the same in every test. So, let me see, I think there are some people who can get a high score at IELTS, but not sure if they can get the same score at EIKEN.) (ID10_Teacher)

5.5 RQ5. What are teachers' and students' views on IELTS to replace the current nationwide examination?

The participants shared similar views on the use of IELTS as a proficiency test in Japan, when they responded to Question 38 IELTSは現在のセンター試験に代わる試験として適切だと思いますか。 (*Do you think IELTS is a good alternative to the current Centre Exam?*) or Question 40 (今後の大学入試に、どのような形であれ、ライティングやスピーキングを英語テストに導入することについてどう思いますか。 (*What do you think about introducing writing and speaking into your English test in any way for future college entrance exams?*)).

Table 12 summarises the descriptive statistics for Question 38 and 40. The average rating of the degree of agreement with the statement asked in Q38 is lower than other questions in the survey (i.e., 2.47 for teachers; 2.75 for students). Further, teachers' rating was lower than students'. Compared with Q38, the average rating for Q40, was high (i.e., 3.7 for teachers, 3.32 for students), and more teachers were positive about introducing speaking and writing in the university entrance examination than students.

Figure 11 visually presents the distributions of the participants' degree of agreement on the two statements. The majority of respondents either disagreed (12 teachers, 20 students) or remained neutral (19 teachers, 17 students) with IELTS being seen as a good alternative to the current Centre Exam, especially by teachers whose responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to neutral (3). There were only nine students who agreed (4) and two students who strongly agreed (5). As for Q40, the findings revealed respondents had mixed views about adding writing and speaking items to the future university entrance exam, as the average for both teachers and students was neutral (3) with a wide range from 1 to 5. While a large number also remained neutral (12 teachers, 20 students) there was a higher number of respondents who agreed (15 teachers, 19 students) and strongly agreed (7 teachers, 3 students) than those who disagreed.

Table 12: Teachers' and students' views on IELTS as an alternative university entrance examination in Japan (Q38 and 40)

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
Q38. Good alternative to the current Centre Exam					
Teachers	36	2.42	0.68	1	3
Students	51	2.75	0.95	1	5
Q40. Improve future university entrance exam by adding writing and speaking items					
Teachers	37	3.70	0.89	1	5
Students	50	3.32	0.86	1	5

Figure 11: Teachers' and students' views on the appropriateness of IELTS as an alternative Centre Exam (Q38) and the addition of writing and speaking tasks in the current test for future college entry exams (Q40)

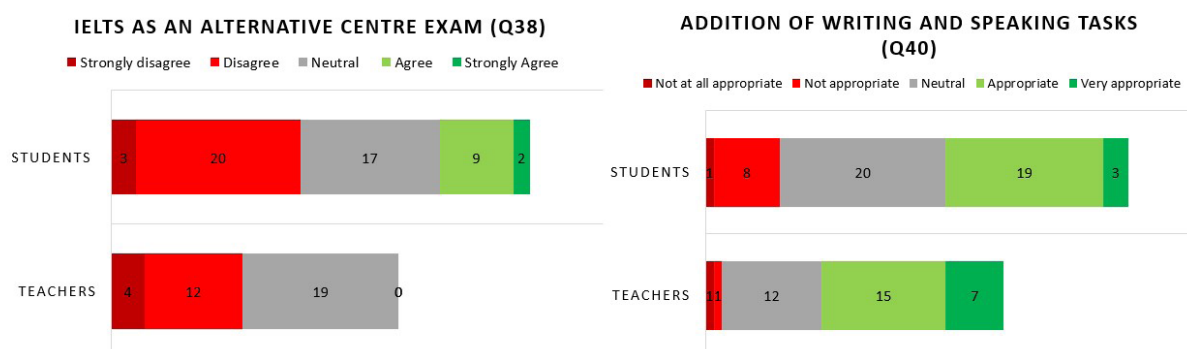


Table 13 further shows the additional responses from a total of 87 participants. It illustrates why the majority of teachers and students disagreed with using IELTS as an alternative to the current Centre Exam. The frequencies of the statements for Question 39 (Q38 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q38? Please click all applicable items) is shown with the total percentage for both teachers and students in the respective columns. The selected responses showed how the majority believed that IELTS required more extensive knowledge and additional academic skills which differed from the current Centre Exam.



Table 13: Teachers' and students' opinions about IELTS as the Centre Exam (Q39)

	Statement	Teachers (n= 36)	Students (n= 51)	Total % (n= 87)
a	IELTS is suitable for measuring communication skills.	9 (25%)	18 (35.29%)	27 (31.03%)
b	Compared to the Centre Exam, IELTS requires a higher level of thinking, judgement and expression.	24 (66.67%)	31 (60.78%)	55 (63.22%)
c	Compared to the Centre Exam, IELTS requires more advanced and extensive knowledge.	21 (58.33%)	25 (49.02%)	46 (59.77%)
d	The examination fee is higher than the Centre Exam.	20 (55.56%)	10 (19.61%)	30 (34.48%)
e	Compared to the Centre Exam, the test sites are limited.	22 (61.11%)	13 (25.49%)	35 (40.29%)
f	It takes longer to notify the results than the Centre Exam.	14 (38.89%)	12 (23.53%)	26 (29.88%)
g	I think IELTS is a good alternative to each university's own secondary exam, rather than a centre exam.	21 (58.33%)	28 (54.90%)	49 (56.32%)
h	Other	6 (16.67%)	5 (9.80%)	11 (12.64%)

Their selected responses showed that more than half of the respondents believed that IELTS requires a higher level of thinking, judgement and expression skills and more advanced and extensive knowledge (Q39b, c) than the current Centre Exam, so it would not be an appropriate replacement. There was also emphasis on particular features of the IELTS such as the examination fee (Q39d), limited venue (Q39e), and time taken to receive the results (Q39f), which raised concerns especially for the Japanese teachers.

The open-ended question and interview responses provided further insights into how teachers and students viewed the IELTS Speaking and Writing Tests as an alternative Centre Exam. The respondents made comments on two main areas, which included: (1) the misalignment of IELTS with MEXT; and (2) equity of using IELTS as an alternative test. Some participants also provided suggestions on how IELTS could potentially become an alternative test in the future, as shown in the sections below.

5.5.1 The misalignment of IELTS with the education policy.

Many of the respondents shared their beliefs that there is a major gap between IELTS and the current English language policy in Japan. That is, to do well in the IELTS test, additional skills which are not in the current English curriculum are required.

The interview data show that both teachers and students were concerned with the linguistic and cultural knowledge required to respond both to IELTS Speaking and Writing Test questions. As shown in the survey results earlier (see Table 5 and 7) more than half of the stakeholders believed that a variety of knowledge was required to respond to the spoken and written topics. Further, there were features of the IELTS test which were considered more challenging than the current requirements for Japanese students, as shown in the excerpts below.

比較をしなくては行けないので 二つのものを比較しながら 自分の考えをまとめるっていう論理的な能力をいえると思うんですが そういう教育を私の生徒であれば日本語でもあまりそういう訓練を受けていないので多分そのあたりが崩壊するのではないかなと思います。

(Since I have to make a comparison, I think that students are required to have the logical ability to put together their thoughts while comparing two things, but my students have not received that kind of education, even in Japanese, and so I think it's likely that students will hit the wall and will not be able to cope.)

(ID06_Secondary school teacher)

自分の母国語で解答するにも難しいような質問が含まれている。

(It contains questions that are difficult to answer even in your native language.)

(Survey open-ended question by student)

文部科学省が定めている学習指導要領の内容と一致していない。日本の高校生が受験までに学校教育で学習してきた内容を測るテストではない。IELTSの対策をしてきた学生以外に不公平である。仮にIELTSをセンター試験の代わりにしたところで、高校生に4技能が身につくわけではない。また、それを指導するための教員へのサポートが不足している。

(It does not match the content of the course of study established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. It is not a test that measures what Japanese high school students have learned in school education before taking the exam. It is unfair except for students who have prepared for IELTS. Even if IELTS replaced the Centre Exam, it does not mean that high school students will acquire the four skills. Also, there is a lack of support for teachers to teach it.)

(Response to the open-ended response by student).

In relation to the gap between the current English curriculum and what is required in the IELTS test, there were many examples of how both teachers and students were concerned about the age of students and their ability to respond to some of these questions even in their own native language. For example, as shown below, one student focused on how these questions were considered an appropriate challenge for university students, especially when there are more discussions expected at a tertiary level:

この内容について自分で考え、理由とともに答えなければならないので難しいと思いました。ただ大学で議論する際にこの程度の内容について扱われることはよくあると思うので適切な難易度だと思います。

(I found it difficult because I had to think about this content myself and answer it along with the reason. However, I think that this level of content is often dealt with when discussing at university, so I think it is an appropriate level of difficulty.)

(Survey open-ended response from student)

The findings from Questions 41, focused on the suitability of IELTS for current secondary school students: IELTSは 何歳ぐらいの学生に適切なテストだと思いますか。(How old should the students be when they complete an IELTS test?) The numbers ranged from 1 = above 15 years old, 2 = above 18 years old, 3 = above 20 years old, 4 = above 22 years old and 5 = Other. When teachers and students were asked to select which age group that they believed was the most appropriate for the IELTS Speaking and Writing tests, there were different averages, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Teachers' and students' views on the average minimum age of IELTS test-takers in Japan (Q42)

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
Teachers	36	2.56	0.76	1	5
Students	49	1.98	0.84	1	5

A closer look at the findings revealed that a majority of teachers believed that students should be either above 18 years old (18 teachers) or 20 years old (14 teachers), while only one teacher believed that any age above 15 years old was acceptable. As for the students' responses, the average minimum age requirements were lower. There were 13 students who believed that 15 years old was acceptable and 29 who believed that test-takers should be above 18 years old; fewer students believed that 20 years old (4 students) or 22 years old (2 students) was the appropriate age to start. The following excerpt further illustrates this. The teacher participant thought that students in the final year of secondary school could take the test, and to give continuity, it would be good for junior secondary school students to take a Cambridge English Examination prior to this.

やっぱり 高校3年生ぐらいでしょうね。中学生には難しすぎると思いますので だから 中学生ぐらいまでは ケンブリッジ英検を受けておいて A2ぐらいまで来たときに ケンブリッジ英検のB1Preliminaryとか受けてもいいですけど ちょっとIELTSも目標にしだすと つながりはいいかなと思いますね。

(I think, IELTS would be suitable for students at the last year of high school. I think it is too difficult for junior high school students, and therefore, it would be good for junior high school students to take Cambridge English Examination. Once they reach A2 level, they could take the Cambridge B1 Preliminary aiming for IELTS at that time, and it would have a good continuity.) (ID04_Secondary school teacher).

Given the circumstances, some teachers expressed their concerns for students if the IELTS test was used as an alternative Centre Exam. For example, one university lecturer felt there was too much additional pressure on students.

留学したい子だとか、やるっていうんだらば、..本当に、必要な事なんじゃないかなと思いますけども、大学入試としては、要するに高校生が頑張れば、普通に授業やってれば、これぐらいは、落ち込まずに取れるっていうふうなのが、望ましいと思うので、..それとしてはやっぱり難しいんじゃないかなと思いますね。

(I think it's really necessary if a student wants to study abroad, but as a university entrance exam, if high school students work hard, if they do their best, if they do attend the class regularly, it would be desirable that they should be able to receive a decent mark without getting depressed, so I think IELTS would be difficult to expect this outcome.) (ID16_University Lecturer)

んー、そうですねー。これでも、試験としては面白いと思いますよね。面白いと思いますけど、人数のクラスサイズの限界もあるんで、そこで、つけれる能力っていうのは、本当に、やっぱり限られていると思うので、もし、例えばこういうことをやるならば、本当に、全、中学校や小学校の全システムを、変えるというのかなあ...。そうしないと、高校3年で、ここまでのことをっていうのは、学校の中でだけでは無理だと思います。

(Hmmm, let me see. Even if difficult, I think it would be good as a test, but even if good...considering the class size, it would be limited to prepare students for the exam like IELTS in the current context. For example, if this type of test is offered as an alternative to the current examination (Centre Exam), the current system (curriculum) should be entirely revised across junior and senior high schools. Otherwise, I would not think students in the final year (3rd grade) of senior high school will be able to prepare under the current system.)
(ID13_Secondary school teacher)

Teachers were also concerned whether they could prepare students for IELTS at school considering the amount of time allocated to English lessons.

そう、それで、授業は1時間ですよね。その中で、1時間の授業が4コマ、1週間に。その中で、Speaking、Writing、Listening、Readingを、教えるというのは、不可能に近いような。
(Yes, the length of one lesson is one hour. Then there are four lessons every week. It seems almost impossible to teach speaking, writing, listening and reading in the four hours.) (ID04_Secondary school teacher)

入試に使うとなると学校で指導する。学校で指導するとなると各学校の教師が評価しないといけない。毎回IELTSを受けてこいというわけにもいきませんのでたぶん本場のIELTSに向けて学校で何度も細かいちっちゃいテストとか模擬テストとかするそうです。模擬テストをするとなると英語だけで4時間ってやっぱりありえないですよ。

(If IELTS is accepted as an alternative to the current Centre Exam, that means we need to prepare students for an IELTS test at school. If we include IELTS preparation in the curriculum, teachers have to assess students' performance. I mean, we cannot advise our students to take a mock IELTS test, and therefore we have to devise many small-scale IELTS mock tests at school. If we administer a mock test, we will not be able to cover four hours on English only.) (ID04_Secondary school teacher)

As explained above, in relation to the current educational policies and requirements for Japanese students, many of the respondents believed that IELTS-assessed skills were either not required or beyond what was needed for all the Japanese students. In some of the interviews, the students had contrasting views about preparing for additional skills assessed in IELTS. Several students thought that these additional skills were only needed for the future. For example, one student stated,

うん。私は高校では別に要らない、・・・かなって思います。大学に入ってから、その、将来、使うようになる人は、やればいいんじゃないかなと思います。

(Yeah. I don't need it in senior high school. The person who will use it in the future after entering the university I think that it is good if it does.) (ID14_Student).

In contrast, there was also one student who saw the additional skills in a positive light:

でもIELTSが、その試験の問題になったら、IELTSに向けて、の、準備をしてもらうから、そうすると、もうちょっとなんか、..その、コミュニケーションを取るとか、そういう力が、高校のうちから身に付くと思うので、私はそっちの方がいいかなって思うので、私はそっちの方がいいと思うんですけど。

(But when IELTS becomes one of the entrance exams, I think I'd prepare for IELTS, so if I would do that, I think I'd get a little more communication, and I would be able to develop that kind of ability at high school, so I think it's better that way.) (ID19_Student).

One teacher agreed that using IELTS as an alternative test would also improve English education in the future, especially when additional skills were assessed:

なんというか 良かったなって思う面もあるし、これでまた こう英語教育は後退しちゃうというか またトラディショナルなものに戻っていくと ちょっと困るなという不安はあります。

(How can I say, there are some aspects (about the examination reform) that I think are good, and (if the current system continues), there is also some concern that English education will recede, or that we go backwards returning to traditional curriculum.) (ID12_Secondary school teacher).

These views highlighted that it depended on the students' reasons for learning English. Most of the teachers and students believed that IELTS was a specialised test only for specific target groups, who were interested in studying abroad, as shown in the excerpts below:

スピーキングとライティングの指導は各学校の生徒の習熟度によってかなり差があるため、IELTSのスピーキングとライティングは多くの高校生にとって難しすぎてほとんど得点できず、差がつかないと思われる。なので二次試験の代わりとしては大変役立つと思うが、統一試験の対象学生についてはカバーできる範囲が狭いと思う。

(Speaking and writing instruction varies considerably depending on the proficiency of the students in each school. IELTS Speaking and Writing are too difficult for many high school students to score, and it seems that there is no difference. So I think IELTS tests will be very useful as a substitute for the secondary exam, but I think that the scope of coverage for the students targeted for the centre exam is narrow.)
(Response to the open-ended response by teacher).

他の英語力判定テスト(例えば英検)との比較ができるか疑問であるため。また、IELTSは主に留学希望の学生のために作られたと聞いたことがあるため、日本大学の入試に採用するのはどうか疑問があるため。

(Because it is doubtful that it can be compared with other English proficiency tests (for example, EIKEN). Also, I've heard that IELTS was developed mainly for students who want to study abroad, so I doubt that it will be adopted for the entrance examination of universities in Japan.)
(Response to the open-ended response by teacher).

あー。なんか、・・・なんだろう。英語に特化した大学、とかはなんか、・・・凄いやってもいいんじゃないかなって、ちょっと今一瞬思っ、でもなんか、・・・なんだろう。・・・高校生で、・・・なんか留学とかいけてる子とかも少ないと思うし、やっぱりこれを受けるのに、要する時間が、他の受験勉強と両立しないと思うから、

(Oh. I wonder what it is. I thought for a moment that a university specialising in English could use the IELTS score, but I wonder what it is. Among high school students, I think that there are few children who can go to study abroad, and after all, because I think that the time required is not compatible with other examination study. I don't think IELTS should be used as an alternative to the Centre Exam.)
(ID18_student).

The excerpt from the secondary school teacher (ID10) also raised issues related to education and training in different school environments. As reported above, many teachers believed that the current school curriculum does not prepare students for IELTS. As shown in the excerpts below, there were concerns related to the teachers' ability to help students with the interview-style questions as well as being able to assess their students' ability to respond to questions appropriately.

アイエルトツ自体は、すごくそれを練習することはコミュニケーション能力の向上に役立つと思うんですけども、ただやっぱり教員の側が、例えば、スピーキングの練習相手になれるかっていうと、多くの方はまだその準備はできていないように思います。ヒントを与え過ぎず、IELTSのエグザミネーみたいな役割をしたりですとか、彼らのスピーチをちゃんと評価できるスキルが、同じくライティングもそうなんですけども、学生が練習するのはすごくコミュニケーション育成にはいいと思うんですけども、学校の先生がそれを助けられるかという、ちょっと怪しいのでIELTSをやるとコミュニケーション力がつくかという、そういった意味で私はちょっと心配というか難しいんじゃないかなって感じがします。

(I think preparing for IELTS itself is very good to help to improve communication skills, but after all, (there is a concern amongst teachers) considering whether the teacher can be a speaking practice partner or not, for example, I don't think many people are still ready for it. I wonder whether they can play a role like an IELTS examiner without giving too many hints and have a skill to assess their speech appropriately... Similarly, writing is the same, but I think that it is very good for students to practise for communication development, but I am a bit sceptical that school teachers can help it, so in that sense I feel that I'm a little worried or find it difficult to think whether IELTS will improve communication skills in these environments.) (ID10_Teacher)

5.5.2 Equity in using IELTS to replace the current system

Equity was another factor that influenced the respondents' views on using the IELTS test as a university entrance examination. As shown previously in Table 11, the teachers and students had similar views on the fairness of using IELTS as an alternative to the current Centre Exam, where both groups were concerned first with Statement d (*Compared to the Centre Exam, the test sites are limited*). The focus on price and outcome notifications, however, were slightly different. The teachers were more concerned about Statement e (*The price is higher than the Centre Exam*), than Statement f (*It takes longer to notify the results than the Centre Exam*), while more students selected Statement f before Statement e. Their responses in the interview and open-ended responses, reflected the results for Statement e and Statement f; more teachers provided further comments on the issues with cost while more students raised concerns about the reasons for slower outcome releases. In general, there were more negative views on the costs involved in taking IELTS.

Many teachers (e.g., ID05, ID06, ID07, ID08, ID09) believed that the costs created a division between students, as shown in the excerpts below when some of the teachers talked about how affordability would affect the number of test-takers in Japan.

試験自体は非常に良い。導入することに反対はないんですけどやっぱり費用の面ですよね。非常にやっぱり1回あたり3万円ぐらいかかるので、何度も受けられるものではない。ちょっとお金持ってる人は有利の状況には変わらないかなとは思いますが。
(*The test itself is very good. I'm not against introducing it, but it's still an expense aspect that I am concerned about, isn't it? It costs about 30,000 yen per test, so it is not something that students can take many times. I think that the advantageous situation does not change for the person who has a little bit more money.*)
(ID08_Secondary school teacher)

Another secondary teacher (ID13) explained that there would be additional costs behind the IELTS examination, which include extra tuition for specialised cram schools and travel expenses to go abroad. The process behind preparing and taking an IELTS test would become more of a financial burden for many people.

やっぱりね、しゃべれる子と、しゃべれない子の差っていうのは、やっぱりそれこそ専門のそういう塾に行ったり、お金がある子が海外行ったり、っていう中で培われた子、たち、と、そうでない子っていうのは学校の中ではね、やっぱりなかなか培えないと思うんですよ、
(*After all, the difference between the child who can speak and the child who cannot speak is that it is a child who grew up in a fortunate environment where they can go to such a specialised cram school, and where they have money to go abroad and a child who did not. And I think that it is not possible to help those students who are not in the fortunate environment.*) (ID13_Secondary school teacher).

A few teachers also mentioned how the test would require more resources to assess the students' English proficiency levels; for example, one teacher shared on the open-response item that the marking would take too much time, as shown in the excerpt below:

人的な労力がかかりすぎる。しかし純粋に労力等を考慮せずすみ、なおかつ試験科目としての英語でなく、言語としてのEnglishの能力を判断するのであれば、センター試験よりもはるかに優れている。
(*It takes too much human effort. However, it is far superior to the Centre Exam if it is possible to judge the ability of English as a language, not English as an examination subject, without considering labour.*)
(Response to the open-ended question response by teacher).

5.5.3 Issues with how students would be marked consistently

As shown in the statement f, in Table 13 above, some teachers and students expressed their concerns with the IELTS marking process, which would be different to the Centre Exam. These students were part of the 26 respondents (14 teachers and 12 students) who selected the feature that IELTS had a slower rate for notifying students about their test outcomes (Table 13). As shown in the excerpts below, the students believed that the open-ended responses with multiple options were difficult to mark in a consistent manner. The variables related to individual differences were seen as unfair for many of these students.

順位を機械的につけるのに向いていない。

(Not suitable for ranking mechanically.)

(Response to the open-ended question by student).

このような表現力を公正に採点することは極めて難しいと思うから。

(I think it is extremely difficult to score the skills to use such expressions fairly.)

(Response to the open-ended question by student).

解答に個人差が出るため、採点基準が一律じゃない。面接形式で手間がかかる。

(The scoring criteria are not uniform because there are individual differences in the answers. It takes time and effort in an interview format.)

(Response to the open response by student).

Another teacher provided further insight into the marking requirements by comparing the four skills assessed in the current Centre Exam. The multiple bands required to test different aspects of the IELTS speaking test were seen as subjective and unfair:

残るスピーキングは、測定が困難であるので、複数の外部試験のバンドスケールを現状では用いざるを得ないのかもしれない。ただし、それが大学入試の公平性を担保できるかどうか、という面においては現状では不透明ではある。

(The remaining speaking test is difficult to assess, and so it may be inevitable to have to have multiple external test band scales. However, it is currently unclear whether it can ensure the fairness of university entrance examinations.)

(Response to the open-ended question by teacher).

5.5.4 IELTS could potentially become an alternative test in the future

Throughout the survey and interview data, the majority of respondents viewed IELTS as a “superior” test but expressed concerns about different areas of education and training. The findings revealed that many teachers believed that time was an important factor if proficiency tests like IELTS were to be introduced as alternative tests in Japan. While more than 50% of the respondents believed that IELTS could be an alternative test, there were a few teachers who also shared their views on how IELTS could potentially become an alternative Centre Exam over time through different kinds of changes.

First of all, there was emphasis placed on the need for change in the current educational policy in relation to the curriculum and classroom learning environment. Many teachers believed that IELTS assessed different areas of general communication and academic skills through the speaking and writing items (see RQ4), and that more student-centred, communicative approaches would need to be encouraged in all Japanese classrooms to develop students’ speaking and writing skills before completing an IELTS test. One teacher (ID06) summarised how there was a need for small changes to be made over time so that Japanese students would be able to meet the new expectations or requirements for general communication in English:

慎重に進めて時間をかけて ゆっくりちょっとずつ変えてもらわないと現場も対応できませんし、生徒も地域も対応できないと思います。

(Therefore, I think that it is not possible for teachers to cope with the change if it does not change slowly little by little by spending time carefully, and both the student and the region are not able to cope.) (ID06_Secondary school teacher).

Another teacher believed that a reduced number of students in each class would make a difference:

入試のあり方を変えることによって、高等学校での学びの方法を変えるというのが目的の一つであると思うが、それならば、例えば英語の授業は15名以下とするという教育政策や、それに対する予算措置といった教育行政にも時間とお金をかけるべきであると個人的には思う。結果を変えることで過程を変えるというのでは、その過程において苦しむ人が増えるだけであり、その過程も含めての政策が必要だと思う。

(I recognise that one of the purposes of the examination reform is to change the way of learning in senior high school by changing the way of entrance examination, but if that is the case, for example, the educational policy should be that the English class is 15 students or less, and for that I personally think that time and money should also be spent on education administration such as budgetary measures. Changing the process by changing the outcome only results in increased numbers of people who suffer in the process, and I think it is necessary to have a policy that includes the process.) (Response to the open-ended question by teacher).

A few teachers also suggested that schools should introduce different classes that specialise in different areas of English communication, as shown in the excerpt below from a secondary school teacher:

はい そうですね。カリキュラムにやっぱりある学校ではスピーキングの授業をしっかりと進めた学校もディベートだけの授業なんかも作れて英語会話でディベートブリッジングをしたりとかは可能だったので そういう学校はいいんですけど そうでない学校でもスピーキングをやる意味ってのは すごく同じくらいあると思うので 簡単な会話でもやっぱりそのカリキュラム上にちゃんと会話をやる ライティングをやるっていうふうに変えた方がいいな と思います。

(Yes, that's right. In a school where the curriculum includes speaking to enhance students' speaking skills, it is possible to devise a debating only class, and in such a class, students can do debating during conversation class, but there are schools which do not have much emphasis on speaking in the curriculum. However, it is important to include speaking in these schools, and therefore I think we should introduce speaking (even simple conversation activities) and writing by changing the curriculum.) (ID10_Secondary school teacher).

Another area that teachers focused on was the cost of the IELTS examinations. As reported for the issues of equity, many teachers believed that the expense was one of the main barriers to making IELTS an alternative test. As shown in the excerpts below, some teachers made suggestions related to reducing the costs of preparing and completing an IELTS test. If the government could subsidise part of the costs, more students would be able to prepare for IELTS so that the students could develop their skills further.

もし それにもし仮に それが 政府の負担になるとかで 生徒にとって経済的な負担が ほぼない状況で受け入れるとしたら、3年間の指導を全部変えなくてはいけないと思いますし 検定教科書の内容を全部変えてもらわないといけないんじゃないかなと思います。

(If, if the government bears the cost and accepts it is a situation where there is almost no economic burden on the students, I think that I will have to change all the course of study for three years (of upper secondary school) and that I will have to ask the MEXT to revise the whole contents of the certified textbook.)

(ID06_Secondary school teacher).

そうですね。もし例えばアイエルトツが無料だったとしたら すごくいいとは思いますが、日本の高校生だったら、日本全体見たときに 上位層 中間層 下位層が入ると上位層でないと結果が出にくいのです。もし突然アイエルトツを導入したとすれば もっと特別な教育を受けている子たちばかり、点数が出ることになる気がします。

(Let's see. I think it would be very nice if IELTS were free, for example, but if you're a senior high school student in Japan, it's hard to get results unless you are in the upper band when you look at Japan as a whole. If IELTS is suddenly introduced, I feel that, only children who are receiving a more special training for IELTS will get results.) (ID05_Secondary School teacher)

大学入試に関しては、・・・ま、大学入試に、IELTSとかTOEFLを導入することについては、・・・金銭面の問題が一番気にかかってしまって、・・・テストとしてよくできてることは、・・・事実なので、・・・そういう金銭の問題とかがクリアできるのであれば、あるいはあのテストの互換性の問題とかがクリアできるのであれば、私は入れることに、・・・賛成です。

(As for the university entrance exam, well, about introducing IELTS or TOEFL to the university entrance exam, the problem of money is the concern, and it is a fact that it is a well-developed test, so if such a money problem can be cleared, or if it is possible to clear the compatibility problem of that test, I will support introducing it (as an alternative to the Centre Exam.) (ID15_University lecturer)

6 Summary of the findings

Overall, the findings for each research question shed light on the views of both Japanese teachers and students on the impact of IELTS Speaking and Writing for general communication. As an English proficiency test, IELTS was more familiar to respondents who had (or are planning) to travel abroad for work or study in the future (RQ1). In general, the findings for RQ1 showed that the sample population knew very little about the format of the IELTS Speaking Test with its three different parts to complete.

After examining sample questions from both the IELTS Writing and Speaking, the respondents' views on the difficulty and appropriateness of each test for assessing communication skills varied depending on the different parts of each test. For example, teachers and students had similar views on the IELTS Speaking Test, where the format and familiarity of the topics made the task appropriate (RQ2). In contrast, the teachers and students had opposite views for both parts of the IELTS Writing Test, as teachers found Task 2 more difficult than Task 1 due to the logical reasoning, but students found Task 1 more difficult because of the graph layouts. Their views on the easiness of each writing task tended to depend on their personal experiences with completing similar style questions (RQ3).

In relation to assessing general communication skills, the teachers and students believed that IELTS required a combination of everyday communication and academic skills to complete all parts of the test. Each test required additional skills, which raised concerns for the teachers and students (RQ4). These differences when compared with the current Centre Exam made it difficult for the participants to view IELTS as a replacement or alternative university entrance exam. Both teachers and students pointed out different issues related to the current gaps between IELTS and the Japanese education policies and the equity of using IELTS as an alternative to the Centre Exam (RQ5).

7 Discussion

The current study investigated the stakeholders' (teachers' and students') views on IELTS Speaking and Writing Test Tasks in relation to the difficulty and appropriateness of the test tasks. The stakeholder perceptions were collected through a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. Five research questions were addressed to fill the gap in the literature and to provide useful information about the assessment of communicative ability in a context where the university entrance examination has undergone some reforms.

7.1 Familiarity (RQ1)

The first research question examined the extent to which IELTS is familiar to participants of the current study. As explained earlier in this report, compared with other commercial tests, IELTS is known to be less familiar in Japan, and therefore it was important to discover the level of familiarity before we elicited their views on the Speaking and Writing test tasks as addressed in Research Questions 2 – 5. The findings were slightly different from earlier studies which investigated the impact of IELTS as an entrance exam requirement (e.g., Hyatt & Brooks, 2006). The sociocultural context of learning English in Japan was one of the main contributing factors. As reported in the Results section, IELTS was more familiar among teachers than students, and their familiarity largely depended on two factors: their overseas study experience and/or knowledge about the recent MEXT initiatives for university entrance examination reform. Students only knew about IELTS if they were planning to study overseas or to travel with a working holiday visa. Most students did not feel any urgent need to know about IELTS or other commercial tests.

Similar to Hyatt and Brooks (2006), the respondents also showed that they were unfamiliar with some of the testing processes and requirements. The findings in the current study showed that teachers knew more about the two tasks of the Writing Test than the three parts of the Speaking Test. Furthermore, whether the test has been developed in Japan or not partly explains teachers' relative familiarity with commercial tests. All participants (both teachers and students) in the study mentioned 'EIKEN' first when asked about their familiarity with commercial tests other than IELTS. Also, other commercial tests which have been developed recently in Japan such as GTEC and TEAP were found to be relatively familiar among many of the teacher participants.

The level of familiarity might also be due to the level of promotional activities undertaken for these tests. For example, a secondary school teacher first learnt about GTEC as that test was offered free to all students in the region (ID13_Secondary school teacher). This was the same for TOEFL, as one prefecture has provided an opportunity to take a TOEFL test for free to students at selective schools (ID04_Secondary school teacher). In the case of TEAP, which was developed by the EIKEN Foundation of Japan in co-operation with a private university in Japan, one teacher participant mentioned that her students think if they want to study at the university where TEAP was developed, they feel they have to take TEAP (ID09_Secondary school teacher). Furthermore, the relative unfamiliarity of IELTS might be due to the lack of mock tests available and the relative scarcity of practice books in Japan (ID04_Secondary school teacher).



7.2 Difficulty and appropriateness (RQ2 and 3)

To examine Research Questions 2 and 3, we elicited participants' perspectives on the level of difficulty (easiness) of the IELTS test and its appropriateness for assessing communication skills with reference to the IELTS Speaking and Writing Test Tasks. The questionnaire survey found similar ratings of level of difficulty (easiness) and appropriateness in terms of topic, requirement, the language test-takers are expected to use to complete tasks for assessing communication skills purpose between the groups (teacher vs. student), and modes (speaking vs. writing), but the difference was not substantial. The small gap in the teachers' and students' views on proficiency tests was also shown in previous studies, such as Coleman et al. (2003) and Rea-Dickins et al. (2007), which both included the perceptions of different stakeholders.

Participants' comments in the open-ended questions in the survey and interviews referring to the difficulty of the tasks in both Speaking and Writing could be due to unfamiliarity and/or inexperience in taking the types of tasks used. Many participants explained the easiness and appropriateness of Speaking tasks in terms of familiarity/abstractness of the topic, and language required to complete the task successfully, but they pointed out that additional skills were required to complete the tasks. This was where teachers believed some of their students would struggle with sharing their opinions even in Japanese and students stressed that they also needed to deal with their nervousness of speaking in public.

There were a number of areas that both teachers and students focused on relating to the task requirements for each of the three parts. For Parts 2 and 3, participants mentioned persuasiveness and/or expressing their own opinion in a logical manner. A few student participants also raised concerns about a relatively long speaking time with the short preparation time. These concerns were explained in terms of the unbalanced focus spent in class on each of the four skills. In relation to this point, Green's large survey (2014) reported a heavy focus on reading skills in Japanese high school English classes. This might be a washback effect of the current university entrance examination which includes only listening and reading. As reported in the Results section, one teacher participant (ID13) was concerned that, even if speaking practice is planned as part of the curriculum, young adolescents would be too embarrassed to speak to each other when they can communicate in Japanese. He also agreed that public speaking is not well perceived in everyday life in Japan.

Due to these reasons, in response to RQ5 the majority of respondents believed that IELTS should not replace the Centre Exam. As noted in the Results section, some students found the Writing tasks, especially Writing Task 2, more achievable (compared with the Speaking tasks) as they had done similar tasks at high school. Some of the concerns related to marking were similar to those found by Hyatt and Brooks (2006) when both teachers and students also believed that the marking scheme was too subjective. Their writing performance would depend on how the examiner interprets the rubrics.

Further evidence that increased familiarity with the test contributed to participants' views on IELTS was provided by a small group of pre-service teachers who had studied proficiency tests and took IELTS as part of their studies. They participated in the survey before and after taking an IELTS test⁶. Their rating of difficulty for the Speaking Test decreased slightly, and more students were found to be favourable to the appropriateness of the test after taking the test. In contrast, their difficulty rating on the Writing Test increased slightly, but as for the Speaking test, the appropriateness rating increased after the test.

6. We could not include the survey results of the pre-service teachers in the main study because the format of the survey is slightly different from the survey used in the main study.

7.3 Appropriacy of IELTS to assess communication skills (RQ 4)

Participants generally agreed that the IELTS test provides a good measure of general communication skills in speaking and writing. For example, the seven pre-service teachers' rating on the appropriateness of IELTS test as an assessment for communication skills improved after the test. However, there were mixed opinions on how relevant the test tasks were to the skills required for academic communication. These findings are in accordance with other IELTS studies. They found similar views from candidates about the suitability of the IELTS Academic Writing tasks to provide a representative sample of the writing required for specific academic or professional purposes (e.g., Knoch, May, Macqueen, Pill & Storch, 2016). They also echo IELTS predictive validity studies which have found no conclusive link between writing band scores and university GPAs (e.g., Humphreys et. al., 2012).

The respondents' views on the definition of communication also influenced their judgements on the usefulness of IELTS Speaking and Writing for developing general communication, which consists of both everyday communication and academic skills. The two groups focused on different features of the tests, which were aligned with their general understanding of communication. For example, as shown in the findings for RQ4, the majority of teachers focused on the ability to understand, judge and express their opinion, while many students focused on speaking to others. Their different views on communication influenced how they interpreted the IELTS Speaking and Writing tests as an assessment for communication skills. As shown earlier, many of the teachers focused on the gap in the current learning content, which helps students develop their communicative competence, while many of the students focused on how nervous they felt about responding to some of the questions (mainly during the IELTS Speaking Test).

In general, many of the respondents viewed the ability to share opinions as an additional skill which IELTS assesses (apart from language). While some also believed that general communication in both their first and second language was important, there were many students who only wanted to prepare for IELTS when they needed to travel or work. In saying that, there was one student who also considered taking the test to prepare for the future. The findings were similar to Moore et al. (2012) in the sense that many of the participants were also hoping to gain additional skills from completing IELTS; for example, world knowledge.

7.4 The IELTS test as an alternative to the Centre Exam (RQ5)

While many viewed IELTS as 'a superior test' that assessed language skills and beyond, there were concerns about how IELTS could be used in Japan as an alternative test to the Centre Exam due to the current educational policies, training and curriculum. Both teachers and students believed that the test was too difficult to be used as an alternative to the Centre Exam, as shown in the survey data when 44.82% of teachers and students responded with "No". Many participants also raised concerns about the high stakes involved in completing the Centre Exam and provided suggestions on how IELTS could potentially become an alternative test over time through educational reform. There were two main reasons related to equity and the current gap in education, which provided further insights into the consequential validity of IELTS.

One of the main concerns related to equity, which was also mentioned in recent studies such as Yokouchi (2019) and Butler and Lino (2019). As shown in Yokouchi (2019), the costs were too high for the majority of Japanese students, as IELTS was seen to be more than a proficiency test. The students' proficiency levels were likely to be influenced by their socio-economic status, as many only prepared for external tests like IELTS when they were needed (Butler & Lino, 2019).



During the interviews in this study, teachers and students focused on the process of preparing and taking IELTS, which requires further development in both language and general communication (as mentioned in RQ4). Their explanations show the respondents' different attitudes and motivational levels towards learning English. One of the main reasons for using IELTS as a proficiency test in Japan was to prepare for overseas travel and/or work, which is what Peirce (1995) described as an investment, as both time and money were required to gain a higher score or competency. A similar response was found in Moore et al. (2012) as the prices were considered too high for the majority of students in Cambodia as well.

The administration process was another area that students focused on, as the examination dates for IELTS differed from NET. As shown in RQ3 regarding the IELTS Writing Test, many students were concerned about the marking process and whether the process was fair for all students. These issues were also raised in Butler and Lino (2019) as they emphasised the need for a double-marking system to measure students' language abilities in a fair manner.

The current gap between what is tested in IELTS and the current English curriculum in Japan is another problem for Japanese students and teachers. In the interview, many teachers raised concerns about the lack of training for both teachers and students, as they believed the IELTS test assessed more than language proficiency; as shown in RQ4, general communication skills in both English and Japanese were vital during both the IELTS Speaking and Writing Tests. Their responses provide further insights into the social consequences of IELTS in the current testing environment, which was also discussed in Saville and Hawkey (2004), who gained constructive feedback on the development of IELTS teaching and preparation material.

7.5 Washback (RQs 4 and 5)

Given that washback relates to the effect that a test has on learning and teaching (Hughes, 2003), the findings of the current study are of relevance in that they point to the influence that taking the IELTS test may have on the learning priorities of Japanese high school students and how their teachers help them to prepare for the test. This can be seen in the perceptions that Japanese students might have little to say about certain topics in the IELTS Speaking and Writing Tests without specific preparation and is in line with other studies (e.g., Green, 2007; Mickan & Motteram, 2009). Candidates believed that IELTS-specific test preparation courses and teaching materials were preferable to general language instruction. Because the effect of washback varies according to a test's perceived importance (Green, 2007), it would be logical to predict that if the IELTS test is introduced as another high-stakes examination determining university entry, it could well have a significant influence on teaching and learning in Japan (see Sasaki, 2018).

As mentioned above, the characteristics of the Centre Exam in which only listening and reading are tested, has led to a washback effect in which these skills are emphasised in the language classroom in Japanese high schools. Although the mooted introduction of a four-skills test like IELTS may be intended as a means of effecting a positive change in pedagogy and practice in English language teaching in the Japanese education system, the actual results of this policy change are still unknown. This is because teachers and learners may neglect the communicative aspect of writing and speaking and instead emphasise the testing situation, as Qi (2007) found in a study of the washback of the introduction of a writing task in a high-stakes English test in China. Therefore, the implication of these findings is that the understandable desire of individuals to gain the highest possible score in a test may mean that the introduction of IELTS as a university entrance test may not result in the desired changes in educational practices.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Limitations and areas for further research

It is worth noting that this study focused on just one large-scale English language test. Although the study's thick description provides important insights into the use of IELTS in the Japanese educational context, it featured a relatively small sample size. Therefore, there are limits to the generalisability of the study findings. The participants in this study are not representative of the entire potential IELTS test-taker population of high school students and their teachers in Japan. This limitation could be addressed by future research in other locations for a more faithful representation of the population. Another limitation is that test-taker perceptions of the new computer-delivered version of the IELTS test were not specifically investigated, as it was not yet being administered on a large scale when the study was conducted.

Further areas for research might involve employing a more focused research design, with a group of participants being asked to reflect upon just one administration of one IELTS test in a Japanese test centre, in which data on their impressions of the test could be collected immediately after a test and compared with test performance. In this way, more can be discovered about issues in language testing as perceived by the layperson, which can be considered by test developers.

Related to this, the experience of taking the paper-based and computer-delivered versions of the IELTS test could also be compared.

8.2 Concluding remarks

This study has raised awareness of the importance of listening to teacher and student voices when considering the use of commercial English language tests to assess the language proficiency of individuals and make decisions about their subsequent academic pathways. The multi-method research design enables further understanding of the perceptions of high-stakes English language tests that are set to be used on a wider scale in Japan for university entrance in the future.

Stakeholder judgements such as the ones featured in this study are important in determining the consequential aspect of a test's validity, or how it affects students, teachers, the curriculum, and society. The opinions collected and analysed here can make a valuable contribution to test validation literature. The findings are also informative for both administrators and test owners.

In assessing the fundamentals of language proficiency, large-scale English language tests provide an efficient and convenient means of assessing candidates as part of the process of ascertaining whether a university applicant meets minimum required English language standards. However, the significance that the test then holds for its test-takers has a washback effect on what learners choose to study and what teachers elect to teach. A mismatch between the skills tested in IELTS and the Japanese English language curriculum as it is currently delivered may result in an undue focus on test-taking strategies rather than on the desired communicative skills that the introduction of a four-skills test is intended to inculcate.

Institutions and policies which intend to rely on scores from tests such as IELTS as a gatekeeper mechanism should understand the realities behind candidates' experiences of them, and allow teachers and students time to adjust to new language proficiency requirements.

In conclusion, IELTS would be an appropriate test for Japanese students only after the appropriate adjustments are made to the curriculum.

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Appendix A: Teachers' and students' biodata (gender and age)

	Teachers	Students
Gender		
Male	24	7
Female	21	45
Age		
15–20 years old	-	51
21–25 years old	-	1
26–30 years old	4	1
31–36 years old	10	-
37–40 years old	-	-
41–45 years old	-	-
46–50 years old	-	-
51–55 years old	6	-
56–60 years old	5	-
60 and above	5	-

Appendix B: Interview participants' biodata

ID	Teacher or Student	Teaching experience	Completed IELTS (Y/N)	Studied abroad (Y/N)	Country studied abroad
01	Teacher	Secondary	Y	Y	Australia
02	Student		Y	Y	Australia
03	Teacher	Secondary	Y	Y	Australia
04	Teacher	Secondary	Y	Y	Australia/UK
05	Teacher	Specialist school	Y	Y	Australia
06	Teacher	Secondary	N	N	
07	Teacher	Secondary	N	N	
08	Teacher	Secondary	Y	Y	Australia
09	Teacher	Secondary	Y	Y	Australia
10	Teacher	Secondary	Y	Y	Australia
11	Teacher	Secondary	Y	Y	Australia
12	Teacher	Secondary	Y	Y	Australia
13	Teacher	Secondary	N	N	
14	Student		N	N	
15	Teacher	University	N	Y	US
16	Teacher	University	N	Y	US
17	Student		N	N	
18	Student		N	N	
19	Student		N	N	

Appendix C: Questionnaire Survey

1. アンケートに参加して、データ提供に同意して下さる場合は、「同意します」をクリックして下さい。If you agree to participate and supply data, please click on 'Agreed'.

Background に関する質問

Questions about your background

2. 性別 Gender 男性 Male 女性 Female
3. 年齢 Age
15-20 歳 yrs old 41-45 歳 yrs old
21-25 歳 yrs old 46-50 歳 yrs old
26-30 歳 yrs old 51-55 歳 yrs old
31-35 歳 yrs old 56-60 歳 yrs old
36-40 歳 yrs old 61 歳以上 yrs old above
4. ご職業 Occupation
学生 Student 教員 Teacher
その他(具体的にご記入下さい。) Other (Please specify)
教員の方のみ Teacher only - 現在教鞭を執られているのは中学・高校ですかそれとも
5. 大学ですか。Do you teach at junior or senior high school or university?
中学 Junior high school 高校 Senior high school
中学と高校(中高一貫校) Junior and senior integrated school
大学 University
6. 教員の方のみ Teacher only - 英語教員歴を教えてください。
Please tell us your teaching experience.
7. 教員の方のみ Teacher only - 現在ご勤務の中学・高校もしくは大学は、どの地域に所在しますか。Where is your school/university is located?
 - 三大都市(東京、大阪、名古屋)
Three major metropolitan cities (Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya)
 - 地方中枢都市(札幌市(北海道)、仙台市(宮城県)、広島市(広島県)、福岡市(福岡県)
Regional central city (Sapporo city (Hokkaido), Sendai City (Miyagi prefecture), Hiroshima city (Hiroshima prefecture), Fukuoka city (Fukuoka prefecture))
 - 地方中核都市: 地方圏(三大都市圏以外の地域)における、札幌・仙台・福岡以外の県庁所在地
おおよび人口が概ね30万人以上の都市。
Regional core cities: Cities in regional areas (areas other than the three major metropolitan areas) with prefectural capitals other than Fukuoka, Sendai, Hiroshima and Fukuoka and a population of approximately 300,000 or more
 - 地方中心都市: 地方圏において生活圏の中心で人口10万人程度
Regional center city:
Population of about 100,000 in the center of the living area in the rural area
 - 地方中小都市: 地方圏において人口5万人程度以下の都市
Local small and medium-sized cities: Cities with a population of about 50,000 or less in rural areas
8. 教員の方のみ Teacher only - 現在ご勤務の中学・高校・大学は次のうちのどれに当てはまりますか。この後、Q12に進んで下さい。
Which category does your school/university apply?
 - 国立 National
 - 公立(県立、道立、都立、府立、市立)

Public Prefectural, prefectural, metropolitan, prefectural, municipal

• 私立 Private

9. 学生のみ Student only - 差し支えなければ大学名を記入して下さい。
If you don't mind, please write the name of the university where you study.
10. 学生のみ Student only - 差し支えなければ 学部名を記入して下さい。
If you don't mind, please write the name of the faculty you belong to.
11. 学生のみ Student only - 差し支えなければ 学科名を記入して下さい。
If you don't mind please write the name of the department you belong to.
12. 留学したことがありますか。Have you ever studied overseas?
13. どの国に留学しましたか。Which country did you study?
アメリカ USA 、カナダ Canada、イギリス UK、オーストラリア Australia、
ニュージーランド New Zealand、その他 Other
14. 留学中の滞在期間は 合計何ヶ月くらいですか。仮に1年以上でも、月に直して答えてください。How long did you study there? Please write down the total months of your overseas study.

IELTSについて About IELTS

15. IELTS(アイエルツ)の存在についてご存じですか。Do you know about IELTS?
16. Q15の答えが「はい」なら、下のステートメントについて、5つの中から、最も適切だと思う文を選んでクリックして下さい。「いいえ」なら Q19 に進んで下さい。「IELTSのテストの内容についてよく知っている。」If your answer is 'yes', please tick the most appropriate item (Strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, and strongly disagree) for the statement that I know .
17. IELTS テスト、特にスピーキングとライティングテストについて、どんなことを知っていますか。ご存知の項目を 全部クリックして下さい。以下の項目は 全てIELTS についてですので、IELTS という言葉は、文章から省略されています。What do you know about IELTS, in particular, Speaking and Writing Tests? Please choose all items that apply to you. The word "IELTS" is omitted in the statements.
 - 4 技能を測定するテストである。It is a test to measure four skills.
 - コミュニケーション能力を測るテストである。
This is a test to measure communication ability.
 - テスト結果は英語圏、特に、イギリス、オーストラリア、ニュージーランドの大学に留学するのに必要である。Test results are required to study abroad at universities in English-speaking countries, especially in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.
 - 広範囲に及ぶレベルの受験者を測定する。
(IELTS) measures test-takers at a wide range of levels.
 - 受験するには、大都市の受験センターに行かなければならない。
To take the exam, you must go to an exam centre in a big city.
 - テストのトピックは、身近なものから専門的なものまで 広範囲に及ぶ。
Testing topics range from familiar to specialised.
 - スピーキングテストは、試験官との面接形式である。
The Speaking test is an interview format with the examiner.
 - スピーキングテストは、3つのパートから 構成されている。
The Speaking test consists of three parts.



- スピーキングテストで高得点を取るには、日常会話以上の能力を必要とする。To get a high score on the Speaking test, you need skills beyond everyday conversation.
 - スピーキングテストには、与えられたトピックに関して、ある程度の長さのスピーチをする設問がある。The Speaking test has questions that give a certain length of speech on a given topic.
 - スピーキングテストでは、論理的に筋道を立てて話すことを求められる。The Speaking test requires you to speak logically and reasonably.
 - ライティングテストには、アカデミック・ライティングとジェネラル・トレーニング ライティングの2種類ある。There are two types of writing tests: Academic writing and General Training writing.
 - アカデミック・ライティングテストでは、2つのタスクが課される。There are two tasks in the Academic Writing Test.
 - アカデミック・ライティング テストでは、実際に 英文を書かなければならない。In the Academic Writing Test, you must actually write in English.
 - アカデミック・ライティング テストのタスクには、グラフや表の内容を理解し、説明しなければならない設問がある。The tasks of the Academic Writing Test have questions that require understanding and explanation of the contents of graphs and tables.
 - アカデミック・ライティング テストのタスクには、物事の過程や手順を説明しなければならない設問がある。The Academic Writing Test task has questions that require you to explain the process or procedure of things.
 - アカデミック・ライティング テストでは、自分の意見を述べるだけでなく、自分の立場を筋道を立てて 論理的に説明しなければならない。In the Academic Writing Test, you must not only express your opinion, but also reasonably and logically explain your position.
18. 模擬試験以外の正規のIELTSを受験したことがありますか。「はい」の人は、この後 Q20 に進んで下さい。
Have you ever taken a regular IELTS test other than the practice test?
If yes, please proceed to Q20 after this.
19. IELTS のことをあまりご存じない参加者の皆さんへ。IELTSは、ブリティッシュ・カウンシル、IDP:IELTS オーストラリア、ケンブリッジ大学英語検定機構が共同運営で保有する試験で、世界140カ国の1,200以上の会場で受験することができます。IELTSには、アカデミック・モジュールとジェネラル・トレーニング・モジュールの2種類があります。いずれも、リスニング、リーディング、ライティング、スピーキングの4つのテストで構成されており、リーディングとライティングに関しては、アカデミック・モジュールとジェネラル・トレーニング・モジュールでは試験問題が異なります。このアンケートでは、スピーキングとアカデミック・モジュールのライティングについてのみ、皆様のご意見を伺います。下の「次に進みます」をクリックして、Q20 に進んでください。
To all participants who are not familiar with IELTS. IELTS is a test jointly run by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and the Cambridge University English Language Testing System, and can be taken at more than 1,200 venues in 140 countries around the world. There are two types of IELTS, the Academic Module and the General Training Module. Each consists of four tests: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. When it comes to reading and writing, the academic and general training modules have different exam questions. In this survey, we will only ask for your feedback on speaking and writing academic modules. Click "Next" below to proceed to Q20.

スピーキングテスト Speaking Test.

Part 1 Introduction and interview (以下は試験官の質問の一部です。
Below are some of the examiner's questions.)

Let's talk about your hometown or village.

- What kind of place is it?
- What's the most interesting part of your town/village?
- Let's move on to talk about accommodation. Tell me about the kind of accommodation you live in? What do you like about living there?

20. コミュニケーション能力を測定するという点で、このタスクをどう思いますか。
What do you think of this task in terms of measuring communication skills?

21. Q20 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q20?
Please click all applicable items.

パート 2 スピーチ (3 ~ 4 分) 試験官からトピックと言及すべきポイントが書かれたカードが渡されます。受験者には 1 分間の準備時間とメモを取るための鉛筆と紙が与えられます。その後、最大 2 分間のスピーチを行い、スピーチの後には、試験官から同じトピックについて 1 ~ 2 つ質問されます。まず下のサンプルタスクに目を通して下さい。

Part 2 Speech (3-4 minutes) The examiner will give you a task card with the topics and points to be mentioned. Candidates will be given a minute of preparation time and a pencil and paper to take notes. After that, you will give a speech for up to 2 minutes, after which the examiner will ask you one or two questions on the same topic. First, take a look at the sample task below.

Candidate Task Card (試験官から渡されるカードの例)

Describe something you own which is very important to you. You should say: Where you got it from; how long you have had it; What you use it for and explain why it is important to you.

Rounding off questions (スピーチの後の試験官からの質問例)

Is it valuable in terms of money? Would it be easy to replace?

22. コミュニケーション能力を測定するという点で、このタスクをどう思いますか。
What do you think of this task in terms of measuring communication skills?

23. Q22 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q22?
Please click all applicable items.

パート 3 ディスカッション (4 ~ 5 分)

試験官からパート 2 のトピックについて、より掘り下げた質問がなされます。まず、下のサンプルタスクに目を通して下さい。

Part 3 Two-way discussion (ディスカッションを始めるための試験官からの質問例)

Let's consider first of all how people's values have changed. What kind of things give status to people in your country? Have things changed since your parents' time?

24. コミュニケーション能力を測定するという点で、このタスクの課題をどう思いますか。
What do you think of this task in terms of measuring communication skills?

25. Q24 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q24?
Please click all applicable items.

26. 以上のサンプルタスクに見られるような IELTS のスピーキングテスト (パート 1, 2, 3) は、

英語のコミュニケーション能力を測るのに適切なテストだと思いますか。Do you think the IELTS Speaking Test (Parts 1, 2, 3) as seen in the sample tasks above is a good test for measuring your English communication skills?

27. Q26 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q26?
Please click all applicable items.
28. 以上のサンプルタスクに見られるようなIELTSのスピーキングテスト(パート1, 2, 3)の受験準備は、思考力、判断力、表現力の発達に役立つと思いますか。Do you think that preparing for the IELTS Speaking Test (Parts 1, 2, 3) as seen in the sample tasks above will help you develop your thinking, judgement and expression?
29. Q28 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。下の項目は全て、「IELTS スピーキングテストで高得点を取るには」ということを前提にしています。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q28?
Please click all applicable items. All of the items below are based on the premise: "How to get a high score in the IELTS Speaking Test".

ライティングテスト(アカデミックライティング) Writing Test (Academic Writing)

Task 1

では、グラフや表、図形を分析し、自分の言葉で説明します。20分間で150語以上書かなければなりません。まず、下のサンプルタスクに目を通して下さい。グラフから得られる主な情報をまとめ、必要なら比較する問題です。Task 1 analyses graphs, tables and shapes and asks you to explain them in your own words. You have to write at least 150 words in 20 minutes. First, take a look at the sample task below. It is a matter of summarising the main information obtained from the graph and comparing it if necessary.

WRITING TASK 1

The chart below shows the number of men and women in further education in Britain in three periods and whether they were studying full-time or part-time. Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant. 下のURLをクリックして、グラフも必ず見て下さい。<https://www.ielts.org/-/media/pdfs/writing-sample-tests/academic-writing-sample-task-1a.ashx?la=en>

30. コミュニケーション能力を測定するという点で、このタスクの課題をどう思いますか。
What do you think of this task in terms of measuring communication skills?
31. Q30 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q30?
Please click all applicable items.

ライティングタスク2 Writing Task 2

Task 2 では、ある主張や問題について40分でエッセイを書きます。出題されるのは、大学や大学院に進学を予定している受験者に適した題材です。まず、下のサンプルタスクに目を通して下さい。「比較的所得の低い家庭に育った子供の方が、裕福な家庭に育った子供より、大人になってからの試練に立ち向かう力がある」という意見について賛成か反対かを、自分の持っている知識や経験からの例を用いて書く問題です。

In Task 2, you will write an essay on a claim or problem in 40 minutes. The questions will be suitable for candidates who are planning to go on to university or graduate school. First, take a look at the sample task below. This task asks whether you agree or disagree on the statement "Children raised in relatively low-income families have more power to face the challenges of adulthood than children raised in wealthy families" and to explain your view, drawing on your experiences and/or what you know about the topic.

WRITING TASK 2

Write about the following topic: Children who are brought up in families that do not have large amounts of money are better prepared to deal with the problems of adult life than children brought up by wealthy parents.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

32. コミュニケーション能力を測定するという点で、このタスクの課題をどう思いますか。
What do you think of this task in terms of measuring communication skills?
33. Q32 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q32?
Please click all applicable items.
34. 以上のサンプルタスクに見られるような IELTS のライティングテスト(Task 1 & 2)は、英語のコミュニケーション能力を測るのに適切なテストだと思いますか。Do you think the IELTS Writing test (Task 1 & 2), as seen in the sample tasks above, is a good test for measuring your English communication skills?
35. Q34 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q34?
Please click all applicable items.
36. 以上のサンプルタスクに見られるような IELTS のライティングテスト(Task 1 & 2) の受験準備は、思考力、判断力、表現力の発達に役立つと思いますか。Do you think that preparing for the IELTS Writing Test (Task 1 & 2) as seen in the sample tasks above will help you develop your thinking, judgement and expression?
37. Q36 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。下の項目は全て、「IELTS アカデミック・ライティングテストで高得点を取るには」ということを前提にしています。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q36? Please click all applicable items. All of the items below are based on the premise: "How to get a high score in the IELTS Academic Writing Test".
38. IELTS は現在のセンター試験に代わる試験として適切だと思いますか。
Do you think IELTS is a good alternative to the current Centre Exam?
39. Q38 に答えた時、決め手になったのは、どのようなことですか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックして下さい。What was the deciding factor when you answered Q38?
Please click all applicable items.
40. 今後の大学入試に、どのような形であれ、ライティングやスピーキングを英語テストに導入することについてどう思いますか。What do you think about introducing writing and speaking into your English test in any way for future university entrance exams?
41. もし貴方 (もしくは貴方の学生) が IELTS を受けるとすれば、どのような準備をしますか。当てはまる項目を全部クリックしてください。If you (or your student) are going to take IELTS, how would you prepare for it? Click on all applicable items.
42. IELTS は何歳ぐらいの学生に適切なテストだと思いますか。How old do you think IELTS is a good test for students?
43. あなたにとって、「コミュニケーション能力」とは何だと思いますか。当てはまる項目をクリックして下さい。What do you think "communicative skills" is? Please click the applicable item.


Appendix D: Interview questions

Section 1.

1. 今まで、英検とかTOEIC、TOEFLのような、英語の標準的な民間試験を受験なさったことありますか。(Have you ever taken an English proficiency test such as EIKEN, TOEIC, TOEFL?)
2. IELTSについて知っていることを教えてください。(Please tell me what you know about IELTS.)
3. IELTSの他にどんな英語能力試験をご存知ですか。(Apart from IELTS, what other commercial English proficiency tests are you familiar with?)
4. それらの試験についてどう思いますか。(What do you think about these tests?)
5. IELTSを受験したことがありますか。(Have you ever taken an IELTS?)

Section 2a (For those who have never taken an IELTS Test)

1. IELTSを受験した人をご存知ですか。(Do you know anyone who has taken an IELTS?)
 - もし、ご存知なら、その人たちは、IELTSについてどんなことを言っていましたか。(If you know, what did they say about IELTS?)
2. IELTS英語のコミュニケーション能力を正確に査定していると思いませんか。(Do you think IELTS accurately assess test candidates' English communication ability?)
3. IELTSを、英語入試に使用することをどう思いますか。(What do you think about using IELTS as an entrance examination?)
4. 現在の日本人学生の英語一般能力をどう思いますか。特に、コミュニケーション能力について思いませんか。(What do you think about Japanese students' English language proficiency? In particular, what do you think about their communication ability?)
5. コミュニケーション能力についてどう思いますか。また、コミュニケーション能力とはどんな能力のことでしょうか。(What is your opinion about communication ability? What do you think it is?)
6. 現在の高校生がIELTSを受験したとすれば、どのぐらい出来ると思いませんか。(If current secondary school students take an IELTS, what score do you think they are able to receive?)
7. Example 1.この書類の3ページにあるIELTSのライティングテストについてお聞きします。(I would like to ask you about the IELTS Writing test on page 3 of this document.)
 - 現在の高校生はどの程度この問題の課題を英語で書面に表現できると思われませんか。(To what extent do current high school students think they can write the task of this issue in English?)
 - この質問に答えるのにどんなスキルが必要と思われませんか。(What skills do you think you need to answer this question?)
 - 高校生がこのような問題を解くのにどのくらい準備が必要と思われませんか。(How much preparation do you think high school students need to solve such problems?)
 - この問題の答えを書くためにはどんなことに集中しなければならないと思いませんか。(What do you think you have to focus on to write the answer to this question?)

- 
8. Example 2. 次はスピーキングについてお聞きします。
(Next, I would like to ask you about speaking)
 - 現在の高校生はどの程度この問題の課題を英語で口頭で表現できると思われますか。
(To what extent do current high school students think they can verbally express the task of this problem in English?)
 - この質問に答えるのにどんなスキルが必要と思われますか。(What do you think you have to focus on to verbally answer this question?)
 - 高校生がこのような問題を解くのにどのくらい準備が必要と思われますか。(How much preparation do you think high school students need to solve such problems?)
 - この問題の答えを口頭で述べるにはどんなことに集中しなければならないと思いますか。(What do you think you have to focus on to verbally answer this question?)
 9. IELTSのテストの特徴は何だと思えますか。(What do you think are the characteristics of the IELTS test?)
 10. IELTSは文科省が推進しているコミュニケーション能力の向上に役立つと思えますか。
(Do you think IELTS will help improve communication skills promoted by the MEXT?)

Section 2b (For those who have taken an IELTS Test)

1. なぜ、IELTSを受験しましたか。(Why did you take an IELTS?)
2. 受験に備えどのように準備しましたか。
3. IELTSのスピーキングとライティングテストについてどう思いましたか。
4. IELTS英語のコミュニケーション能力を正確に査定すると思いましたか。Do you think IELTS accurately assess test candidates' English communication ability?
5. IELTSを、英語入試に使用することをどう思いますか。What do you think about using IELTS as an entrance examination?
6. 現在の日本人学生の英語一般能力をどう思いますか。特に、コミュニケーション能力について思えますか。What do you think about Japanese students' English language proficiency? In particular, what do you think about their communication ability?
7. コミュニケーション能力についてどう思いますか。また、コミュニケーション能力とはどんな能力のことでしょうか。What is your opinion about communication ability? What do you think it is?
8. 現在の高校生がIELTSを受験したとすれば、どのくらい出来ると思えますか。
If current secondary school students take an IELTS, what score do you think they are able to receive?
9. IELTSのテストの特徴は何だと思えますか。(What do you think are the characteristics of the IELTS test?)
10. IELTSは文科省が推進しているコミュニケーション能力の向上に役立つと思えますか。
(Do you think IELTS will help improve communication skills promoted by the MEXT?)

Appendix E: Transcription guidelines

Transcribe as exactly as possible what you hear, using standard orthography (double spaced, 12 pt. font). We're not interested in pronunciation details. When speakers contract words, please do write it as contraction (I'm, don't, gonna, wanna). If they do not contract, please write the two words separately (I am, do not, going to, want to). Do not use carriage return except for when a task (or subtask) begins and ends.

UNINTELLIGIBLE SEGMENTS

For each syllable in a word you cannot understand, write an X along with the rest of the word. For each word you cannot understand, write XXX (as many Xs as syllables you can estimate). If a long segment (e.g., phrase or sentence) is not intelligible or if the person speaks in Japanese and you cannot transcribe that part, say so in brackets [].

ASIDE COMMENTS (from transcriber to researcher)

Use brackets to type in essential comments to the researchers [e.g., this task seems to be missing, I couldn't find it]

SILENCE

We don't need information about pauses, but we do want to know when the speaker keeps silent for a long time during the narration of one of the stories. If the speaker stops for so long that you could take time to write (...) without having to rewind the tape and miss your transcription spot, then please do so.

PUNCTUATION

Use the following punctuation marks: .(period), ,(comma), ? (question mark). Just use them as you find natural, perhaps following intonation clues (but do not worry much about it).

ABANDONED WORDS OR UTTERANCES

If a speaker starts a word and then doesn't finish it but instead abandons it (because of change of mind, self-correction, not knowing how to finish last syllables, etc.) producing a word fragment, please write a dash (-) after the last intelligible syllable or sound, with no space in between.

If a speaker starts an utterance or sentence and then drops it in the middle and abandons it (because of change of plan, reformulation of an idea, not knowing how to finish off the sentence which was started, etc.) producing an incomplete sentence fragment, please write a double dash (-) where the abrupt interruption is made, with a space after the last uttered word or syllable.

Sometimes the distinction between an abandoned word and an abandoned utterance won't be clear to you. In those cases, just mark the abandoned fragment with a dash without a space or a double dash preceded by a space, as you feel appropriate.

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