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Investigating IELTS Paper Mode vs. Computer Mode: Evidence from Academic Writing Test

Mehdi Dastpak1[1], Mohammad Javad Riasati [2]* , Ehsan Hadipourfard[3]

[1]PhD candidate in TEFL, Department of Foreign Languages, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

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Abstract

The present research compared two different modes for IELTS academic module administration among Iranian IELTS candidates: the paper mode and the computer mode in writing tasks one & two in terms of overall band score. Additionally, it examined whether computer familiarity had any significant effect on the IELTS overall band score of Iranian EFL candidates. To this end, 88 IELTS candidates from three different language institutes in Iran were randomly selected. Hence, based on the OPT results, 50 IELTS candidates were recruited and then divided into two equal groups, i.e. paper mode group and computer mode group randomly. Moreover, a computer familiarity questionnaire was also administered. The study's findings revealed that the participants in the computer-based mode had a better overall band score than the participants in the paper-based mode on both writing Tasks. Additionally, the results showed that computer familiarity could result in computer mode outperformance in both tasks of IELTS academic writing tasks. These findings have some pedagogical implications, the most important of which is the influence of computer mode administration of IELTS and computer familiarity on candidates' scores.

[2] Corresponding Author's Email: mjriasati2002@yahoo.com

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INTRODUCTION

Due to globalization and the expansion of the English language, the sociolinguistic complexity of English has become apparent compared to other languages (e.g. French, German, etc.). According to Kachru (1986), English-speaking countries are divided into three main circles, namely internal circles, outer circle, and extended circle country. The inner-circle refers to English-speaking countries. The outer circle indicates countries where English is used with local languages, while the expanded circle indicates countries where English as a foreign language is important. However, based on theories of globalization and language change, thisdivision has no clear boundaries.

Still, the language use and language test performance model proposed by Bachman (1990) suggests that many factors can affect a candidate's test performance. According to Bachman, the factors include communicative language skills, testing methods, personal characteristics and random factors.

Furthermore, Milanovic (2009) believes that Cambridge ESOL (English for other language users) attempts to develop, manage and validate different types of exams within a consistent but evolving reference frame. It builds two main popular exams, namely TOEFL (English as a Foreign Language Test) and IELTS (International Language Testing System). In addition, tests have the potential to control what should be instructed and what should be learned. In other words, they have the potential to control human knowledge. This is important for tests that use it as a disciplinary tool, which means that candidates must intentionally or unintentionally change their behaviour to meet the test requirements.

On the other hand, Ellis (2008) argues that language learning skills fall into two broad categories: receptive ability, including listening and reading and productive ability, including writing and speaking. Also, Weissberg (2006) described second language literacy as "a situation of symmetrical development" and argued that spoken and written languages developed at similar rates (p. 37). Therefore, he asked second-language writing teachers to balance spoken and written languages in second-language writing courses.

Theoretically, this approach could enable individual learners to be supported in a way to support their development in another weaker area.

Hinkel (2013) believes that to improve learners' writing skills, they need to acquire the appropriate level of language foundation to strengthen their language skills and enhance the various vocabulary and grammar skills required for writing skills. Silva (1990) argues that writing skills usually follow standardized structures, grammar, and vocabulary patterns that cannot be separated from the spoken

structure. Therefore, writing exercises can increase learners' awareness of sentence structure.

The TOEFL and IELTS tests were developed in the 20th century to measure the language level of candidates (Davies, 2008). For more than 30 years, these two tests have undergone many changes that are said to measure the level of candidates better. Since then, many studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of testing on society. Many scholars are concerned about the TOEFL topic in the IELTS test because of their strong position in society. The IELTS test (formerly known as ELTS (English Language Testing Service) was first introduced by British (UK) test developers in the early 1980s with the motivation to create language tests for specific purposes (O'Sullivan, 2012). It can also replace the English Proficiency Test Battery (EPTB), a traditional multiple-choice test used by the British Council and a required test for international applicants to British universities and colleges (IELTS, 2013). The original ELTS was a test for students planning to study a specific subject. Six modules were generated for this purpose: life sciences, social studies, physical sciences, technology, medicine and general academics (O'Sullivan).

According to Clapham and Alderson, due to the new idea of "between practicality and maximum predictive power" (such as IELTS, 2013, page 4), the test developer divided the six modules into three modules: Physical science and technology, life and medical science, business research and social science in 1989. Everyone has the choice of reading and writingand all candidates' speeches and listening essays are the same. In 1995, the IELTS test started without domain-specific modules, and all candidates had the same thesis, except for the academic and general training (non-academic) options for the test (O'Sullivan, 2012).

In fact, candidates' scores for the IELTS test range from 0-9 (from non-users to expert users). Each of the four skills provides band scores in this range, and the average of the four scores determines the overall band score. In addition to the IELTS test, many other internationally recognized English proficiency tests, including the TOEIC, TOEFL, the First English Certificate (FCE, and the CPE). Of all these tests, the IELTS test enjoys a high status as one of the most widely used international English proficiency tests in the world (Davies, 2008).

In a comprehensive study, Mickan, Slatter, and Gibson (2000) investigated the validity of the IELTS writing test. The purpose of this study is to define factors that may affect written test results. Readability analysis shows that the understanding of the test hints is due to the interpretation of task purpose and vocabulary grammar. Studies have found that socio-cultural influences can affect a person's ability to write.

Besides, Feast (2002) studied the correlation between IELTS test scores and GPA and found a positive correlation (coefficient = +0.39). In addition, for graduate students, the results show that the correlation between IELTS students' learning level and average GPA is stronger or much higher than the typical correlation

(coefficient = +0.79). On average, graduates and undergraduates have higher average GPAs.

Also, Bayliss and Ingram (2007) studied the relationship between IELTS and predicting academic language performance. The results show that overall IELTS scores imply students' language proficiency in their academic field. There is no correlation between student grades and IELTS scores in tasks related to coursework, as they are not tested on IELTS.

In another study, Wallace (1997) examined the global significance of IELTS test materials and curriculum design. The author believes that the frame of reference of international students is different from that of traditional Western students. As a result, some British references and texts in the IELTS test may be detrimental to students.

The other study by Ahmadi and Mansoordehghan (2014) compared the impact of Task one and Task two of the IELTS writing module on test takers' writing performance and found no significant differences in test-taker performance in these tasks. On the other hand, Lan (2015) found that when testing less demanding tasks (such as Task one) (i.e. graphical description), the test taker's accuracy was much better. Demanding tasks, on the other hand, produce more complex text with lexical variations and grammatical dependencies.

Similarly, O'Loughlin and Wigglesworth (2003) found that more straightforward tasks require less information to process but lead to more complex structures. On the other hand, some studies have tested the effects of teaching interventions, such as exposing candidates to sample papers (e.g., Ambe, 2008; Bagheri & Zare, 2009). For example, Bagheri and Zare (2009) found that exposing candidates to essays can increase their awareness of writing characteristics, such as form, discourse, relevance, and vocabulary resources.

Correspondingly, Ambe (2008) found that ESL learners in Japan improved their Writing Skills. He also found that the degree of attention depends on the proficiency of the language learner and the type of task .Focusing on effective interventions, other studies have explored candidate papers in terms of appropriate use of discourse markers (for example, Ahmadi-Fatalaki & Nazari, 2015; Patriana, Rachmajanti & Mukminatien, 2016; Serajfard & Allami, 2012). For example, Ahmadi-Fatalaki and Nazari (2015) found that most IELTS tests use boosters and framework metadiscourse markers as the most commonly used techniques to improve the quality of writing. Similarly, Patriana, Rachmajanti, and Mukminatien (2016) found that although EFL learners use discourse markers to write coherent text, they do not use them properly.

Moreover, some studies have examined the impact of different writing tasks on different issues, such as test scores (Lee & Kantor, 2005), writing process (Plakans, 2008), and text features (Cumming, Kantor, Baba, Erdosy, Eouanzoui & James, 2005). For example, Lee and Kantor (2005) compared writing tasks and found a high correlation between scores for independent tasks and complete tasks based on listening and reading; they found that these

tasks might be measuring the same infrastructure.

In another study, Cumming et al. (2005) reported significant differences in various linguistic and discourse characteristics in terms of integrated and independent writing tasks. Guo, Crossley & McNamara (2013) explore whether linguistic characteristics can determine the level of second language writing in integrated and independent writing tasks. They studied linguistic features such as lexical complexity, syntactic complexity, cohesion, and basic textual information in integrated independent writing samples. The results show that language function can predict scores for complete and independent writing tasks. They concluded that the assessment of these writing tasks relied on similar and different functions.

With the critical role of technology in the development of language skills, computer-based (CB) assessments are becoming increasingly popular in most academic fields. Many international language candidates often use computers in many areas of academic English written assessment. There is no doubt that the IELTS is the most common English proficiency test for higher education in the world. Educational institutions, employers, professional registration agencies, and government immigration agencies often require proof of English language as part of their application requirements. In fact, the test is designed to check the English ability of people who want to study or work, and English is the language of communication.

Despite the fact that there is a will to write correctly in English, many learners have difficulty to write in English in general, and in testing conditions in particular. In addition, all IELTS candidates are evaluated on four language skills. IELTS is conducted in both paper and computer modes. Accordingly, the current research explored the writing section of the IELTS test, which is primarily a demanding requirement for candidates. This study also compared two different modes for administering the IELTS academic module among Iranian IELTS preparation IELTS exams, namely the paper mode and the computer mode in writing tasks one & two in terms of the overall score. Moreover, it investigated whether computer familiarity had any significant effect on IELTS overall band score of Iranian candidates.

We hope that the findings of the present study could assist English learners, IELTS candidates and college students. In an academic environment, learners need to provide written assignments, critical reviews, term papers, dissertations, and dissertations as part of their academic assignments to meet their curriculum requirements. According to Fukao and Fujii (2001), writing is crucial to mastering the success of a course, as writing can show learners how well they are learning. As for language instructors, learner writing would help determine the level of understanding of the course content that will lead to the completion of a particular course.

In addition, the results of this study may also assist IELTS teachers make some adjustments to their teaching methods, curricula and teaching strategies based on candidates' needs.

Academic writing seems cognitively complex. According to personal cognitive theory (Myles, 2002), communication is a positive process of skill development and gradual elimination of errors, because learners internalize language. Finally, the novelty of this research was that the computer-based writing task in academic module, as all IELTS writing tests, have so far been performed in paper mode.

In line with the purpose of the current study, the following questions were proposed:

RQ1. Do IELTS candidates perform differently in paper mode and computer mode of IELTS academic writing test in terms of overall band score?

RQ2. Does computer familiarity have any significant effect on IELTS overall band score of Iranian candidates?

METHODS

Participants

Participants of this study concluded 50 out of 87 Iranian students studying at three language institutes in Iran, preparing themselves to take the IELTS exam either to attend universities abroad or to emigrate overseas, where the medium of instruction would be in English. In order to collect the samples from the population accidental sampling was utilized. That is to say, since these groups of participants were available at the institutes, they were provided with a brief explanation of the research and consequently, they were selected for the study. There was an attempt to select the participants who had no previous IELTS exam experience and for the first time they registered for IELTS exam since the researchers wanted them not to have any prior experience. Participants of this study were all Persian native speakers ranging from 26 to 38 years old with an advance level of English knowledge that was considered in their entrance to IELTS preparatory course in order to ensure their homogeneity in terms of their knowledge and being L2 learners. Needless to say, OPT was conducted to make sure that the participants of the study were all of equal proficiency level.

Materials

For the purpose of the current study, four research instruments were utilized.

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

A standardized proficiency test (OPT) was administered to assess students' knowledge of the key language as well as their receptive and productive skills (Edwards, 2009). Thisenabled the researcher to have a greaterunderstanding of what level their students wereat, and to find out a homogenous sample. The test contained three sections with multiple- choice questions, which assessed students' knowledge of key grammar and vocabulary from elementary to intermediate levels, a reading test with 10-graded comprehension questions and an optional writing task that assesses students'

ability to produce the language.

A Retired IELTS Academic Sample

Based on the IELTS test instructions, candidates were supposed to write at least 150 words in 20 minutes for Task one, and 250 words in 40 minutes for Task two in academic writing. Each candidate should do four writings in an academic module, two of which in pen-and-paper mode and the other two in computer mode. The writings were administered as the pretest prior to the study and as posttest at the end of the study.

Computer Familiarity Questionnaire

A 14-item Computer Familiarity Questionnaire (CFQ) adopted from Weir, Yan, O'Sullivan & Bax (2007) was administered to both computer and paper groups to determine whether or not computer familiarity had any effect on their performance. This test was consisted of three categories each of which focused mainly on a certain issue of computer familiarity, namely computer usage, comfort and perceived ability, and interest in computers. The test was based on a Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The principal focus of each category is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Principal Focus of each Category

Categories	Items
Computer Usage	Q [1], Q [2], Q [3], Q [4], Q [5]
Comfort and perceived ability	Q [6], Q [7], Q [8], Q [9], Q [14]
Interest in computers	Q [10], Q [11], Q [12], Q [13]

Data Collection Procedure

To conduct the study, first, 88 Iranian IELTS candidates were planning to take for the IELTS exam at three different language institutes in Iran were randomly selected. Referring to the institutes to register for IELTS classes, they were given an OPT to select a homogenous sample. Thus, based on OPT results, 50 out of 88 IELTS candidates were randomly selected and divided into two equal groups as paper mode group (PM=25) and computer mode group (CM=25). During three successive sessions, in one group, the participants were given a topic from previous IELTS exams on academic writing module. They had 40 minutesto write an essay on paper mode. For the next session, the participants wrote topic and were supposed to write another essay in the same mode. In the computer mode group, the participants were given the same

topics; however, they were requested to type the essaysin the computer using Microsoft Word. Finally, both groups took the Computer Familiarity Questionnaire to determine whether their degree of computer familiarity had any significant effect on their performance.

Data Analysis Procedure

To analyze the data gathered from the instruments, SPSS package version 24 was utilized. The statistical technique adopted in the study was an Independent samples *t*-test. It was used to analyze the data pertinent to the performances of the participants in CM and PM group in their overall band score in both Tasks one and two of IELTS Academic Writing Test and also the data germane to the Computer Familiarity Questionnaire. That is to say, in order to compare the scores of the participants in CM and PM groups we entered the obtained scores into SPSS software and ran Independent samples *t*-test. On the other hand, the same procedure was applied for the information obtained from the Computer Familiarity Questionnaire of both groups.

RESULTS

Before comparing the performance of the two groups, it is essential to check the hypothesis of the parametric test before selecting the appropriate statistical test. According to Field (2013), hypotheses using parametric statistical tests include the normality of the distribution, the uniformity of the variance, and at least the independence of the interval variable and the measurement. The kurtosis and skewness values of each group and their corresponding z-scores were first calculated.

Table 2

Skewness and Kurtosis values

Group	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
PM	-.108	.352	-.608	.789
CM	.156	.358	-.723	.623

Regarding PM group, the z-score of Skewness was Z Skewness = -.108, and the kurtosis z-score was Z kurtosis = 0.-.608. The CM's z-score of Skewness was Z Skewness = 0.156, and their kurtosis z-score was Z kurtosis = .358. Comparing the z-scores against the known values for the normal distribution indicates that value greater than -.789 is significant at $p < .05$. As it is evident, none of the z-scores is higher than -.789, which indicates a normal distribution of the scores. The research question probed to find out whether IELTS candidates performed differently in paper mode and computer mode

of academic module of writing tasks one & two in terms of overall band score. To this end, the results of the two groups are compared through an independent samples t-test.

To answer the research question, stating whether candidates performed differently in paper and computer mode in terms of overall band score (Task one), an Independent samples t-test was conducted. The results are depicted in Tables 3 and 4.

As presented in Tables3 and 4, IELTS candidates performed differently in paper mode (M=4.72, SD=.45) and computer mode (M=6.50, SD=.45) in terms of overall band score in Task one (*t* (106) =20.35, *p*=.00, two-tailed). Furthermore, the participants in CM group significantly gained better overall band scores than those in PM group. Hence, the answer to the research question is positive.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of PM and CM groups for overall band score (Task one)

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
overall	CM	25	**6.50**	.45557	.06200
	PM	25	**4.72**	.45211	.06152

Table 4

Independent samples t-test of PM and CM groups for overall band score (Task one)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
overall	Equal variances assumed	.168	.683	20.354	106	.000	1.7777	.08734	1.6046	1.9509
	Equal variances not assumed			20.354	105.99	.000	1.7777	.08734	1.6046	1.9509

According to Tables 5 and 6, the mean scores for both groups are significantly different (*t* (106) =17.95, *p*=00, two-tailed). That is, IELTS candidates performed differently in the paper mode (M=4.7, SD=.500) from those in the computer mode (M=6.5, SD=.523) in terms of overall band score. That is to say, the participants in CM group outperformed their counterparts in PM group. So, the answer to the second research question is positive.

Finally, to find out if CM candidates' computer familiarity differed from their counterparts in the PM group, another Independent samples *t*-test was run. The results of the *t*-test confirmed that the candidates' computer familiarity in the CM group was statistically different from that in the PM group. The results are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 5

The descriptive statistics of PM and CM group for overall band score (Task two)

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
overall	CM	25	**6.56**	.52347	.07124
	PM	25	**4.79**	.50017	.06807

Table 6

Independent samples t-test of PM and CM group for overall band score (Task two)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
overall	Equal variances assumed	.190	**.664**	17.950	106	**.000**	1.7685	.09853	1.5731	1.9638
	Equal variances not assumed			17.950	105.78	.000	1.7685	.09853	1.5731	1.9638

Table 7

The descriptive statistics of PM and CM group for Computer Familiarity Questionnaire

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CFQ	CM	25	**63.94**	4.19531	.57091
	PM	25	**61.51**	5.47289	.74477

Table 8

Independent samples t-test of PM and CM group for Computer Familiarity Questionnaire

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
CFQ	Equal variances assumed	3.105	**.081**	2.585	106	**.011**	2.42593	.93841	.56544	4.28641
	Equal variances not assumed			2.585	99.300	.011	2.42593	.93841	.56399	4.28787

As presented in Tables 7 and 8, IELTS candidates answered the questions in the CFQ differently in the paper mode (M=61.51, SD=5.47) and the computer mode (M=63.94, SD=4.19), (*t* (106)=2.58, *p*=.011, two-tailed). That is to say, the participants in the CM group significantly gained better scores than those in the PM group which confirmed higher computer familiarity of the participants in the CM group.

DISCUSSIONS

The current study was set to compare two different modes of IELTS academic module administration among Iranian IELTS candidates, i.e. the paper mode and the computer mode in writing tasks one & two in terms of overall band score. Moreover, it explored whether computer familiarity had any significant effect on the IELTS overall band

score of Iranian candidates. The findings revealed that the participants in CM had a better overall band score than PM group in writing Task one. In addition, the participants in CM also gained a better overall band score than PM group in writing Task two in terms of overall band score. Additionally, the results showed that the computer familiarity resulted in a better overall band score in writing tasks one & two.

The results of the present research study are in line with Breland, Lee and Muraki's (2004). In a study comparing scores assigned to PB and CB TOEFL essays, they also found that although there was little observed difference in mean scores when candidates were matched on English language ability, slight differences were observed in effect sizes consistently favoring the paper-based mode test.

In addition, the results of the current study supported the results of the study by Wolfe and Manalo (2005). They examined whether the choice of writing mode has any effect on TOEFL writing scores for subgroups of TOEFL candidates. They found that various candidate demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, L1 script, L2 proficiency) influenced the likelihood that a candidate chooses one writing mode (paper-based vs. computer-based) over the other. Additionally, there was no difference between essay scores of candidates who chose to handwrite or word-process their essays. However, candidates with lower multiple-choice scores tended to have higher scores on the paper-based writing test than on the computer-based writing test, while candidates with higher multiple-choice scores tended to have similar scores in both modes.

Additionally, the present findings are in line with the findings of Green and Maycock (2004). They found that candidates performed marginally better on the paper-based mode than they did on the computer-based mode. In contrast, Blackhurst (2005) and Weir, O'Sullivan and Jin (2007) found no significant differences between writing modes. Blackhurst argued that the two versions of IELTS can be used interchangeably and that candidates, given adequate computer skills, will perform equally well on either version of the test.

Another group of studies has explored the impacts of writing modes on the characteristics of candidates' texts. For instance, Wolfe, Bolton, Feltovich & Niday (1996) showed that computer-based mode essays were generally neater, more extended, had a more formal tone, and a weaker voice than paper-based mode essays written by the same students, while Russell and Haney (1997) concluded that students who wrote their essays on the computer tended to write almost twice as much and were more apt to organize their responses into more paragraphs than those who wrote on paper. Chambers (2008) also found that texts produced in both modes showed differences in lexical variation, number of sentences and paragraphs, and nature of lexical errors. Finally, Whithaus, Harrison & Midyette (2008) found that the quality of writing and the types of errors produced by candidates varied in minor but potentially significant ways between keyboarded and handwritten essays.

According to Baker and Kinzer (1998), when candidates wrote on paper, the writing process was more linear. In contrast, when they wrote on the computer, the process of producing and revising text was more integrated. Specifically, when writing on paper, the students generally brainstormed, outlined their ideas, wrote a draft, revised the draft,made a second draft, and then proof read the draft before producing the final version. When writing on computers, they appeared to critically examine and edit their text as ideas flowed from their mind to written form, rather than waiting until an entire draft of the text was produced before beginning the revisionprocess.

Similarly, Van Waes and Schellens (2003) revealed that writing on the computer-based modelled to a more fragmented and recursive writing process than writing on paper. When writing on the computer, writers could spend more time on the first draft and less on finalizing the text, pursued a more fragmentary writing process, tended to revise more extensively at the beginning of the writing process and to revise in smaller units throughout the writing process, attended more to lower linguistic levels (letter, word) and formal properties of the text, and did not normally undertake any systematic revision of their work before finishing than they did when writing on paper. When writing on paper, writers tended to plan their text mentally, evaluate and revise it in advance, and only proceed to write it down after these phases have been completed. Van Waes and Schellens concluded that their findings indicate that "writing with the computer calls for a different distribution of conceptual planning effort in the writing process: rather than being concentrated at the beginning, it is spread more evenly over the writing process as a whole" (p. 849). Collier and Werier (1995), in contrast, found few differences in the writing processes of good writers across writing modes. They argued that "good writers are good writers no matter how they write their processes and their products are only minimally tied to the mode of text production.

Finally, some studies examined the effects of the computer on candidates' revision behaviors. The findings of these studies are mixed, with some studies indicating that the computer encourages writers to make more revisions than when writing on paper, while others were finding no effects or adverse effects on candidates' revision behaviours (Barkaoui, 2016; van Waes & Schellens, 2003).

There are several reasons for the mixed findings of computer-based and paper-based modes, including variation across studies in terms of candidates' L2 proficiency and computer skills, task requirements, research contexts and procedures, variable definitions and measures, candidates' motivation and attitudes to writing mode, and test administration conditions (e.g., timing, editing functions available to candidates) (Chambers, 2008; Lee, 2004; Pennington, 1993).

Another explanation may be the rapid changes in the availability of and access to computers, as well as familiarity with technology over the time period within which the studies above were conducted. These rapid changes, particularly in the last two decades,

make early research findings less relevant to current students.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the mode of IELTS writing test delivery per se may influence the candidates' scores in Tasks one and two differently. That is, the type of the mode (i.e. computer-based & paper-based) would affect the performance of the IELTS candidates' writing tasks one & two. The results of this study may raise important questions for the examination providers (i.e. the British Council, Cambridge ESOL and IDP Australia). The IELTS test developers conduct detailedresearch and analysis of test material and test takers' performance to ensure that not only does IELTS provide accurate information for the institutions that recognize it, but that the tests are fair to test-takers whatever their nationality, first language and gender (Green, 2007; Hawkey, 2006; Saville, 2009).

Curriculum developers and teachers should be aware of the general assertion that narrowingthe curriculum in response to test demands contributes to distortion in the interpretability of test results (Green, 2007). However, as Green suggested, by focusing on features of the test rather than on the focal construct, it may be possible to improve scores without improving target abilities.

Theoretically, the findings can add fresh insights to the body of the related literature concerning how mode of presenting high-stakes examinations can affect IELTS score. The results can also be helpful for IELTS preparation course developers in that they can design a test preparation course curriculum and provide instruction in test-taking strategies, communicative language functions, and reinforce the development of language skills not just test-taking skills.

There are several uncontrollable variables that could affect the findings of the study. Socio-economic status could play a role, especially if families have more of the financial means to help support their learners take preparatory classes and are able to buy test taking materials and resources to become familiar with IELTS techniques. Motivational level and prior educational and English language proficiency levels could also contribute to the study's findings. Thus, it is suggested that other studies be done in order to examine such variables. Further studies are also suggested to be carried out to investigate issues related to IELTS in other EFL/ESL contexts.

CONTRIBUTION TO NEW KNOWLEDGE

This study also provides essential information for Cambridge ESOL Research and Validation Group who undertake impact studies of IELTS as an integral part of the ongoing monitoring, validation and evaluation of the IELTS test (Hawkey, 2006; Saville, 2009). The research findings can help this body understand and consider improving language teaching, learning, methods, materials, and activities. The implications of the current study also addressed

all of the individuals who directly and indirectly are influenced by international exams such as IELTS and TOEFL, academic students, universities abroad, private language centre sectors, and immigration authorities.

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Biodata

Mr Mehdi Dastpak is a PhD candidate of TEFL at Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch, Iran. His research areas include IELTS, TOEFL, curriculum development, language teaching and testing.
Email: md_dataforse@yahoo.com

Dr Mohammad Javad Riasati is an assistant professor in TEFL, and a faculty member at Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch. He has published a number of papers and presented papers at several international conferences. He also taught various English courses in different institutions and universities. His areas of interest include Assessment, IELTS Speaking, and psycholinguistics.
Email: mjriasati2002@yahoo.com

Dr Ehsan Hadipourfard is an assistance professor in TEFL, and a faculty member at Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch. His areas of research are Technology-Assisted Language Learning, assessment, and Computer assisted language learning.
E-mail: e.ehadipor@gmail.com