
Test-taking Techniques and the Listening Performance of IELTS Test-Takers across Proficiency Levels: Effects and Percepts

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Abstract

Although abundant research has addressed test-taking techniques in relation to the IELTS, there is a dearth of investigations examining the influence of such techniques on IELTS test-takers' listening performance across proficiency levels. Accordingly, this study, adopting an explanatory mixed-methods design, probed the effect of test-taking techniques on B1 and B2 level learners' IELTS listening scores. The participants comprised 62 B1-level and 63 B2-level learners who were divided into two experimental and two control groups. In the two experimental groups, 16 test-taking techniques were explicitly taught and practiced. Prior and after the treatment, the four groups received listening pretest and posttest. After finishing the treatment, 15 participants in each experimental group took part in semi-structured interviews. The results of quantitative analysis indicated that teaching test-taking techniques significantly improved both B1 and B2-level learners' listening performance scores with the B1-level learners outscoring their B2-level counterparts. The results of qualitative data analysis revealed five themes for the B1-level learners and four themes for the B2-level learners. Moreover, the results showed that B1-level learners obtained a substantially higher number of themes and theme instances compared to B2-level learners. The results are discussed and implications for language learning, teaching, and testing are provided.

Keywords: IELTS, Test-taking techniques, Listening, Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is one of the most widely used language proficiency tests worldwide (Dang & Dang, 2021; Ma & Chong, 2022). It assesses the language skills of non-native speakers of English, including listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The listening component of the IELTS test measures how well test-takers can understand spoken English in academic and social contexts. However, many test-takers experience

difficulties in achieving their desired scores, especially in the listening section (Winke & Lim, 2017). One possible reason for this is a lack of knowledge and practice in test-taking techniques (Nguyen, 2007; Winke & Lim, 2014). Test-taking techniques refer to those strategies that help test-takers manage their time, understand the instructions, and respond to the questions effectively (Cohen, 2012; Estaji & Banitalebi, 2023).

A review of previous investigations in relation to IELTS test-taking preparation indicates

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that test-taking techniques have been so far explored in relation to IELTS reading (e.g., Khoshsima et al., 2018; Mousavi et al., 2014; Nosrati, 2015), teachers' challenges and strategies in teaching IELTS (Roza, 2019), variations in strategies adopted by IELTS repeaters (Estaji & Banitalebi, 2023), and contributions to subsequent academic study (Dang & Dang, 2021). A review of studies pertinent to the IELTS listening demonstrates that the listening component of the IELTS has, thus far, been examined in regard to test preparation and test performance (Winke & Lim, 2017), test-wiseness and anxiety (Winke & Lim, 2014), anxiety and listening strategy use (Golchi, 2012), metacognitive awareness (Tavakoli et al., 2012), the use of tactics and strategies (Badger & Yan, 2012), explicit teaching of listening strategies (Bagheri & Karami, 2014), and listening in academic English programs (Sabet & Babaei, 2017).

Notwithstanding the abundant research into test-taking techniques and listening performance on the IELTS, the review of empirical investigations reveals the non-existence of research exploring the influence of test-taking techniques on the listening performance of IELTS test-takers across proficiency levels. The results of this study can help IELTS teachers and test-takers understand the importance of test-taking techniques and how they can improve IELTS students' scores by applying such techniques. Additionally, this study can provide insights into how different proficiency levels may require different approaches to teaching test-taking techniques. Overall, this study can contribute to the improvement of language testing practices and the enhancement of language learners' performance.

Literature Review

The IELTS is widely recognized as a reliable and valid measure of English language proficiency (Bakri, 2023; Uysal, 2010). The IELTS test is designed to assess the four language skills needed for prospective authentic, target contexts (Moore & Morton, 1999; Shakibaei, 2017). Therefore, it is an essential tool for international students who want to study in English-speaking countries and for professionals who want to work in English-speaking environments (Chalhoub-

Deville & Turner, 2000; Pearson, 2019). Additionally, the IELTS provides a standard measure of language proficiency that can be used for research purposes and international comparisons (Moore & Morton, 2005; Moore et al., 2012). IELTS is used for admission to universities, immigration purposes, and employment opportunities in English-speaking countries (Hoang, 2019; Read, 2022). The IELTS test consists of four components: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Each component evaluates a different set of language skills.

The listening section of the IELTS test measures how well test-takers can understand spoken English in academic and social contexts (Field, 2012). It consists of four parts, each with ten questions. The questions in the listening section are designed to test a range of skills, including understanding the main ideas, identifying specific information, recognizing opinions and attitudes, and following a sequence of events. The complexity of the questions increases as the test progresses. Overall, listening is a cognitively demanding and complex skill, which poses many challenges for EFL learners (Chou, 2023; Taghizadeh & Emam, 2023). The complexities and challenges of listening become more convoluted under test-taking conditions (Kabir & Cunningham, 2023; Nakatsuhara, 2012). The listening component of the IELTS test is often considered the most challenging by test-takers due to its fast pace and complex content (Field, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the factors that affect test-takers' listening performance on the IELTS test (Phung & Ha, 2022). One of the possible ways which can probably affect EFL learners' listening performance on the IELTS is through the teaching of test-taking techniques.

Test-taking techniques are characterized as strategies which can familiarize learners with the test format, test content, test instructions, and how to answer the question items efficiently and effectively (Cohen, 2011). Such techniques include note-taking, recognition of keywords, predicting the content, information about different sections of the test, eliminating incorrect options, looking for clues while listening, paying attention to numbers and measurement units, and knowing how to answer different

question types (Cohen, 2011, 2012; Estaji & Banitalebi, 2022, 2023). These techniques are particularly important for standardized tests like IELTS, where the format and content are predictable. Therefore, teaching test-taking techniques can enhance test-takers' performance and reduce their anxiety (Golchi, 2012; Winke & Lim, 2014).

Several studies have so far explored the effect of test preparation on test performance. Ostovar-Namaghi (2016) examined the effect of test taking strategies on EFL learners' listening proficiency gains. The results showed that the participants who received strategy training significantly outperformed those who did not. Allen (2016) investigated the washback to the learner from the IELTS test in the Japanese tertiary context. The study specifically concentrated on washback upon learners' test preparation strategies and score gains. The results revealed a significant increase in listening and speaking scores of the participants who reported preparing more intensely for the test. Nguyen (2007) examined the effect of test preparation on the IELTS and TOEFL iBT listening tests. The results revealed the positive effect of test preparation on both tests. Trenkic and Hu's (2021) results indicated the effectiveness of coaching on the IELTS scores. Previous investigations (e.g., Golchi, 2012; Winke & Lim, 2014) have also shown associations between test-taking strategies and anxiety in listening. Tavakoli et al. (2012) investigated the relationship between the learners' metacognitive awareness and their performance on the listening section of IELTS. The results indicated that metacognitive awareness had a positive relationship with test-takers' IELTS listening test performance

Proficiency level, as a variable having associations between various dimensions of L2 learning, has been examined in relation to syntactic complexity measures (Ortega, 2003), using computer-tagged linguistic features (Grant & Ginther, 2000), distinguishing measures for different writing proficiency levels (Verspoor et al., 2012), motivation and foreign language enjoyment (Zhang et al., 2020), gender differences in writing and writing fluency (Al-Saadi, 2020), socioeconomic status (SES) in the context of English-medium instruction (EMI)

(Muttaqin et al., 2022), collaborative EFL storytelling activities (Huang et al., 2017), learners' engagement in peer interaction (Dao & McDonough, 2018), and student engagement with teacher written feedback (Cheng & Liu, 2022). However, there is a lack of studies exploring the effect of test-taking techniques on learners' performance on the IELTS listening section.

Overall, the literature suggests that teaching test-taking techniques can be an effective way to improve IELTS test-takers' listening performance and reduce test anxiety. However, the effectiveness of these techniques may vary depending on the proficiency level of the test-takers. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the effects of teaching test-taking techniques on different proficiency levels in order to provide tailored instruction for IELTS test-takers. Moreover, it is important to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of test-takers towards test-taking techniques. Additionally, investigating the matches and/or mismatches between the perceptions of different proficiency levels can provide insights into the effectiveness of test-taking techniques and help educators design more effective instruction. Accordingly, this study aimed to address the following research questions:

RQ1: *To what extent does teaching test-taking techniques affect Iranian B1-level learners' listening performance on the IELTS test?*

RQ2: *To what extent does teaching test-taking techniques affect Iranian B2-level learners' listening performance on the IELTS test?*

RQ3: *Is there any significant difference between the effects of test-taking techniques on Iranian B1 and B2 level learners' listening performance on the IELTS test?*

RQ4: *What are the B1-level learners' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of test taking techniques on their listening performance on the IELTS test?*

RQ5: *What are the B2-level learners' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of test taking techniques on their listening performance on the IELTS test?*

RQ6: *What are the matches and/or mismatches between the B1 and B2-level learners' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of test taking*

techniques on their listening performance on the IELTS test?

METHOD

Participants

The participants comprised two groups of EFL learners at the B1 and B2 levels. To select the participants, initially a group of pre-intermediate learners (N=102) and a group of upper-intermediate learners (N=110) were given the IELTS test. From among the pre-intermediate learners 62 who scored 4 or 4.5 were selected as learners at the B1 level. As for the B2 level learners, 63 who scored 6 or 6.5 were chosen. The selected learners were from both genders and their age ranged between 18 to 35.

Instruments

IELTS: In this study, the IELTS general module was used to select learners with a homogenized level of language proficiency. This module assesses the four language skills including listening, reading, writing and speaking sections. The listening section contains four sections of 10 questions each. The timing for the listening section is 30 minutes, and test-takers are given an extra 10 minutes to complete the answer sheet. The reading section consists of 5 to 6 texts in three sections with a total of 40 questions which should be answered in one hour. The writing section comprises two writing tasks. In the first writing task, test-takers should write a 250-word essay in 40 minutes. In the second task, test-takers are required to write a 150-word letter in 20 minutes. The speaking section, lasting 11 to 14 minutes, test-takers should respond to questions on a variety of topics.

Listening Pretest and Posttest

The listening scores of the participants on the IELTS run for homogeneity purposes were used as the listening pretest scores. As for the

listening posttest, the listening section of the IELTS from a different version was administered.

Semi-structured Interviews

A set of semi-structured interview questions was developed to tap into participants' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of test taking techniques on their listening performance on the IELTS test. Firstly, an initial list of six questions was developed based on an extensive review of the literature. Then, this list of questions became subject to expert opinion in a panel of three PhD holders in the field of TEFL. Based on their comments, two questions were removed due to having overlapping content with other questions. Then, the list of four questions was piloted on 10 participants, selected randomly from among the pool of participants. Finally, due revisions were carried out in terms of wording and grammar based on their comments to enhance the readability and clarity of the questions.

Data Collection Procedure

Initially, the IELTS was administered to 102 pre-intermediate and 110 upper-intermediate learners. Based on the results, 62 B1-level learners who scored 4 or 4.5 were identified. Moreover, 63 B2-level learners who scored 6 or 6.5 were spotted. Following that, the 62 B1 learners were put into an experimental (N=32) and a control group (N=30). Similarly, the 63 B2 learners were placed into an experimental (N=32) and a control group (N=31). Next, in the experimental groups, the learners received IELTS test-taking techniques for 16 sessions. The test taking techniques for the listening section of the IELTS were extracted from Estaji and Banitalebi (2023). Estaji and Banitalebi developed these 16 techniques based on Cohen's (2012) list of test-taking strategies. Table 1 displays the test-taking techniques which were worked on during each session in the experimental groups.

Table 1
Test-taking Techniques Implemented in the Experimental Groups

No	Test-Taking Technique
1	Take notes while listening.
2	Highlight keywords.
3	Use gaps between texts to read ahead for keywords.
4	Spell accurately, and check the spellings afterward.
5	Know that the listening text becomes more complex toward the end.
6	Eliminate incorrect options while listening.
7	Look for an option that seems to deviate from the others (it is special or different).
8	Take advantage of clues appearing in other items in order to answer the item under consideration.
9	Use clues in other items to answer an item under consideration.
10	Select the option because it appears to have a word or phrase from the passage in it – possibly a keyword.
11	Pay extra attention to measurement units.
12	Pay extra attention to numbers.
13	Read questions first and predict answers.
14	Select a choice that is longer or shorter than the others.
15	Eliminate options that appear to be overlapping.
16	Know how to answer different question types.

To administer the treatment, in each session, the following steps were taken in the experimental groups:

- The technique was clearly introduced to the participants.
- A sample listening of the IELTS was played and the instructor explained the technique while performing it for the participants
- The instructor asked concept check questions to make sure that the participants had clearly grasped what the technique was and how to do it
- The participants were invited to ask any questions they had in relation to implementing the technique
- The participants were asked to work in pairs and a sample listening of the IELTS was played while they worked on the technique together
- The instructor checked the pairs while the participants were working with the technique to obtain further assurance that the learners were completely familiar with the technique and knew how to use it
- A sample of IELTS listening section was played for the participants and they did the listening task individually
- The instructor checked each participant's performance on the task and gave them feedback on their performance with a focus on implementing the targeted technique

- A final sample of the IELTS listening section was played and the learners were asked to use the targeted technique

In the control groups, the conventional syllabus of the institute was worked on and no IELTS tasks and their associated test-taking techniques were administered. After 16 sessions of treatment, the participants in the four groups were given the listening section of the IELTS from a different version. Finally, 15 participants from each experimental group were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews to probe into their perceptions concerning the effectiveness of test taking techniques on their listening performance on the IELTS test.

DATA ANALYSIS

Results

Quantitative Results

The First Research Question

To address the first research question, initially it was decided to consider the pretest scores of the B1-level groups and run ANCOVA. However, since the assumptions of homogeneity of variances and homogeneity of regression slopes were not met, the gain scores were computed for each group by subtracting the pretest scores from the posttest scores. Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of the listening gain scores for the experimental and control groups at the B1 level.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of the Listening Gain Scores for the Experimental and Control Groups at the B1 Level

	N	Range	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Gain EXP B1	32	1.00	.50	1.50	1.15	.34	-.51	.41
Gain CONT B1	30	.50	.00	.50	.20	.24	.43	.42

As presented in the above table, the Skewness and Kurtosis ratio values fall within the range of +/-1.96. Accordingly, the normality assumption was met and the parametric independent

samples t-test was run (Pallant, 2020). to investigate the effect of test-taking techniques on the IELTS listening scores of the B1-level learners. Table 3 portrays the respective results.

Table 3
Independent Samples T-test for the B1-level Learners' Experimental and Control Groups

Group	M	SD	t	sig (2-tailed)	DF
Gain B1 Experimental	1.15	.34	12,53	.00	60
Gain B1 Control	.20	.24			

As shown in the above table, there was a statistically significant difference between the listening scores means of the experimental (M=1.15, SD=.34) and that of the control group (M=.20, SD=.24), $t(60)=12.53$, $p<.001$ (two-tailed). Thus, it can be concluded that teaching test-taking techniques has significantly affected Iranian B1-level learners' listening performance on the IELTS test.

The Second Research Question

Similar to the first research question, since the assumptions of ANCOVA were not warranted, the gain scores were calculated for the B2-level experimental and control groups. Table 4 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of the listening gain scores for the experimental and control groups at the B2 level.

Table 5
Mann-Whitney U Test for the B1-level Learners' Experimental and Control Groups

Total N	63
Mann-Whitney U	7.50
Wilcoxon W	503.50
Test Statistic	7.50
Standard Error	67.35
Standardized Test Statistic	-7.25
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	.00

As indicated in the above table, there was a statistically significant difference between the listening scores means of the experimental and that of the control group ($U=7.50$, $z = -7.25$, $p = .000<.001$). Therefore, it can be concluded that teaching test-taking techniques has significantly affected Iranian B2-level learners' listening performance on the IELTS test.

The Third Research Question

For the third research question, similar to the first two research questions, the gain scores for the B1 and B2 level learners were computed due to the violations of ANCOVA assumptions. Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics of the listening gain scores for the B1 and B2-level experimental groups.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics of the Listening Gain Scores for the Experimental Groups at the B1 and B2 Levels

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis		
	Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Error							
Gain EXP B1	32	1.00	.50	1.50	1.15	.346	-.51	.41	-.74	.80
Gain Exp B2	32	1.00	.50	1.50	.99	.20	-.32	.41	3.73	.80

Since the Kurtosis ratio value for the B2 experimental group lies out of the range of +/-1.96, the normality assumption was violated. Thus, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was applied to

examine any significant difference between the effects of test-taking techniques on Iranian B1 and B2 level learners' listening performance on the IELTS test. Table 7 exhibits the respective results.

Table 7
Mann-Whitney U Test for the B1 and B2 level Learners' Experimental Groups

Total N	64
Mann-Whitney U	360.00
Wilcoxon W	888.00
Test Statistic	360.00
Standard Error	64.02
Standardized Test Statistic	-2.37
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.018

As the above table shows, there was a statistically significant difference between the listening score means of the B1 and B2 level experimental groups ($U = 360$, $z = -2.37$, $p = .018 < .05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that teaching test-taking techniques has differently affected Iranian B1 and B2-level learners' listening performance on the IELTS test, with the B1-level learners outperforming their counterparts at the B2-level.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The Fourth Research Question

The fourth research question aimed to explore B1-level learners' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of test taking techniques on their listening performance on the IELTS test. Table 8 portrays the emerging themes and their frequency and percentage for B1 level test-takers.

Table 8
Emerging Themes and Their Frequency and Percentage for B1 Level Test-Takers

No	Theme	Frequency	Percentage
1	Improving goal-setting	12	80%
2	Fostering self-assessment	14	93.33%
3	Promoting motivation	14	93.33%
4	Reducing anxiety	13	86.66%
5	Enhancing familiarity with the test format and content	15	100%

As indicated in the above table, five themes have emerged from the results of content analysis for B1 level learners. The first theme, *improving goal-setting*, has been mentioned by 12 out of the 15 interviewees (80%). The second and the third themes, *fostering self-assessment and promoting motivation*, have been expressed by 14 out of the 15 B1 level learners (93.33%). The fourth theme, *reducing anxiety*, has been voiced by 13 out of 15 interviewees (86.66%). Finally, the last

theme, *enhancing familiarity with the test format and content*, has been mentioned by 15 out of the 15 participants (100%).

The Fifth Research Question

The fifth research question aimed to examine B2-level learners' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of test taking techniques on their listening performance on the IELTS test. Table 9 portrays the emerging themes and their frequency

and percentage for B2 level test-takers.

Table 9

Emerging Themes and Their Frequency and Percentage for B1 Level Test-Takers

No	Theme	Frequency	Percentage
1	Improving engagement	12	80%
2	Enhancing time-management	10	66.66%
3	Reducing anxiety	10	66.66%
4	Enhancing familiarity with the test format and content	8	53.33%

As exhibited in the above table, four themes have emerged from the results of content analysis for B2 level learners. The first theme, *improving engagement*, has been mentioned by 12 out of the 15 interviewees (80%). The second theme, *enhancing time management*, has been expressed by 10 out of the 15 B2 level learners (66.66%). The third theme, *reducing anxiety*, has been voiced by 10 out of 15 interviewees (66.66%). Finally, the fourth theme, *enhancing familiarity with the test format and content*, has

been mentioned by 8 out of the 15 B2 level interviewees (53.33%).

The Sixth Research Question

The sixth research question sought to uncover the matches and/or mismatches between the B1 and B2-level learners' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of test taking techniques on their listening performance on the IELTS test. Table 10 compares the results of content analysis for B1 and B2 level learners.

Table 10

Comparison of the Results of Content Analysis for B1 and B2 Level Learners

	B1 Learners	B2 Learners
Number of Themes	5	4
Total Theme Mentions	68	40
Number of Common Themes	2	2
Number of Specific Themes	3	2

As seen in the above table, the number of themes for the B1 level learners and that of B2 level learners are 5 and 4, respectively, which are approximately the same. However, the number of theme instances for the B1 level learners equals 68 which is substantially higher than 40 for B2 level learners. The two common themes for the two groups were reducing anxiety and enhancing familiarity with the test format and content. Moreover, three themes consisting of improving goal-setting, fostering self-assessment, and promoting motivation belonged specifically to the B1 level group while two themes including the improvement of engagement and enhancement of time-management belonged specifically to the B2 level group.

Discussion

This study investigated the effect of teaching test-taking techniques on Iranian B1-level and B2-level learners' listening performance on the

IELTS test. The results of statistical analysis indicated that teaching test-taking techniques significantly improved both groups' performance on the listening section of the IELTS. The results of qualitative data analysis demonstrated five themes for the B1-level learners consisting of improving goal-setting, fostering self-assessment, promoting motivation, reducing anxiety, and enhancing familiarity with the test format and content. The results also revealed four themes for the B2-level learners. From among the four themes for B2-level learners, two were common with the B1-level learners and two themes encompassing the improvement of engagement and enhancement of time-management belonged specifically to the B2 level test-takers.

The results of the present study concerning the positive effect of teaching test-taking techniques on the IELTS listening performance of both B1 and B2-level learners corroborate the

findings of previous investigations (e.g., Allen, 2016; Nguyen, 2007; Ostovar-Namaghi, 2016; Trenkic & Hu, 2021) showing the effectiveness of test-preparation via test-taking techniques and coaching on IELTS scores. Similar to the results of the present study, Ostovar-Namaghi's (2016) results revealed the positive effect of strategy training on test scores. Allen's (2016) results revealed a significant increase in listening and speaking scores of the participants who reported preparing more intensely for the test. Nguyen (2007) showed the positive effect of test preparation on the IELTS and TOEFL tests. Likewise, Trenkic and Hu's (2021) results showed the positive effectiveness of coaching on the IELTS scores.

The main justification for the results of the study is that teaching test-taking techniques has helped test-takers to understand the structure and format of the IELTS listening test. This familiarity with test format as reflected in the emerging themes for both B1 and B2 level learners has contributed to the significant improvement of their listening scores. This understanding has enabled the participants to identify the types of questions they will encounter, the types of answers they need to provide, and the strategies they need to use to answer the questions effectively (Cohen, 2011; Estaji & Banitalebi, 2023). By knowing what to expect, test-takers can feel more confident and less anxious during the test, which can positively impact their performance (Winke & Lim, 2014). As Golchi (2012) maintains, listening anxiety has reverse association with listening strategy use and the less IELTS test-takers feel anxious, the higher the chances for the implementation of listening strategies.

Another justification for the results is that teaching test-taking techniques helps test-takers to develop their listening skills. These techniques involve activities such as note-taking, predicting answers, and identifying key words and phrases (Estaji & Banitalebi, 2023). By practicing these techniques, test-takers can improve their ability to understand spoken English and extract relevant information from it (Bagheri & Karami, 2014). This improved listening ability can translate into better performance on the IELTS listening test (Kabir &

Cunningham, 2023). Another justification for the results is that teaching test-taking techniques helps test-takers to manage their time effectively during the test (Estaji & Banitalebi, 2023). The IELTS listening test is timed, and test-takers must complete all sections within a specific time frame. By using techniques such as paying attention to details, test-takers can quickly identify relevant information and avoid spending too much time on irrelevant details. This time management skill can help test-takers to complete the test within the allotted time and avoid rushing through it. This justification can be further supported as one of the themes extracted from the interviews was enhancing time-management.

The results of the present study concerning the significant difference between the performances of B1 and B2 level learners on the listening section of the IELTS as a result of receiving test-taking techniques substantiate the findings of previous research (e.g., Dao & McDonough, 2018; Grant & Ginther, 2000; Ortega, 2003; Verspoor et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2020) indicating the impact of proficiency level on different aspects of language learning. More specifically, Cheng and Liu (2022) found that students' engagement was mediated by their proficiency level. The results of Cheng and Liu (2022) are notably important here as in the present study it was found that B2 level learners mentioned improving engagement as one of the themes while B1 level learners did not mention engagement in their interviews.

One reason for the outperformance of B1 level learners on the IELTS listening test as a result of test-taking techniques is that B1 level learners may have had less developed listening skills than their B2 level counterparts. As a result, the training in test-taking techniques may have had a greater impact on their listening skills development. In contrast, B2 level learners may have already developed more advanced listening skills, making it more difficult for the test-taking techniques training to have a significant impact on their performance. Another reason for the outperformance of B1 level learners on the IELTS listening test as a result of test-taking techniques is that B1 level learners may have been more motivated to improve

their listening skills. As lower-level learners, they may have recognized the importance of improving their overall English proficiency and saw the test-taking techniques training as an opportunity to do so. In contrast, B2 level learners may have already achieved a certain level of proficiency and may not have been as motivated to improve their skills.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that test-taking techniques can be used as a pedagogical tool to enhance learners' listening performance, which can be attributed to the potential of such techniques to help learners develop effective strategies for approaching listening tasks. Based on the findings of this study, teachers can use test-taking techniques to enhance the listening performance of their students. Moreover, learners can benefit from receiving test-taking techniques training, as it can help them improve their listening skills and overall English proficiency. The results of this study indicated that while both B1 and B2 level learners benefited from the training, B1 level learners outperformed their B2-level counterparts. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of test-taking techniques may be influenced by the learners' proficiency level and warrants further investigation. The results of this study also have practical implications for language testing organizations such as IELTS. These organizations can provide test-taking techniques training to test-takers to improve their performance on the test. Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that IELTS may need to consider revising its listening section to ensure that it assesses listening skills rather than test-taking skills.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of incorporating test-taking techniques into language teaching and learning. It provides evidence that test-taking techniques can significantly improve learners' listening performance and overall English proficiency. The findings of this study also warrant further investigation into the effectiveness of test-taking techniques across different proficiency levels and contexts. Future research can comparatively explore the impact of test-taking techniques on learners' performance on other language proficiency tests.

Moreover, future researchers can investigate the transferability of test-taking techniques to other language skills such as speaking and writing. Other studies can examine the impact of test-taking techniques on learners' motivation and engagement in language learning. Studies can be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of test-taking techniques on learners with different levels of anxiety. Exploring the impact of incorporating test-taking techniques into language teaching materials and curriculum design on learners' overall language development can be another topic for further research.

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