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HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF IELTS ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Annotation

Currently, most people are studying and willing to take an IELTS certificate due to the opportunities it offers. Therefore, its evolution also attract many learners. This paper provides data about how IELTS has come to its today's format. We firmly believe that this article is found helpful by those who have an interest for IELTS.

Key words: IELTS, language assessment, historical development of IELTS, English language testing, communicative language testing, language proficiency assessment, international language tests.

ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЕ РАЗВИТИЕ СИСТЕМЫ ОЦЕНКИ IELTS

Аннотация

В настоящее время большинство людей изучают английский язык и стремятся получить сертификат IELTS благодаря возможностям, которые он предоставляет. Поэтому его развитие также привлекает многих учащихся. В данной работе представлены сведения о том, как IELTS приобрёл свой современный формат. Мы твердо верим, что эта статья окажется полезной для тех, кто интересуется экзаменом IELTS.

Ключевые слова: IELTS, оценка языковых навыков, историческое развитие IELTS, тестирование по английскому языку, коммуникативное языковое тестирование, оценка владения языком, международные языковые тесты.

IELTS BAHOLASH TIZIMINING TARIXIY RIVOJLANISHI

Annotatsiya

Hozirgi vaqtda ko'pchilik ingliz tilini o'rganib, u taqdim etadigan imkoniyatlar tufayli IELTS sertifikatini olishga intilmoqda. Shu sababli, ushbu imtihonning kelib chiqishi ham ko'plab o'quvchilarni qiziqirtirmoqda. Ushbu maqolada IELTS qanday qilib bugungi zamonaviy formatga ega bo'lganligi haqida ma'lumotlar berilgan. Biz ushbu maqola IELTS imtihoniga qiziqqanlar uchun foydali bo'lishiga qat'iy ishonamiz.

Kalit so'zlar: IELTS, til ko'nikmalarini baholash, IELTSning tarixiy rivojlanishi, ingliz tilini sinash, kommunikativ til testlash, til bilish darajasini baholash, xalqaro til testlari.

Introduction. In today's digital era, being able to communicate in a foreign language is very essential, particularly in English since English is the most commonly used and widely spread language over the world. Uzbekistan is also promoting taking international certificates including IELTS. According to Uzbekistan's president Shavkat Mirziyoyev Miromonovich's Resolution of May 19, 2021 – PQ-5117 “On Measures to Further Improve the System of Foreign Language Learning” the taking of internationally recognized language certificates such as IELTS, TOEFL and others was encouraged in schools and universities[1]. People use the language for many purposes such as education, employment and migration so that the demand for a reliable, standardized language testing system has increased dramatically. In order to evaluate one's real-life communicative and language using ability universities all over the world is requiring such a certificate which has been gained in the standardized assessment system. IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is one of the most reliable and reputational English proficiency tests. IELTS plays a crucial role in international education, with thousands of universities across the UK, the USA, Canada, Europe use this certificate as an indicator for English proficiency of non-native speakers. Universities find the IELTS as a valid measurement of the students' knowledge because its assessment system evaluate applicants' four mainly important skills which are listening, reading, writing and speaking.

Furthermore, in the global labor market as well relevant IELTS scores demonstrate the employees' ability to communicate and function properly while working. For regulated professions like

nursing or medicine, immigration authorities and professional licensing boards use IELTS to ensure that candidates meet safety and communication standards. A high IELTS score can increase employability, opportunities for promotion, and access to international work environments.

Although a lot of candidates are getting IELTS certificate with a decent score, most of them still do not have data about how IELTS assessment system has evolved during the last decades. However, to deeply understand how IELTS scoring system works it is fundamental to get information about its historical background(Taylor and Weir, 2012)[2]. In the 1980s this testing system worked as ELTS (The English Language Testing Service and the format of IELTS (The International English Language Testing system) was introduced to the world. British Counsel, IDP and Cambridge English Language Assessment were the major characters which played an important role for today's shape and format of the test.

In order to meet the global needs and to increase validity and reliability several changes have been made in the format and scoring system of this test. Knowing the origin and evolution of IELTS helps not only the candidates who want to take an IELTS exam but also researchers can get the most out of it. They may be able to understand the overall changes and trends in the assessment system which can be helpful while working with particular testing projects (Green, 2014)[3]. This article aims to provide information about historical background of the test by examining its original form and today's modern structure.

Literature review. As IELTS has gained fame among people around the world, it has overcome several stages until its today's format. It is far difficult to fully understand the development of IELTS framework without taking a look at the English language scoring systems and tests in general. According to the Lado (1961), language testing systems and tests in mid-twentieth century particularly were mostly based on the structural linguistics and behaviorist learning habits because they were adopted to give scores to the test takers based on discrete-points [4]. It means that they only evaluate individual points such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Although this type language testing was clear and reliable method to use for single linguistic elements, it failed to measure learners' real-life communicative skills and their ability to fully use the language meaningfully in real-life contexts. However, since English has become globally important for several spheres of life such as employment, education and migration, discrete-point testing methods showed their limitations and the demand for a test which can assess the communicative skills rather than only grammar or vocabulary has emerged. McNamara (2000) mentions that this type of old-fashioned tests and tests which were adopted to measure the skills individually are not able to represent the test takers full language using ability [5].

As a response to a high demand for a reliable and internationally recognized test the International English Language Testing System was introduced. The English Language Testing System (ELTS) was first used to evaluate the international students' communicative language knowledge who were applying to English-medium institutions in the early 1980s. ELTS changed into IELTS as it had some faults related to complexity (Clapham, 1996) [6]. The British Council, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate and IDP Education Australia had a partnership and relaunched the ELTS as IELTS in 1989. Davies (1996) emphasizes the functions that IELTS offered and it made it flexible assessment system for people [7]. The introduction of Academic and General Training modules was the contribution to IELTS's global expansion making the test reliable to diverse candidate populations.

Four core language skills – reading, listening, writing and speaking - are evaluated in the IELTS which can show the real communicative language ability of the test takers. At that point, Weir (2005) has given his opinion by highlighting the importance of including cognitive processes and real-life language demands [8]. IELTS offers face-to-face speaking exam format which can be the great opportunity to express the candidates real communicative and interactional ability in English. Moreover, authentic materials, tasks, texts are provided in the process of taking the exam according to other three skills. According to Taylor (2006), since its introduction IELTS has changed continuously adapting to the advancements in the language assessment research and feedback by the test takers [9]. However, obvious feature is about the format of speaking assessment. Face-to-face speaking assessment allows the examiner to evaluate the candidate more accurately based on the real-life speaking competence. These improvements illustrate the reasons IELTS has been renowned for its validity and reliability around the world.

IELTS has become not only the language proficiency indicator but also it plays a crucial role in the admission of educational places. Shohamy (2001) explains IELTS as a large-scale language test and mentions its importance on population's opportunities to study, migrate and work. This situation improves the concerns about its fairness, equal access and responsibility in language testing [10].

The importance of IELTS in teaching and learning process. Alderson and Wall (1993) argue that the high-stake test like IELTS often shape the teachers and students who only study the test format and get prepared only to solve the questions without focusing on their communicative abilities in this foreign language [11].

Research methodology. This study employs a qualitative, historical-documentary research design focusing on the development of IELTS from its origin to its today's format. A

historical-documentary approach was chosen since it offers a comprehensive analysis of existing materials such as documents, reports and academic literature to give information about the origin of IELTS, its stages while developing and its today's role (Clapham, 1996). This study relies entirely on secondary sources which means that any new data were not used directly from participants, particularly books about language proficiency testing systems and IELTS history, peer reviewed articles on the journals and IELTS handbook and Cambridge Assessment English Research Reports which are the official publication for IELTS test takers. Detailed data related to the historical development, the design and reliability of the test and socio-educational implications of IELTS were given in these resources.

Relevant literature and resources were learned to use for this paper. Reliable online platforms and websites, including the official IELTS database, academic databases, university libraries were used to collect the information. Chosen sources were related to the historical background of IELTS theoretical foundations and stages, testing systems, test format and social consequences. In order to maintain the reliability of the research authoritative and widely mentioned materials and resources were chosen (Bachman, 1990) [12].

Qualitative content analysis was applied for data analysis. Qualitative content analysis was involved reading the materials and resources closely and find the key points and patterns about the development of IELTS. Several major thematic categories were organized based the collected data. These categories were the background of English language testing, the evolution and origin of IELTS, changes in the test format and the impact of the test to the social life. By learning these different materials, researcher was able to identify the main trends and differing views and opinions (Green, 2014) [13].

As this study relied on only secondary sources, it does not include any primary information such questionnaires or interviews from the participants of the IELTS examination. In addition, the information used in this research were dependent only published and original resources.

Analysis and results. Qualitative content analysis was used while analyzing the gathered information from official IELTS publications and academic literature. In order to identify the significant worldwide impact of the IELTS assessment system, themes about the historical development, theoretical and structural foundations the gathered data were carefully analyzed. The evolution of IELTS examination from a regional language proficiency testing system to a globally standardized high-stakes language assessment was revealed by examining the documents found during the research. The analysis revealed several patterns and stages of IELTS development (Weir, 2013) [14].

Historical emergence and institutional formation. The research results show that IELTS originally came from the earlier English proficiency examinations which are for international students applying for the universities in English-speaking countries. One of the most important shift in the IELTS assessment system is its transition from ELTS (English Language Testing Service) to IELTS (International English Language Testing system). The collaboration of Cambridge Assessment English, the British Council and IDP Australia played a major role in institutionalizing the test and strengthening the scoring reliability and international recognition (Davies, A. (2008) [15].

Transition from discrete-point to communicative testing. One of the most noticeable findings is that system transformed from the discrete-point framework into the communicative one. Before it used to evaluate the learners' isolated skills such as grammar or vocabulary items. However, as time passed it adopted the communicative framework in the examination system. Moreover, the introduction of four-skill assessment was the real reflect of theoretical transition. Authenticity was in the center of attention as face-to-face speaking format was introduced in the IELTS examination (Bachman, L.F., and Palmer, A.S. (1996) [16].

Structural refinement and standardization. The analysis indicates the continuous enhancements in test structure and scoring

procedures. Detailed band descriptors based on every skill were revealed. In order to meet the candidates needs two modules of IELTS (academic and general training) were adopted (Taylor, L., and Falvey, P. (Eds.). (2007) [17].

Conclusion. In my opinion, the IELTS's development was the great milestone in the history of language testing. The strategic partnership between Cambridge Assessment English, the British Council, and IDP Australia has played an immense role in the test's transformation from the ELTS to IELTS. This particular change has won a great status as a global testing system for IELTS. I have to

mention that the critical point of this paper is the system's transition from a discrete-point approach to a communicative testing system which has relied totally on the one's communicative skills including speaking not just multiple choice questions based on grammar. The introduction of band descriptors has ensured that the testing system was a reliable framework and can be responsive for many language learners needs. All of the shifts during the evolution of ELTS into IELTS have made their contribution to the testing system's validity and fairness which made it globally famous and popular because of its advantageous sides.

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