

Comparison and Enlightenment Between IELTS and Different English Language Examinations in China

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Abstract: The world-renowned international English test, the IELTS test, tests students' comprehensive English language proficiency. Compared to some selective English language tests in China, the IELTS test has various aspects that are worth learning from it. In recent years, some English language tests in China have some shortcomings that still need to be improved to some extent, and the testing methods and concepts demonstrated in the IELTS test can make up for the shortcomings of Chinese English testing. This article aims to compare the IELTS with the Chinese English test in terms of exam organization and requirements, exam question types and content, and discuss the summary and inspiration for Chinese exams and education. The research results indicate that some testing concepts and methods in the IELTS exam are worth learning from in Chinese education. English language tests in China can also refer to its advantages to reform and optimize its own examination and education models, making the domestic examination system and education model more suitable for Chinese students. Practice has also proven that in some regions where the IELTS exam has been implemented, the education system has also been positively affected, and the educational effectiveness of students has also been significantly improved.

Keywords: IELTS, English language tests in China, comparison

1. Introduction

The International English Language Testing System, abbreviated as IELTS, is one of the international English standard proficiency tests. This exam is jointly managed by the British Council, University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), and Individual Development Plan (IDP). The IELTS exam can be divided into three categories: Academic, IELTS for UKVI, and IELTS Life Skills. The format of the exam is to test students' comprehensive English proficiency from four aspects: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It can accurately evaluate candidates' English language proficiency and is a globally recognized international English test [1].

Nationwide Unified Examination for Admissions to General Universities and Colleges, abbreviated as "College Entrance Exam", is a selective examination conducted by qualified high school graduates or candidates with equivalent educational qualifications.

College English Test Band 4/6 (CET-4/6) is a national unified examination organized by the Ministry of Education of China and implemented by the Education Examination Institute of the

Ministry of Education of China. The purpose is to promote English teaching in Chinese universities and objectively and accurately measure the comprehensive English ability of college students.

Test for English Majors Band 4/8, abbreviated as TEM-4/8, is implemented by the Chinese Ministry of Education to comprehensively assess the English language proficiency of college English majors nationwide. The question types include listening, reading, error correction, translation, and writing, and the content includes testing various abilities in English listening, reading, writing, and translation.

Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination refers to a selective examination conducted by Chinese education authorities and enrollment institutions to select graduate students. It consists of a preliminary examination and a follow-up examination.

This article only studies the English exam section.

2. Analysis and Comparison of the Organization and Requirements of the IELTS Exam and the Chinese English Language Examination

2.1. Comparison of Exam Fees

Firstly, the author will use Table 1 and Table 2 to observe the comparison of IELTS and China English Language Examination fees.

Table 1: Classification and Fees of the IELTS exam [2].

Classification	Fee
Academic	¥2170
IELTS for UKVI	¥2220
IELTS Life Skills	¥1550
Transfer/Withdraw	¥420
Reconsider	¥1000/¥1400

Table 2: Fees for some English language exams in China.

Classification	Fee
College Entrance Exam	No more than ¥200
CET-4/6	¥30-40
TEM-4/8	¥40-45
National Graduate Entrance Exam	¥120-220

From Table 1 and Table 2, it is not difficult to see that the cost difference between the IELTS exam and the Chinese exam is significant. Although the relatively expensive price of IELTS has brought some students a certain economic burden, in the opposite direction, it has also had a certain promoting effect on the learning enthusiasm and efficiency of candidates. Moreover, due to the relatively high cost of exams, candidates usually consider carefully and prepare well before actively preparing for the exam before finally taking the exam, otherwise they will waste a large amount of money. On the other hand, the average price of English language exams in China is relatively cheap. Here, for example, the college students' CET-4 and CET-6 exams: due to the low registration fee, many students wanted to have a try, which has led to a continuous increase in the total number of people taking the CET-4 and CET-6 exams in recent years, but the overall pass rate has not very good. In addition, due to the low cost and not mandatory attendance every time, there is a serious phenomenon of absenteeism in exams, and even some students may intentionally miss exams. The negative

phenomena in these exams have caused a huge waste of manpower and resources, so they all need to be improved [2].

2.2. Comparison of Exam Time and Cycle

From the perspective of exam time and cycle, the IELTS exam usually has an average of 2-4 exam opportunities per exam point per month. Except for the inability to register for two consecutive exams at the same time, you can freely choose to register for other times. If candidates are unable to participate in the exam due to special reasons, they can also complete relevant procedures such as transfer and withdrawal before the registration deadline. This system undoubtedly provides candidates with more opportunities and choices, and also enables them to take exams more seriously. On the other hand, in China's domestic English language exams, the number of exams is relatively small and there are special date regulations. Here are two types of exams, specifically the college entrance examination and the national master's entrance examination. These two types of exams only have one opportunity to register and participate in each year. If candidates are unable to take the exam due to special circumstances, they may have to miss the exam or wait for the next year to re-register, Reduced the opportunities for candidates to choose freely and lacked relative flexibility.

2.3. Comparison of Exam Language Environment and Exam Venue Services

From the perspective of the exam language environment and exam venue services, as a relatively rare and expensive exam, the IELTS exam service is quite thoughtful, and the exam places great emphasis on the candidate's ability to communicate in English in the actual language environment. So, when taking the IELTS written test, candidates must communicate almost entirely in English, and all instructions and notices issued by the invigilator are also in English. Before the start of the exam, the invigilator will also conduct strict checks and patiently inquire about relevant matters in English throughout the entire process, in order to meet the reasonable needs of all candidates in the exam as much as possible [2]. In the domestic English language exams in China, for example, the National College Entrance Examination and the College English Test Band 4 and Band 6, invigilators explain almost all exam information and notification instructions in Chinese, except for publishing information related to exam questions in English. In terms of exam services, there are also very few invigilators who have a poor attitude towards invigilation services, violate invigilation principles, and affect students' exam performance. These phenomena are all areas that need to be improved [2].

2.4. Comparison of Exam Answering Requirements

From the perspective of exam answering requirements, during the IELTS paper and pencil exam, dedicated pencils and erasers will be distributed to all candidates for use in answering. The biggest advantage of using a pencil to answer questions with a lot of written text is that it is easier to erase traces, making it easier for candidates to correct errors in a timely manner, especially for parts with more subjective questions. This provides great convenience for students' exams. The English language test in China basically requires that all written parts should be answered with black signature pen, and in most cases, correction fluid should not be used for correction. Even if the use of correction fluid is allowed to alter the trace of the signature pen, it will also affect the overall beauty of the test paper, thus affecting the overall score of the examinee. In addition, once the parts with more subjective questions are wrongly written, it will be difficult to have the opportunity to modify them again and will also add a lot of psychological burden to the examinee for the next exam, so there is a lack of flexibility.

3. Analysis and Comparison of the Type and Content of the IELTS Exam and the English Language Exams in China

3.1. Listening

In terms of listening, firstly, the IELTS exam has undergone multiple reforms in terms of question types, which can be described as diverse and diverse. Each exam has different types of questions, such as multiple-choice questions, multiple-choice questions, fill in the blank questions, matching questions, and so on. Even in the case of computer-based exams, the types of questions each person may receive may be different. This not only allows for a more comprehensive assessment of students' listening ability, but also avoids the possibility of missing questions in advance and facilitating cheating. It can also effectively prevent candidates from guessing answers, and also prevent candidates from losing too many points due to their lack of proficiency in individual question types. It can truly and effectively reflect the true listening level of candidates. However, in some English language exams in China, the question types are mostly fixed and follow a certain set pattern and routine, In addition taking the Professional English Test Band 4 and Band 8 as an example, there is a clear phenomenon of difficulty and differentiation in almost all types of questions, so that candidates may easily understand the routines of the question setters .In this situation, candidates can easily guess or even rely solely on luck to score. Moreover, due to the relatively fixed question types, although it facilitates targeted practice for candidates, it also increases the risk of missing questions and being predicted in advance. Secondly, from the perspective of content, the IELTS listening test corpus is authentic and has a wide range of material sources [3]. The recording time is long, and the material contains a large amount of information, making the test pronunciation international. All the content in the exam is close to life, with a wide range and high accuracy of the words used, as well as high results and logic; There are much knowledge involved in listening recordings, so the overall requirements for candidates' phonetic materials are also high; In addition, the exam covers a wide range of topics, all of which involve real-life scenarios. The audio may contain niche accents from India and other regions, which can also help students gradually adapt to different phonetic environments in their future learning and life. Compared with domestic language tests in China, taking the listening materials of college students' English Test Band 4 and 6 as an example, the listening materials are generally standard British or American accents, and the audio used in college English listening textbooks for candidates are almost only standard accents such as British and American, which to some extent leads to low recognition of dialects or English with accents, thereby affecting their cross-cultural communication abilities in real life [4].

3.2. Reading

In terms of reading, from the perspective of question types, IELTS reading and listening also have a variety of question types, and some of the question types appear randomly in each exam. This also allows for a more comprehensive assessment of students' reading ability, avoids the possibility of missing questions and cheating, and also avoids candidates from predicting and guessing answers in advance, and the content can vary, sometimes it appears in the form of graphics and tables [5]. Therefore, there are also various ways of answering the questions, such as multiple-choice questions, brief answers to the questions, completing the sentences, select the most suitable titles, category dividing, matching sentences [6]. However, there are also some problems in the reading section of domestic English language exams, similar to listening, following certain question setting patterns and routines, which may result in missed questions and the risk of being predicted in advance. Moreover, if the reading test question type is too single, it is likely to focus on some weak reading items of the candidates, which cannot fully reflect some typical reading methods, and thus cannot accurately test

the students' true comprehensive ability level. From the perspective of content, there are mainly three aspects of IELTS reading skills: guessing words, skimming, and searching. The ability to skim is to enable students to have a general grasp of an article in a short period of time, thereby improving reading efficiency; Reading is the reverse thinking process of locking in keywords in the sentence of an article, understanding the general content of the article, and cultivating students' good reading habits by taking questions to find answers in the text. Guessing words effectively expands students' vocabulary and helps them better understand words in context. It helps students have a deeper understanding of word formation in actual context and content, thus forming a good vocabulary system and greatly promoting the expansion of vocabulary [7]. The reading materials for IELTS can also be utilized to promote the dissemination of domestic and foreign cultures, allowing students to continuously expand their knowledge during the reading process, thereby better understanding the two-way educational models and development backgrounds at home and abroad. However, in domestic language tests in China, especially in the English Proficiency Test Band 4 and Band 8, there are issues with lengthy and short reading sections in some types of questions, as well as some knowledge points that are not covered. This results in a lower overall test performance than expected and increases the randomness of candidates' responses, which is not conducive to the long-term development of the exam.

3.3. Writing

In terms of writing, from the perspective of question types, the IELTS exam requires candidates to complete two essays within one hour, including the first chart or letter essay, with no less than 150 words and no limit; The other is an argumentative or report type essay, which requires no less than 250 words and no limit [2]. The IELTS writing question type mainly tests students' English application ability, requiring them to express their opinions in English and complete the content of the question. In addition, there are also requirements for accuracy, organization, and coherence. Candidates need to answer questions accurately. The content is orderly and coherent, and there are fewer vocabulary and syntax error. In China's domestic English language testing, taking the College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 as an example, the writing section requires candidates to complete an article, including a letter or argumentative paper, according to prompts within half an hour. The requirements for the number of words in an essay are: 120 to 180 words in Level 4; The sixth level is 150 to 200 words, far below the total word count requirement for IELTS writing [8]. Therefore, from the type and format of the questions, it can be seen that IELTS writing requires much higher writing ability than College English Test Band 4 and 6 and has a high evaluation effect and intensity on the comprehensive writing ability of candidates. From the perspective of content, in terms of vocabulary, IELTS writing emphasizes accuracy first and then diversity in terms of vocabulary usage. It does not encourage candidates to use difficult words, on the contrary, it emphasizes some writing skills. In terms of grammar, sentence structure and grammar are required to be free from systematic errors, and long and difficult sentences are not required to be used. From a logical perspective, the IELTS writing test may consider repetition of sentences as a manifestation of a candidate's lack of ability to argue their own viewpoints, and simply stating their viewpoints back and forth is meaningless, making it difficult to achieve high scores. From the perspective of structure and coherence, IELTS writing is very picky about the use of conjunction, and there are clear provisions on coherence and cohesion: be able to organize information and arguments coherently, use connecting means effectively, avoid too much or insufficient, and conjunction should refer to accurately. The Chinese English language test, taking college students' English Test Band 4 and 6 as an example, generally recognizes that candidates only pursue changes in vocabulary. Chinese teachers also encourage students to use difficult words to enhance their writing in their daily teaching, rather than emphasizing appropriate and accurate use of words. In terms of grammar, Chinese teachers usually

encourage students to use various clauses, etc. Therefore, articles that use complex grammar such as clauses will stand out, even if some parts are used improperly, it doesn't matter much. From a logical perspective, most Chinese teachers do not have high requirements for in-depth expansion of content and the content is not sufficiently substantial, resulting in many candidates often catching up on repetitive words and saying them back and forth in order to gather words, but unable to expand their viewpoints in depth. In addition, Chinese exams may encourage students to use more conjunction, such as first, second, third, etc. at the beginning of a paragraph. But this kind of words are often used mechanically and without new ideas, which leads candidates to often use some conjunction that have little meaning to the article [8]. These are all areas that need improvement.

3.4. Speaking

In terms of speaking time and format, the average IELTS speaking test takes place 2-4 times per month. Candidates can make appointments based on their actual situation, usually arranged around a week before the written test. The exam duration generally does not exceed 15 minutes and adopts the form of everyone's dialogue, providing a more realistic language interaction environment [9]. The examiners of the oral exam are mostly nonnative English speakers, and throughout the entire IELTS oral exam, a full English assessment is implemented to demonstrate the true English-speaking level of the candidates. Ultimately, the examiners make a scientific evaluation and provide corresponding exam scores. From the perspective of question type and content, the IELTS speaking test is divided into three parts: introduction Q&A, personal statement, and two-way discussion. Introduction and Q&A require candidates to introduce themselves. The examiner will ask several topics for candidates to answer, which will give them a preliminary understanding of their oral proficiency. The personal statement section requires candidates to provide a personal statement mainly based on the prescribed topic and around the topic for about 2 minutes. In the two-way discussion section, the examiner will conduct a two-way discussion based on some abstract topics, with a duration of approximately 4-5 minutes. Overall, the content of oral tests tends to be based on real-life scenarios, requiring candidates to make flexible adjustments according to actual situations. The three test sections range from easy to difficult, and candidates will respond more fluently, thus more accurately reflecting their true level. The Chinese English Language Test, taking the English Proficiency Test Band 4 and Band 8 as an example, is usually scheduled in December of each year, with approximately 25 minutes each time. In terms of format, recorded oral exams are often used, and candidates will have a computer that plays the recording [9]. They need to answer and be recorded based on the recorded content. Moreover, due to the fact that English major students mainly participate in the TEM8 oral test, the content tends to be more focused on abstract topics such as politics and economy, and also tests candidates' thinking and innovation. Therefore, overall, the TEM8 oral test is somewhat difficult and lacks practical application. Therefore, significant adjustments should be made.

4. Enlightenment and Summary for Chinese Education

Through the above series of comparisons, it is not difficult to find that there are still a series of problems that need to be improved in various aspects of China's English language exams. At the same time, the educational methods and system of Chinese teachers also need to be adjusted accordingly.

In terms of exam organization and requirements, some English language exams in China can make a series of adjustments to the exam cycle, exam fees, and exam venue selection, such as appropriately increasing some exam fees, increasing exam frequency and venue selection, to make students pay more attention to the exam itself, thereby improving their learning motivation and overall exam effectiveness.

From the perspective of exam question types and content, in terms of listening and speaking, Chinese teachers should reasonably choose textbook content when guiding students to prepare for the exam and stimulate students' interest in learning. At the same time, we need to change teaching methods and organically combine listening and speaking with classroom teaching. The Chinese exam should also fully learn the advantages of the IELTS exam, providing relevant assistance to improve the quality of English listening and speaking teaching and students' learning efficiency. In terms of oral English, Chinese teachers should pay more attention to pronunciation and intonation when teaching oral English, and create real situations; Understand students' needs and expand teaching content; Strengthen corpus input and attach importance to timely feedback; Create a pleasant atmosphere and incorporate cultural factors [9].

In terms of reading and writing, especially about the memorizing vocabulary, it is important to focus on storing IELTS vocabulary and cultivating the ability to infer word meanings; emphasize synonymous substitution and cultivate sentence reporting ability; emphasize grammar analysis and exercise reading skills. Chinese teachers should appropriately weaken complex grammar and emphasize the importance of accuracy in their daily writing teaching, so that students can consciously check and fill gaps, reduce syntax error and learn to use conjunction flexibly and accurately, so as to improve their ability to write correct sentences. Finally, especially in terms of reading, it is necessary to gradually cultivate students' ability to layout the entire article, from reviewing questions to deducing questions, to providing viewpoints and arguments, in order to achieve clear viewpoints throughout the article, clear themes in each paragraph, and connections between paragraphs [9]. The Chinese exam should also make some adjustments to the perspective of reading and writing assessment, so that the test questions are more closely related to students' lives and comprehensively assess their comprehensive abilities, and cultivate students' concept and ability of overall layout, from reviewing questions to deducing questions, to providing viewpoints and discussing them, train students to speak clearly and logically, and ensure that the entire article has clear viewpoints and the main idea of each paragraph is clear [10].

5. Conclusions

Studying IELTS test questions can bring many important insights to Chinese education. Themed teaching based on IELTS test questions has a good auxiliary effect on Chinese English exams and teaching and can also have a very profound impact on China's English education reform. Therefore, Chinese teachers should also fully apply IELTS teaching to English teaching during the teaching process, and continuously improve the traditional English teaching mode to improve the comprehensive quality of English education in China.

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