IELTS PREPARATION IN NEW ZEALAND: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE NATURE OF THE COURSES AND EVIDENCE OF WASHBACK

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the impact of major tests and examinations on language teaching and learning has become an area of significant interest for testers and teachers alike. One aspect of test impact is washback, which is traditionally described as the negative effects that result from a test. It is said to create a narrowing of the curriculum in the classroom so that teachers and learners focus solely on the areas to be tested. On the other hand, there have been attempts to generate positive washback by means of examination reform to encourage teachers and learners to adopt more modern communicative approaches to language learning. The test that is the subject of the present study is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which has become the preferred method of assessing the English language proficiency of international students seeking admission into tertiary institutions in many countries. Since its introduction into New Zealand in 1991, courses which claim to prepare students for the test have become an increasingly common feature of the programmes offered by both private and public sector language schools.

This study investigated the washback effect of the test by studying three IELTS preparation courses offered by language schools at public tertiary institutions in Auckland. The aim was to identify the significant activities in an IELTS preparation class in New Zealand and establish whether there was evidence of washback in the way classes were designed and delivered. Various forms of data-gathering were utilised, including two structured observation instruments, questionnaires and interviews for the teachers, two questionnaires for the students, and pre- and post-testing of the students. In addition, an analysis was made of IELTS preparation textbooks, with particular reference to those which were sources of materials for the three courses. Thus, the study provided a detailed account of the range and duration of activities occurring in IELTS preparation courses as well as insight into the teachers` approach to selecting appropriate lesson content and teaching methods.

The findings showed markedly different approaches between the courses, with two focusing almost exclusively on familiarising students with the test and providing them with practice on test tasks. On the other hand, the third course, while including some test practice, took a topic-based approach and differed from the others in the amount of time spent on the types of activities one might expect to find in a communicative classroom. Pre- and post-testing revealed no significant gain in overall IELTS scores during the courses.

The study concludes that teachers who design and deliver IELTS preparation courses are constrained by a combination of factors, of which IELTS itself is but one. It highlights the need for further research into appropriate methodologies for washback research, including the refinement and validation of observation instruments, and provides more evidence of the complex impact of tests on both classroom teaching and learning.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency tests play a significant socio-economic role in modern societies. They are used to make many significant decisions about people by policymakers who are therefore able to exert power and authority in the context in which the tests are used. Language tests can also be used to communicate the educational priorities to the stakeholders in the results of the tests. Language proficiency testing is a complex area which continues to create debate between language researchers and test developers. However, while applied linguists discuss the exact nature of language proficiency and how it can be assessed, educators still need to make decisions about the language ability of students as accurately and efficiently as possible.

Testing is often seen as both a necessary evil and a vehicle for effecting educational change. Test scores are used by policymakers in education as tools to control admission, promotion, placement and graduation. But just as tests have the power to select, motivate and reward, so too can they exclude, de-motivate and punish.

Not all tests carry the same weight. Tests that are seen by the stakeholders as being influential clearly have the greatest potential to affect those involved with them. It is these 'high stakes' tests which will influence the way that students and teachers behave as well as their perceptions of their own abilities and worth. High stakes tests may influence the content and methodology of teaching programmes, attitudes toward the value of certain educational objectives and activities, the academic employment options that are open to individuals, and in the long term, they may have significant long term implications for education systems and for the societies in which they are used.

In recent years there has been growing interest among testers in the field of education, in the effects, both desirable and undesirable, of tests and the concepts of 'test impact' and 'test washback'. Impact is defined by Davies et al (1999: 79) as "the effect of a test on individuals, on educational systems and on society in general." The term washback, or 'backwash' as it is sometimes referred to, can be broadly defined as the effect of testing on teaching and learning, and is therefore a form of impact. It is then a concept which includes several specialist areas in the field of applied linguistics. In order to explore how individual tests

influence stakeholders, investigative approaches such as case studies, employing a range of methods, allow the collection of detailed information on specific contexts.

One major use of language tests in English speaking countries is to provide a language proficiency benchmark for the admission of international students into universities. Examples of such tests include the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB). The widespread use of these tests, and the increasing numbers of international students wishing to study and gain qualifications abroad, has led to the creation of a test preparation 'industry'.

The test to be discussed here is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in New Zealand. IELTS is available in two formats – the Academic and General Training Modules. The General Training Modules focus on testing basic survival skills in a broad social and educational context. The Academic Modules of IELTS were designed to "assess the language ability of candidates who need to study or work where English is the language of communication" (IELTS 2003: 1), and it is this Academic Module which is the focus of this thesis. The Academic Modules are used in over 110 countries to assess whether or not candidates should be admitted into undergraduate or postgraduate level courses where English is the medium. The test is managed by three partners – the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL), the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia.

IELTS candidates take four test modules covering all four skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking (see Appendix 8 for a diagram of the test format).

- The listening module is around 30 minutes long and is divided into four sections. The first two sections deal with social needs while the final two are concerned with situations related to educational or training contexts.
- The reading module takes 40 minutes. Candidates answer 40 questions based on three reading passages totalling between 2,000 and 2,750 words. The texts for the reading module are taken from magazines, journals, books and newspapers which have been written for non-specialist readers. At least one of the texts must contain a detailed logical argument and one may contain graphs diagrams or illustrations.
- Two separate tasks make up the writing module and both must be completed within 60 minutes. Task 1 requires candidates to look at a table, diagram or graph and to then present the information in writing. This could involve describing or explaining data, describing a process, an object or an event. In the second task candidates respond to a

statement expressing a point of view or argument or problem. The essay is expected to consider appropriate register, organisation, style and content.

- For the speaking module candidates take part in an 11 to 14 minute oral interview with an examiner. There are three parts to this module. In Part 1, candidates answer general questions about themselves, their homes, families, studies and other familiar topics. The second phase asks candidates to give a verbal response to a written prompt on a particular topic. For Phase 3 the examiner and candidate discuss more abstract topics related to the topic presented in the previous phase.

IELTS is designed to measure the full range of language ability from non-user to expert user (see Appendix 9 for a description of IELTS band scores). The results of each module are presented in band scores which are then averaged and rounded to give an overall band score. The overall band scores and the listening and reading scores are reported in both half and whole bands; writing and speaking can only be reported as whole numbers.

IELTS is a high stakes test because, for most international students whose goal is to enter tertiary studies, gaining - or failing to gain - the required IELTS score can have lifelong consequences, not only educational, but also professional, financial and personal. With such a crucial gatekeeping role for such a large number of people, we can expect it to have some impact on the societies in which it is used. One such effect can be seen in the number of IELTS preparation courses which have sprung up in response to the increased demand from potential students eager to pass the test.

Changes to government policy in New Zealand in the late 1990s led to a rapidly increasing number of overseas students wishing to enrol in New Zealand polytechnics and universities. A large proportion of these students came from a non-English speaking background, and as a result New Zealand tertiary institutions needed to ascertain that the applicants' English was proficient enough to undertake tertiary-level studies successfully. IELTS was chosen by the majority of tertiary institutions as the most appropriate test for this purpose.

There has been a resulting growth in the New Zealand ESOL teaching sector as prospective students seek to improve their language skills in preparation for entry into tertiary study. IELTS Australia reported that 4,011 IELTS candidates were tested in New Zealand in 1999. That figure grew to 12,991 in 2001. The potential for economic gains to New Zealand can be seen in the proliferation of private language centres and institutes at tertiary institutions, and in the increased numbers of international students being recruited by local secondary schools. In 2001 The New Zealand Ministry of Education stated that there were 7,000 international

students in New Zealand schools and approximately 11,000 in the tertiary sector. The value of international education was projected as being $NZ500 million in 2000, with the potential to contribute $NZ 1 billion by 2005 (Ward, 2001: 6).

In order to investigate the phenomenon of IELTS preparation in New Zealand, Read and Hayes (2003) conducted a nation-wide survey of language schools in 2000. Three-quarters of the 78 schools which responded to a postal questionnaire reported that they offered an IELTS preparation course. A good proportion of these courses were relatively short ones to familiarise students with the format and content of the test and they were not specifically linked to programmes in English for academic purposes (EAP) or English for further study (EFS). Follow-up interviews with teachers of IELTS preparation courses revealed that there was a lot of pressure from students to gain entry to such courses in order to be able to "pass the exam" and be admitted to a degree programme at a university or polytechnic as soon as possible. Relatively few of the teachers were able to spend any significant amount of class time on academic language skills which were not directly assessed in the IELTS test. Thus, there was some evidence from this study that the adoption of IELTS for tertiary admissions purposes was having a washback effect on learners (and their teachers) preparing for academic study in New Zealand. However, this was a rather different context from that in most previous research on the topic.

Investigations of test washback have traditionally been undertaken in one of two situations. The first assesses the effects on teachers and learners when a well-established but outdated exam is replaced with a more modern one. For example, in research in Hong Kong and China by Cheng (1997) and Qi (2002), and in Japan, by Watanabe (1996), the introduction of a more communicative test has been studied to see whether a new, more 'modern' method of assessment has a flow on effect of encouraging teachers to teach in a more communicative way. A second type of research investigates washback from a test which is seen to be out of step with current language teaching principles and seeks to document ways in which the test acts as a constraint on course design, teaching practice and student learning (eg, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons, 1996).

The case of IELTS in New Zealand presents a different situation in several key areas. Firstly, the last changes to the test were made in 1995 so the current form of the test was already well-established in New Zealand when the study was undertaken. When introduced, the test was seen as modern, innovative and compatible with a communicative approach to language teaching. Consequently, many of the presuppositions about washback research are not

applicable to the context being investigated here. When considering the washback this test might create, it is necessary to look back at the thinking behind the design of IELTS and the ELTS test from which it originated.

IELTS was promoted and adopted as a gatekeeper for entry into tertiary institutions in New Zealand on the basis that the test is designed to simulate academic study tasks and encourage the development and application of relevant language skills. Ideally, then, IELTS preparation courses would mirror a focus on language skills and the practice of appropriate study tasks. In this sense, we would expect a "good" preparation course to exemplify the principles of communicative language teaching: a focus on EAP, use of "authentic" materials and tasks and a learner-centred approach which promoted learner autonomy. As a result of being required to take IELTS, students would take this kind of course and come to recognise the importance of developing academic language skills which would lead to more adequate preparation for their tertiary study.

Unlike the situation in many previous washback studies, the adoption of IELTS was not intended to influence the behaviour of English teachers. In the New Zealand case, there is already an expectation that teachers of English as a second language have adopted a modern, communicative approach. Therefore, the focus of this research is on what, if any, effect IELTS and/or the preparation courses themselves are having on the teachers. Evidence of positive washback would be that the courses taken by students preparing for IELTS would share many similarities with communicative EAP courses. Teachers on such courses would be able to deliver the courses in ways that they knew would help the students meet the language demands of their academic studies without feeling the necessity to teach in a more exam-oriented way. In other words, they would not feel that the format and content of the test caused them to teach in a less communicative fashion than they normally would. The students would accept the need to acquire relevant language skills as well as needing to "pass the exam".

On the other hand, the potential for negative washback would become evident should the teachers be obliged to teach in a way that was less focused on communication and more exam-oriented. The constraints of the test itself must also be considered here because while IELTS is in some senses a 'communicative' test, it is, as with all large-scale tests, constrained by practical considerations. Consequently, the scope and range of the test tasks are limited by the need to fit into the three hours of testing time, to ensure that the test administration can be standardised and that there is no bias against any group of candidates. This certainly reduces the extent to which the test tasks can truly represent real academic study tasks.

For international students adequate preparation for the language demands of tertiary study is an important factor in determining academic success. The majority come to New Zealand from education systems in East and Southeast Asia where exam success is linked to intensive study and the memorisation of language texts and structural elements. However, this kind of language knowledge does not adequately equip them for academic study and similarly, traditional structure-oriented examinations are not seen as good predictors of a student's ability to cope in a tertiary study environment. Thus, evidence of negative washback might also take this form: students preparing for tertiary study by taking IELTS preparation might insist that they be taught English in New Zealand in the way they are accustomed to studying for tests, that is, by the intensive study and memorisation of vocabulary and grammar, the translation and analysis of written texts and rote memorisation of model answers. There would be no inquiry into the language issues related to the tasks completed in the class. There would be no genuine communicative tasks and texts would tend to be designed specifically for non-native speakers. There would be significant use of languages other than English in the classroom. Students might be focusing on test preparation at the expense of a more rounded development of their language proficiency. The teaching of test-taking skills and the practice of test-like exercises are expected in an exam-preparation class. Whether this was positive or negative would depend on the types of skills and techniques practised and whether it supported the development of communicative competence in some way (as opposed, for example, to promoting rote learning).

As authors such as Wall and Alderson (1993), Blewchamp (1994) and Watanabe (1996a, 1996b) have observed, washback research needs to consider both the attitudes of the teachers and their comprehension and beliefs about the test they are preparing their students for. One way of gaining an objective measure of how a test influences any one teacher is to observe them teaching a test preparation course and a non-test preparation course and observing the differences in approach. In this study, the teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the differences and similarities between teaching regular classes or test preparation were gathered using interviews and questionnaires.

The present study focuses on the teachers, but unlike large surveys such as those conducted by Deakin (1996) and Read and Hayes (2003), it does not rely solely on their reports of what happens in their classrooms but involves the direct observation of their courses, as well as the collection of supplementary data from various other sources. It differs from previous research on IELTS in another key aspect. It studies particular classrooms, but unlike Brown (1998) and Coober (1997), it does not take an experimental approach, nor does it focus on only one

IELTS module or skill. It is not primarily concerned with the relative effectiveness of the courses as preparation for the test, but rather explores the broader washback and impact issues.

The thesis is structured in the following way:

Chapter 2 incorporates a review of the early and subsequent literature on washback including definitions, its connection to impact, its positive and negative connotations, and possible models of the washback process. It highlights the lack of clarity over what constitutes positive and negative washback and gives an overview of major longitudinal and cross sectional washback studies. It also summarises IELTS-related research with emphasis on the washback effects and impact of the test.

Chapter 3, acknowledging the complexity of washback, gives careful consideration to an appropriate methodology for this research. An attempt is made to ensure that methods and approaches utilised were appropriate to capture the washback traces, if any, in the contexts and learning situations which could develop in a classroom. The reasons that the selected courses were appropriate for this study are presented. Influential methods for classroom research in language teaching used by language teaching researchers are examined, the appropriacy of triangulation is considered and the variables that were taken into consideration are presented. This chapter also describes the instruments used in observation and in the elicitation of teacher and student perspectives.

Chapter 4 sets out to describe the basic structure and nature of the three courses, as well as to portray the teachers and students involved. It incorporates a description of the schools offering the courses and a description of each observed course by the Head IELTS Teacher or Director of Studies at each school cross-referenced to comments obtained by the course teachers. Information on the teachers involved is presented. Information is also presented on students both fully attending as well as non completing ones. Detailed descriptions of the class activities week by week at each school are offered. The summary compares the three courses in terms of the course content, teachers and students.

Chapter 5 discusses the classroom observation. Justification is made for the use and adaptation of the two main data-gathering instruments. The first, Part A of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT), focused on recording the activities and interactions which occurred in the classrooms as well as materials used. The second instrument was originally developed by the University of Cambridge Observation

Scheme (UCOS) as part of a study of IELTS impact. It was designed to record features particular to test preparation courses as well as identifying the skills and activities which the students were involved in. The development of a further instrument was also deemed necessary and is also discussed. This chapter goes on to summarise the results of the data collected with these three instruments.

Chapter 6 incorporates data collected from the teachers of the courses through interviews before the classroom observations began, through the course of the observations and once the classroom phase of the study was completed. Data from questionnaires filled out by the teachers at the start and end of each course is also presented. Information on a teacher's position, qualifications, experience, as well as his/her perception of the course that was about to be taught ranging from the structure of the course to the materials that were to be used is derived. The teacher's experience on and perception of IELTS is also sought. Shifts in the teachers' strategies after the courses started and reflections of the teachers on what was happening in their classrooms and how it influenced the way they were teaching the courses are addressed. The teachers' are asked to reflect on whether their goals had been met by the end of the course and any changes they would make in future courses. The teachers' reflections on impact are elicited. How familiar the test was to the teachers is assessed. Information is also presented on what the teachers perceived they did in class. This was then compared with the data from the classroom observations.

Chapter 7 records how the students felt about the courses and the test itself. Data presented was gathered via a pre-observation questionnaire gathering information about their background, English language training, their perceptions of IELTS, as well as their expectations of the IELTS preparation course. Students were also given a questionnaire at the end of the course which asked questions about the course they had just attended and aimed to see if there had been a change in their perceptions of the course or the IELTS exam. Analysis of the results of the student questionnaires is also provided. A comparison of the students of the three classes observed is attached. Pre- and post-test results are presented, analysed and the overall pre- and post-test mean scores for each class are compared.

Chapter 8 contains a description and analysis of IELTS preparation textbooks available in New Zealand, with particular reference to those used by the teachers of the three observed courses. It incorporates a review of the relevant literature, addresses methodology and presents features of the textbooks. In this chapter the data collected from the classroom observations at each school are analysed to see from which texts the tasks originated. This

analysis follows the same criteria as the earlier part of the investigation. Tables are compiled to indicate what the textbooks were used for in class.

Chapter 9 is a review of the whole study, bringing together themes and results from the earlier chapters. It revisits the concept of washback in light of the findings of the research.

Chapter 10 concludes the study and suggests potential areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Judging from the volume of research in recent years, the washback effect is still to be adequately defined and analysed. While there is consensus that washback incorporates the effects of tests on teaching and learning, researchers have not agreed on what washback is, what it might look like, or how it works. There have only been a limited number of washback studies, and invariably, researchers call for further investigations that would establish what washback is and even whether it exists.

This chapter incorporates a critical review of the relevant literature with particular attention on washback definitions, its connection to impact, positive and negative connotations, models of test washback and it presents an overview of some major washback studies. It also summarises IELTS related research with emphasis on the washback effects and impact of the test.

2.2 Defining washback

It is widely accepted in language teaching that major tests and examinations inevitably have an influence both within the education system and beyond it. There are two terms which are used to refer to this influence: impact and washback. The broader concept is impact, which Wall (1997: 291) defined as "…any of the effects that a test may have on individuals, policies or practices, within the classroom, the school, the educational system or society as a whole." Bachman and Palmer (1996) note the complex nature of the phenomenon and suggest that impact should be considered within the social context, taking into account variables such as social goals and values, the educational system the test is used in, and the potential outcomes of its use. Washback is a form of impact and the term is commonly used to refer specifically to the effects of a test on teaching and learning.

In general the term 'washback' refers to any influence a test may have on teachers and learners, either positive or negative, and either at the micro or macro level. At the micro level, the test affects students and instructors; at the macro level, it affects the instructional system of the institution. Pierce (1992: 687) specifies classroom pedagogy, curriculum development, and educational policy as the areas where washback has an effect. On the other hand, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) took a view of washback which concentrated more on the

effect of the test on teaching. They referred to washback as "… the influence that writers of language testing, syllabus design and language teaching believe a test will have on the teaching that precedes it" (ibid: 280).

Bailey's (1999) extensive summary of the current research on language testing washback highlighted various perspectives and provided deeper insight into the complexity of this phenomenon. The literature on washback indicates that, while there is acknowledgement of the potential for tests to influence teaching and learning, there is no unanimous agreement whether 'washback' exists, whether it is positive or negative and how it actually works in practice. In early literature it was assumed that good tests would encourage good instructional practice. In the last 10 years research has revealed that this phenomenon is more complex.

Concern about the influence of assessment is not confined to language teaching. A phrase that is often used in this context is 'teaching to the test'. For example Swain (1985) commented that "It has frequently been noted that teachers will teach to a test: that is, if they know the content of a test and/or the format of a test, they will teach their students accordingly" (p. 43). This is often perceived as an unacceptable practice in education in general. Stephens (1995) asserted that when assessment-as-test appeared to drive instruction, this relationship seemed to be an artefact of a model in which individuals ceded authority for decision making to outsiders. The teachers interviewed as part of this study expressed the opinion that raising the test score cannot be the single most important indicator of school improvement because teaching will come to resemble testing and that teaching to the test can only improve student capabilities and knowledge if the test is good. However, the alignment of curriculum to the broad objectives of achievement tests has come to seem logical to many educators. For instance, Bushweller (1997), referring to the American school context, said that:

> Teaching to the test--the very words have always been heresy to educators. Teaching to the test puts too much emphasis on standardized tests that are poorly constructed and largely irrelevant, the theory goes; it stifles creativity and encourages cheating. But today a new perspective (and a new education buzz phrase) is emerging. It's called curriculum alignment, and it means teaching knowledge and skills that are assessed by tests designed largely around academic standards set by the state. In other words, teaching to the test.

The question of what constitutes appropriate instructional preparation for high stakes tests has been discussed at length, particularly in the US with regard to standardised achievement

tests. For instance, Mehrens and Kaminski (1989) suggested the concept of a continuum of test preparation practices, arguing that the scores of students who have been trained on test-like materials are questionable. They identify eight forms of instruction, moving from acceptable and ethical practices, such as giving general instruction and test-taking skills, through to the unethical practice of providing instruction on a published parallel form of the test or on the test itself, with a grey area of questionable practices in between.

In a similar vein, in his paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Educational Research Association, Mehrens (1991) discussed issues involved in high stakes testing with emphasis on the proper role of instructional preparation. Addressing the attempt to improve test scores by teaching what is on the test, Mehrens presents the following guidelines concerning appropriate instructional strategies:

1. a teacher should not engage in instruction that attenuates the ability to infer from the test score to the domain of knowledge/skill/ability of interest;
2. it is appropriate to teach the content domain to which the user wishes to infer;
3. it is appropriate to teach test-taking skills;
4. it is inappropriate to limit content instruction to a particular test item format;
5. it is inappropriate to teach only objectives from the domain that are sampled on the test;
6. it is inappropriate to use an instructional guide that reviews the questions of the latest issue of the test;
7. it is inappropriate to limit instruction to the actual test questions;
8. it is appropriate to teach toward test objectives if the test objective comprise the domain objectives;
9. it is appropriate to ensure that students understand the test vocabulary; and
10. one cannot teach only the specific task of a performance assessment.

Here the discussion extends to how certain kinds of test preparation might ‘pollute’ test scores and make them less reliable. In terms of washback, Mehrens indicates that points 2, 3, 8 and 9 reflect practices which would have a positive effect, while the remainder can be seen as indications of negative washback.

This distinction between positive and negative effects is also recognised by language testers. We can expect students and teachers to prepare in some way for a high stakes test, therefore, some forms of test preparation must be accepted as appropriate activities. Davies et al (2001: 210) describe this ‘test wiseness’:

> Familiarity, or lack of it, with item or task types, the kinds of text used, or appropriate techniques (such as reading the questions relation to a text before reading the text itself, or apportioning a suitable time to each section of the test), are likely to affect a test taker's score.

This type of preparation that familiarises students with the requirements of the test and supports them practising on test-like materials. If the test in question is one that is in keeping with current theories of language, we might expect it is more likely to encourage positive washback. Thus, if the skills that are to appear on the exam correlate with the objectives of the curriculum then the washback of that exam could be said to be positive. But, on the other hand, if the instruction is adjusted to correspond with the exam's subject matter, then this has a negative effect on the curriculum and the exam can be seen as having negative washback.

Alderson and Hamp-Lyons summarise some typical concerns regarding negative washback to the curriculum (1996: 281, original citations included):

1. Narrowing of the curriculum (Madaus, 1988; Cooley, 1991)
2. Lost instructional time (Smith et al., 1989)
3. Reduced emphasis on skills that require complex thinking or problem-solving (Fredericksen, 1984; Darling-Hammond and Wise, 1985)
4. Test score 'pollution', or increases in test scores without an accompanying rise in ability in the construct being tested (Haladyna, Nolan and Haas, 1991)

For some, washback has only negative connotations. For example, Spolsky (1995: 55) defined backwash as a "term better applied only to accidental side-effects of examinations, and not to those effects intended when the first purpose of the examination is control of the curriculum", and spoke of the "…inevitable outcome in narrowing the educational process…" (ibid.). He uses vocabulary tests to illustrate what he calls the 'crux of the backwash problem'. While vocabulary tests may be a quick measure of language proficiency, once they are established as the only form of assessment, the backwash to instruction resulted in the tests becoming a measure of vocabulary learning rather than language proficiency. Spolsky suspects that "a good proportion of the Asian students who take TOEFL every year…. were more highly motivated to pass the examination than to learn English", a fact that he attributes in part to the "tendency to cramming" among many Asian students (1995: 64). For Davies et al (1999:225), negative washback occurs when the test items are based on an outdated view of language which bears little relationship to the teaching curriculum (ibid.). The example they

give is a useful one: "If…the skill of writing is only tested by multiple choice items, then there is great pressure to practice such items rather than to practice the skill of writing (ibid.)." A test which is structure based and prevents proficiency teaching becoming communicative in nature, can be said to have a negative washback effect.

According to Alderson and Banerjee (2001) test washback is commonly seen as a negative form of impact as it forces teachers to do things they do not really want to do. Similarly, Wall and Alderson (1993) reasoned that if the aims, activities, or marking criteria of the textbook and the exam contain no conflicts and the teachers accept and work towards these goals, then this is a form of positive washback. Negative washback would be evidenced in the exam having a distorting or restraining influence on what is being taught and how. Alderson and Banerjee (2001) acknowledge that tests have the potential to be 'levers for change' in education if one accepts the argument that if bad tests have a negative impact then it should be possible for a good test to have good washback.

Testing has not always been portrayed as having a negative effect on education and educational systems. An early advocate in favour of working for positive washback in language testing was Hughes (1989), who argued that to promote beneficial washback one should "base achievement tests on objectives rather than on detailed teaching and textbook content and they will provide a truer picture of what has actually been achieved. He also saw it as crucial that learners and teachers knew and understood the test because no matter how good the potential washback a test might have, if the requirements were not understood, the potential was unlikely to be realised. More generally, Bailey stated that "A test will generate positive washback to the learner if the test-taker buys into the assessment process". She goes on to comment that "A test will promote beneficial washback to the extent that it is based on sound theoretical principles which are widely accepted in the field…" (1996: 176), and that "A test will yield positive washback to the learner and to the program to the extent that it utilizes authentic tasks and authentic texts." (p. 276). Bailey concluded, "a test will promote beneficial washback to programs to the extent that it measures what programs intend to teach."

To sum up the matter of defining the concept, Bailey (1996) stated that washback is positive or negative depending on whether or not the test promoted the learners' language development (as opposed to their perceived progress or to their test-taking skills). The literature on the topic implies that the higher the stakes involved with proficiency tests, the more likely those assessments are going to affect the preparation in the course curriculum

prior to that assessment, as teachers will tend to "teach to the test" and students will tend to focus more, if not exclusively, on the skills or subjects they expect to meet in the exam.

2.3 Models of washback

Several authors have attempted to develop possible models of the washback process.

Hughes, cited in Bailey (1999), presented a framework for washback in which he stated: "In order to clarify our thinking about washback, it is helpful, I believe, to distinguish between participants, process and product in teaching and learning, recognizing that all three may be affected by the nature of a test" (1993: 2). Here, Hughes included language learners and teachers, administrators, materials developers and publishers as participants. The term process refers to such things as materials development, syllabus design, changes in teaching methods or content and learning and/or test-taking strategies, or "any actions taken by the participants which may contribute to the process of learning". Product, in this framework, covers what is learned (facts, skills, etc), as well as the quality of learning (fluency, etc)" (1993).

Bailey (1996: 264) combined this trichotomy from Hughes with the work of Alderson and Wall (1993) (discussed below) to create a basic model of washback. The result illustrated the influence of a test on the interactions of participants and processes, leading to products as well as indicating the potential for participants to influence the test.

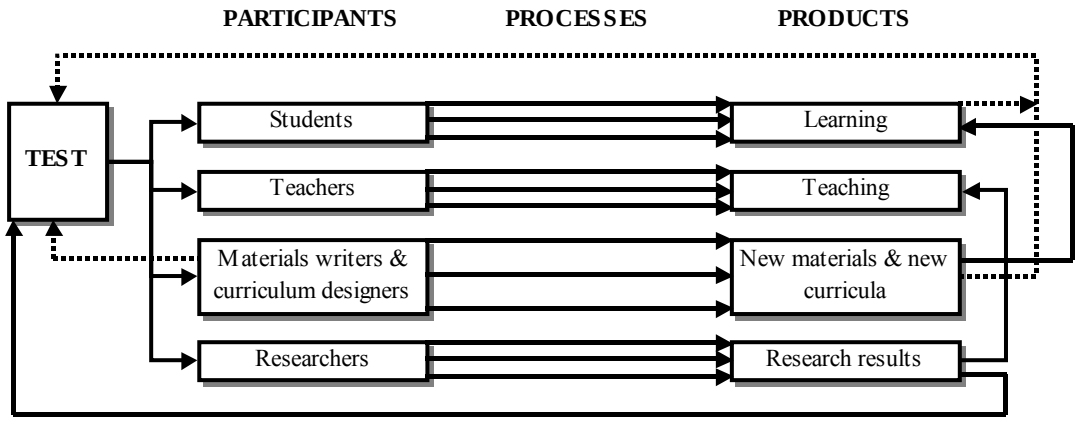

Figure 1 - Washback model proposed by Bailey

She listed ways that students who are about to take an important test may participate in any of the following processes (ibid.: 264-265):

1. Practising items similar in format to those of the test.
2. Studying vocabulary and grammar rules.
3. Participating in interactive language practice (e.g., target language conversations).
4. Reading widely in the target language.
5. Listening to non-interactive language (radio, television, etc.).
6. Applying test-taking strategies.
7. Enrolling in test-preparation courses.
8. Requesting guidance in their studying and feedback on their performance.
9. Enrolling in, requesting or demanding additional (unscheduled) test-preparation classes or tutorials (in addition to or in lieu of other language classes).
10. Skipping language classes to study for the test.

Bailey contends that it is the selection from among these processes which could lead to beneficial or negative washback, "…depending on whether or not their use promoted the learners' actual language development (as opposed to their *perceived* progress or their test-taking skills alone) (1996: 265).

Bailey also refers to 'washback to the programme', the potential of the test to influence teachers, administrators, counsellors and curriculum developers. She draws on Alderson and Wall's list of Washback Hypotheses (1993) (see below), identifying Hypotheses 1,3, 4, 7, 9 and 11 as contributing to programme washback (ibid.: 266). Bailey (1996: 266-267) refers to six principles of Shohamy's 1992 diagnostic feedback model, for assessing foreign language learning, as partially explaining how washback works. The model compares learning a language for achievement purposes and for proficiency, and mentions the need for a test to provide detailed diagnostic information. Changes in instruction should be made in response to the feedback from the test, which should be both norm and criterion referenced, thereby connecting teaching and learning. As Shohamy points out, if tests are to have positive impact, the teachers and administrators must be involved as it is they who effect the change (1992: 515). Finally, an ideal test should reflect the current theories of language, including discourse features, registers and sociocultural rules. It would also focus on the direct testing of authentic language situations and tasks (ibid).

The first, traditional view of washback pre-dated Alderson and Wall (1993) and suggested that the introduction of any test would lead to a single, uniform washback effect, which might be negative or positive. In the 1990s, with the publication of evidence based studies which followed on from Alderson and Wall's article, a second model evolved. The data collected

from such studies showed that not all teachers responded in the same ways upon the introduction of a new test. Burrows (1998) proposed a view of washback which, like the second model, is informed by objective data gathering. However, she argues that the patterns in the teachers' responses should not simply be analysed in their own terms but should be related to broader models of educational change from the research literature on innovation in education generally. She used a quote from Shavelson and Stern (1981: 455) to summarise her position that: "...a solely behavioural model is conceptually incomplete. It cannot account for predictable variations in teachers' behaviour arising from differences in their goals, judgements, and decisions". Burrows contended that without empirical evidence, it was not acceptable to propose that washback was different from other types of educational change and as such teachers would respond to changes to testing depending on their beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (1998).

Another set of simpler models is presented by Burrows (1998). As part of her doctoral study, she sought empirical evidence of the washback effect on the attitudes and practices of teachers on the Adult Migrant English Program in New South Wales in Australia. Her study looked at the impact of the implementation of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English. Her conclusions were that there was evidence of washback, but that different teachers reacted to the changes in assessment differently. She also felt that in her case, where testing and the curriculum were closely interwoven, the changes were not easy to separate.

Burrows (ibid.) identified three models of washback: one traditional pre-dating Alderson and Wall (1993); a second model, relating to current writing about washback (e.g. Shohamy et al., 1996); and she proposed a third model relating washback to curriculum innovation and teachers' beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK) as shown in the following diagrams:

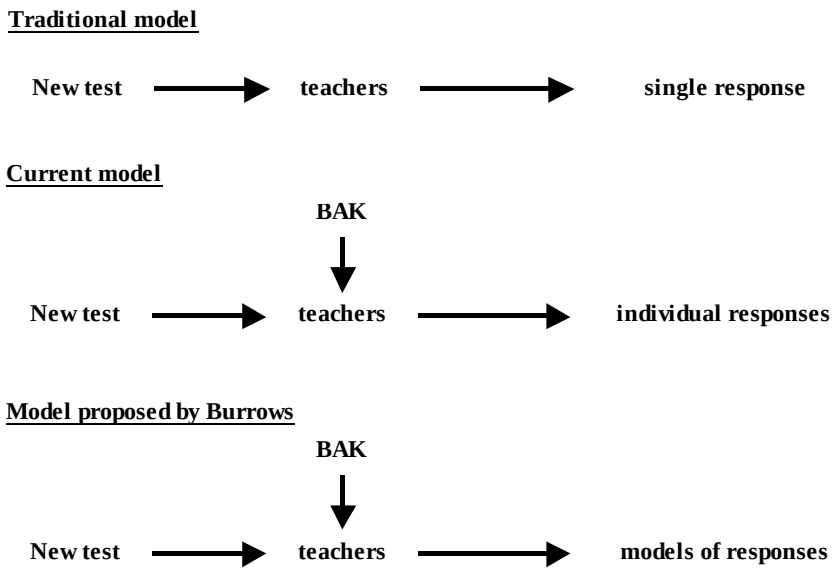

Figure 2 - Washback models proposed by Burrows (1998)

2.4 Alderson and Wall (1993)

Much of the literature on this subject has been speculative rather than empirically based. The first scholars to suggest that the washback effects of language tests were not as straightforward as had been assumed were Alderson and Wall (1993). It was Alderson and Wall who pointed out the problematic nature of the concept of washback and the need for carefully designed research. In their article 'Does Washback Exist?' they questioned existing notions of washback and proposed a series of washback hypotheses. Within this article they identified 15 hypotheses which may potentially play a role in the washback effect and must therefore be considered in any investigation (1993: 120-121).

Hypothesis	**Relates to**
1. A test will influence teaching.	Teachers
2. A test will influence learning.	Learners
3. A test will influence what teachers teach; and	Teachers
4. A test will influence how teachers teach; and therefore by extension from (2) above,	Teachers
5. A test will influence what learners learn; and	Learners
6. A test will influence how learners learn.	Learners

7.	A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching; and	Teachers
8.	A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning.	Learners
9.	A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching; and	Teachers
10.	A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.	Learners
11.	A test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning.	Teachers & learners
12.	Tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely,	High stakes tests
13.	Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback.	Low stakes tests
14.	Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers.	Teachers & learners
15.	Tests will have washback effects for some learners and some teachers, but not for others.	Teachers & learners

Alderson and Wall expanded on the basic concept of tests influencing learning and teaching and hypothesised that a test will influence what and how teachers teach and learners learn as well as the rate, sequence, degree and depth of both sides of the teaching/learning process. Alderson and Wall also made reference to the difference between high and low stakes tests saying that the former will have washback and the later will have none. Finally, they considered that tests will not automatically create washback on all teachers and learners, in other words, that the simple existence of a test does not alone guarantee the occurrence of washback, at least not as a general phenomenon.

Alderson and Wall (1993) suggested that if a washback hypothesis which supposes that a test prompted teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do were correct, then a 'good' test should have good effects. However, this also meant that a 'poor' test "… could conceivably have a 'good' effect if it made teachers and learners do 'good' things they would not otherwise do…"(1993: 117). This view that "good tests do not necessarily have good impact' is held by others, including Bailey (1996) and Messick (1996).

In a subsequent article, Wall and Alderson (1993) described in more detail the impact of the introduction of a new English language examination on Sri Lankan secondary schools. Although they found that the test had a washback effect on the content of teaching, they concluded that "the exam can have no impact on methodology unless teachers understand correctly what the exam is testing" (1993: 65). They asserted that the exam itself is only one element in the achievement of the intended impact and that 'good' tests do not necessarily have 'good' impact.

Further exploring the observation that tests can have impact in some aspects of teaching but not on others, Wall (1996) searched for insights from both general education and innovation theory. She proposed a series of reasons why teachers might respond differently to the

introduction of tests which were related to the concept of teachers reacting as individuals when in a context of educational change. Wall made reference to the main themes arising from Fullan's 1991 survey (cited in Wall 1996) of innovation in education, namely that innovation can be a lengthy process; and that each of the participants needs to find their own meaning for change, and that these interpretations may differ (Wall 1996). Fullan suggested that the process of change resulting from an innovation is a lengthy one which has three phases: innovation, implementation and continuation (ibid.). Wall's paper is also relevant to this study as it reminds us that what occurs in classrooms is influenced by a hierarchy of inter-related systems from the institution where the class is held to the educational, administrative, political and cultural environment (Wall 1996). Wall suggests a longitudinal approach to washback studies and notes that washback may be occurring in ways that are unexpected or too subtle to recognise (Wall 1996: 349 – 350).

2.5 Research studies since Alderson and Wall

Since the publication of the seminal work of Alderson and Wall in 1993, a number of researchers have sought to obtain evidence as to whether washback exists by means of empirical research in language classrooms. The design of these studies has generally involved some form of comparison:

- before and after a new test/exam has been introduced; or
- the study of the same teachers in exam and non-exam classes

The first kind have been by definition longitudinal in nature, since they have required the collection of data over a period of time – perhaps two or three school years in the case of revisions to secondary school examinations. By contrast, studies of the second type have been cross-sectional involving comparisons of teachers, classes, courses and/or schools over a short period of time. Let us look at each kind of research in turn.

2.5.1 Longitudinal studies of school exam innovation

As noted above, longitudinal studies of washback have generally monitored the impact of innovations in high stakes secondary school examinations in particular societies. In some cases, the innovations were revisions to existing exam papers, in others, the exam reform was more radical. This kind of research design requires the gathering of data before the innovation

has been implemented, to act as a baseline for the identification of changes in subsequent years as a result of the new or revised exam.

The Matriculation English Test (MET), which is the English language test for entrance into all universities in China, has been the subject of several washback studies. It is a standardised, norm-referenced proficiency test, which in 1990 had an annual test population of 3 million (Li, 1990: 393). Li documented the evidence for washback four years after the MET had been introduced (1990). Data was collected through the analysis of test results and their comparison with other tests. A study of student writing was also carried out. A questionnaire was completed by 229 teachers and local English teaching-and-research officers from which Li found that following the introduction of MET, there had been changes, some still superficial, in three main areas:

- imported and self-compiled teaching materials began to be used to expand on the official national textbooks and teachers voiced their concerns about the textbooks not meeting the requirements of the exam;
- there was an increase in the amount of classroom time dedicated to practising the four skills and;
- there was a renewed interest in after-class learning of English (1990).

Students were also questioned. Their typical response was that the good thing about MET was that they did not need to memorise in order to prepare for it, a major departure from the usual tests they sat.

The study recorded the washback effects of the new test over a five-year period and found it encouraged the use of new textbooks and innovative materials. Although Li noted that some of the changes the research had uncovered were not all that significant in terms of encouraging high school teachers to change their teaching methods, she was hopeful that there would gradually be a marked and more persistent change over time (ibid.: 402).

Another early study of this kind was conducted by Shohamy (1993), who followed the introduction of 3 different tests in schools in Israel. One was a test of Arabic as a second language (for grades 7,8 and 9) (ASL), one an EFL oral test (given to 12 grade students), and the last, a test of reading comprehension (for grades 4 and 5). Of particular interest were her observations that in general, after changes were implemented, classroom instruction became test-like and that the textbooks that emerged over time consisted mainly of test-like activities. She concluded that the use of test-like activities was most likely a result of teachers not being

trained to teach the new areas likely to be tested. As a result she saw that for some teachers, and students, these texts become the pedagogic knowledge source.

In a subsequent study Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt and Ferman (1996) further documented an investigation of two national tests the Test of English as a foreign language (EFL) and the Test of Arabic (ASL) as a second language. They found that they each had different washback effects with changes to the Arabic test having no effect but the slight changes to the EFL creating an increase in the range of positive outcomes, including improvements to classroom activities, materials and the perceived status of the test. Results from this study provided evidence of how the impact of these two tests had changed over time – ASL decreasing and EFL increasing. Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt and Ferman (1996) consider that issues such as the status and purpose of the test, and the language it measures, as well as the format and skills of the test, were important factors contributing to the type of washback it will create at any point in time.

Qi (2004) continued the work of Li (1990) by examining the NMET (National Matriculation English Test). In her study she carried out in-depth interviews and follow-up discussions with eight test constructors, ten senior secondary school teachers, and three English inspectors. Based on the coded data Qi analysed the structure of the Senior III English course from both the chronological and conceptual perspective using a concept put forward by Woods (1996). She found that de-contextualised linguistic knowledge still had a central place in the Senior II English Course at the expense of communicative meaning and contexts, this despite the decreased weighting on linguistic knowledge in NMET over time. Qi noted the powerful impact the format of the test had and that some students and parents complained if the materials did not mirror the exam.

Qi's conclusion was that after 15 years of use "...the NMET has produced only limited intended washback effects, as teaching of linguistic knowledge is still emphasised and the kind of language use in teaching is restricted to the skills tested in the NMET" (in press). This mirrors the findings of Andrews (1995), Cheng (1997) and Wall and Alderson (1993) with respect to other national examinations. Her study also confirms the circuitous and complicated nature of washback. Finally, Qi suggests that tests may not be a good lever for change – that educational systems or school practices will not let themselves be controlled by test constructors. In China the NMET was not an efficient tool for inducing pedagogical change.

A similar research project by Cheng, beginning in 1995, studied the washback effect of revisions to the Hong Kong Certificate of Education in English - a high stakes examination in Hong Kong secondary schools. The aim of the revisions had been to bring about positive washback in classroom teaching by narrowing the gap between what goes on in the examination room and the language used in the real world. In this research, Cheng used a range of methodological techniques in her in-depth case study approach. The preliminary findings showed the rapid change that occurred with the teaching materials but the slow and difficult process of adapting teaching methodology. Cheng suggested that it was the teaching content that showed the most washback. In a later article, Cheng (1999) found that there was substantial variation in teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and as a result their classroom practices also varied. Her study showed that the revisions to the public examination had changed the content of teaching but had had very little influence on the existing interaction pattern between teachers and students. However, Cheng felt that further empirical data would be needed before any judgement could be made about whether the effects were positive or negative (1999).

Cheng and Falvey carried out a large-scale, three-year research study in the same context (2000). They sought evidence that the changes to the exam, initiated to bring about positive washback, had had any influence. Results indicated that "washback can influence teaching to some extent, such as the implementation of activities similar to those required in the exam" (2000: 22). In this example, washback was seen to occur quickly and efficiently in the creation of teaching materials. The perceptions of students and teachers regarding teaching and learning activities were also directly influenced by the changes to the exam. However, the washback effect on the teachers' teaching methods was limited and superficial (2000: 1). Cheng and Falvey illustrate the difficulties of making substantial changes in teaching and learning unless all participants work together. They observe that the washback effect is a process which occurs over a period of time and may occur in cycles and suggested that effective teacher education, along with materials development, are key to bringing about genuine change in classroom teaching.

In summary, these longitudinal studies confirm the complex nature of Alderson and Wall's washback hypotheses (1993), which highlight the variable nature of the effect of tests on the various stakeholders. They showed that in some cases there was evidence that over time tests can have a positive impact on classroom activities and materials (Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt and Ferman, 1996). However, the implementation of changes to tests in other contexts showed little or no evidence of pedagogic shift (Cheng, 1999, Cheng and Falvey 2000, and Qi, in press).

2.5.2 Synchronic/cross-sectional studies

The second approach to washback research has involved a focus on existing tests or examinations, using a comparative design. This kind of study can be conducted over a relatively short period of time, making it more practical for many researchers than the more extended, longitudinal types.

Watanabe has conducted several studies on examinations within the Japanese context (1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b, 2001). In his first study (Watanabe 1992), he hypothesised that Japanese students who had sat the university entrance examinations would have more restricted learning strategies than those of a control group of students who were able to enter university via a system of recommendation rather than examination. His reason for presupposing this was the widely accepted notion (both within Japan and internationally) that the curriculum which prepared Japanese students for matriculation was an extremely narrow one, which in turn reflected a great deal of negative washback caused by the Japanese examination system. To his surprise, Watanabe discovered that the opposite was the case. He found that the examinations group employed a wider range of strategies than the recommended group. As he put it,

> the results of the present study have shown that the entrance examination has a beneficial effect on their use of learning strategies, at least in that the students who took the examination of the type currently given to the students of the college reported using a wider range of strategies than those who did not take the exam. (Watanabe, 1992: 191 - 2)

However, among these students aiming to pass the exam, the number of strategies used did not seem to increase between the first and second year of study. Discussing the possible explanations for this result, Watanabe noted that the students were only learning EFL as a tool for entering college and were less likely to be motivated to develop more than a minimum number of strategies.

Watanabe (1997a) went on to investigate washback in his doctoral study - a classroom based research project focussing on the high stakes entrance examinations in English of Japanese universities. He selected two teachers who were taking classes both at high schools and at an extracurricular institution called *yobiko (*or cram school*)*. He compared the teachers giving different types of lessons. At the high school they were observed in regular and exam

preparation classes, while the comparison at the yobiko was between exam preparation for two different university exam courses. Reviewing his results, he was struck by the fact that there were "… very few areas where the presence of the predicted type of washback was identified" and that there were diverse differences between the teachers (1997: 288), with one teacher approaching the two different types of classes in a similar way and the other adopting a less communicative approach in the exam preparation class. In general, Watanabe found that the power of the exams was much weaker than he had predicted and that they were only one factor contributing to what happened in the classrooms. Observing the differences between the teachers, Watanabe's study identified the effect of educational background and beliefs about teaching as having a more significant impact on the classrooms than the exam itself.

Watanabe was one of the first to use an experimental design to examine claims about the washback effect and to seek evidence for the impact of a test. The results of his study contradict a commonly held belief about the Japanese examination system, thus leading one to question the validity of other claims concerning the impacts of testing on education. He supported the use of an ethnographic approach to such research:

> Washback is an extremely complex phenomenon. It can be conceptualised on different dimensions, involving a number of variables, such as teaching, learning, interaction between teachers and students, students' motivation, etc and therefore needs to be examined from multiple perspectives. Classical experimental research is not appropriate because of the difficulty of controlling for all these variables. Ethnography, on the other hand may be a more suitable approach to understanding the complex nature of washback. (1996b: 211)

Using a similar design to the one in Watanabe's second study, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) studied washback in the context of TOEFL preparation. This study recorded the observation of 2 teachers teaching 2 different kinds of classes - one TOEFL preparation and one 'normal' language proficiency class. They focused on a number of variables within the lessons with respect to the types and duration of key activities of teachers and students, as well as aspects of the classroom language, such as references to TOEFL and the use of metalanguage. The research found differences between the teachers that were at least as significant as those found between the TOEFL and non-TOEFL classes. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons found that the test affected what and how the teachers taught but not why they taught that way. Institutions which train teachers and the testing agency were also suggested as having responsibility for the ways in which teachers presented TOEFL preparation. Alderson

and Hamp-Lyons (ibid) reached the conclusion that the washback they had observed was not caused by the exam alone. They saw the test, the teachers, the test preparation materials and the students as all contributing to the washback observed (1996: 295). As a result they suggested adding "Tests will have different amounts and types of washback on some teachers and learners than on other teachers and learners" (1996: 296) to Alderson and Wall's 1993 Washback Hypotheses.

What is clear from these studies is that a test does not have the same effects on all teachers preparing students to take it. The reasons for this seem to stem from decisions, expectations and assumptions made by all stakeholders from test developers, administrators, materials and syllabus designers, through to teachers and students. The reasons why teachers teach the way they do, and in essence the fact that they are teaching test preparation at all, seems inseparable from the other elements which create the context that they teach within.

2.6 Research on IELTS

We turn now to the test which is the focus of the present study, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). As noted in Chapter 1, IELTS has become a high stakes test for international students seeking admission to universities in New Zealand, as well and the United Kingdom and Australia. The question then is what kind of influence the test has on the way that students prepare for academic study.

The official guidelines from the IELTS organisation address the question of how candidates should prepare for the test in the Questions and Answers section of the IELTS Handbook (January 2001:17) which states:

> It is not necessary to attend a preparation course though it is, of course, a good idea to prepare thoroughly for the test. An order form is given at the end of the Handbook for a Specimen Materials Pack. This includes a full practice test with an answer key and a cassette so that candidates can get some idea of their level and familiarise themselves with the format of the test. There is also a wide range of published preparation materials.

Regarding the amount of preparation, IELTS has this to say:

> Recommendations for hours of language tuition are influenced by a number of affective variables. It has been shown that individuals can take up to 200 hours to

> improve by one IELTS band. There is also a marked tendency for more rapid progress at lower levels (July 2001:22).

While the official stance of the IELTS syndicate is that preparation for the test is useful but that preparation need not be carried out in the context of a preparation course, students in New Zealand often seem to pay little heed to this advice. As a result of the demand for specific preparation courses for IELTS, the majority of language schools offer them (Read and Hayes, 2003).

In recent years the IELTS syndicate has actively pursued research into the area of the impact of the test on stakeholders and as a result there have been several such investigations. In 1996 University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) undertook a project to look into impact of IELTS and how it could be investigated more effectively. The IELTS Impact projects consisted of three phases: Phase 1 (1995 – 1996) involved the identification of areas to be targeted and the development of instruments to collect information which allowed impact to be measured; Phase 2 (1997 – 1999) – the validation of the instruments prior to full-scale implementation; and, Phase 3 (2000), the implementation of the instrument as a part of a major survey (Saville 2000: 5). Four sub-projects were undertaken and associated procedures and instruments developed.

Project One looked at the context and nature of classroom activity in IELTS classes. Four instruments were drafted for use in classroom observations and procedures and questionnaires were also developed and trialed on a small scale. The second Project focused on the content and nature of IELTS teaching materials and included the trialing, revision and validation of an instrument to evaluate their contents and methodology. In Project Three the views and attitudes towards IELTS user groups were collected from a range of stakeholders with the use of questionnaires. And finally, the fourth project set out to collect in-depth information from candidates regarding their attitudes, motivation and cognitive/meta-cognitive characteristics (Saville and Hawkey, in press).

Hawkey reported on the development and implementation of the IELTS Impact Study (IIS), outlining the work that had been carried out since the inception of the project. His report included a validation model for questionnaires using scales and a rationalisation of the original IIS data collection instruments as the project continues (2001: 13-14). Saville and Hawkey (in press) focus on Project Two.

Studies by Deakin (1996) and Read and Hayes (2003) collected data regarding IELTS preparation at the national level in Australia and New Zealand respectively. Others have focused on specific courses and the washback effect of the exam on preparation for specific modules, for example Green and Weir (forthcoming) focusing on reading, Brown (1998) on writing, and Coomber (1997) on listening. Elder and O'Loughlin (2003) investigated whether three months of intensive English study made a difference to the IELTS scores of students in a variety of institutions in Auckland and Melbourne.

In addition to canvassing the general attitudes towards IELTS within the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession in Australia, Deakin (1996) set out to investigate the following three broad questions related to the impact of IELTS:

- Is there too much pressure from students in English for Further Studies (EFS) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses to focus primarily on preparation for the IELTS test?
- Are teachers and students losing sight of the importance in tertiary studies of EAP skills not tested by IELTS?
- Are some students with broadly acceptable IELTS scores being accepted into university while lacking some of the English language skills required for successful completion of tertiary studies?

The study consisted of four stages. Stage 1 was a broad survey of attitudes to IELTS and related EAP issues in all-English teaching centres likely to be involved in IELTS. The second stage was a qualitative follow up survey of ELT centres more directly linked to IELTS and EAP programs. A number of case studies illustrating the application of IELTS test results in tertiary admission decisions were collected and analysed in Stage 3, and in Stage 4 three focus groups discussed the role of IELTS and the interpretation of results.

Deakin found that there was a general perception that IELTS is a good test and an important measure of whether or not students are ready to undertake tertiary study, ranking well ahead of other comparable tests (1996: 8-9). IELTS test preparation courses were offered to students at 74% of the surveyed centres. The courses followed different models depending on the needs of the students and the schools, but over half included IELTS within an EAP course. A focus on EAP over pure test preparation was particularly evident in university or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) settings. The research highlighted the opinion that "satisfactory IELTS scores will not prevent some overseas students experiencing difficulties

with their studies, due partly to limited English skills (1996: 23)". It emphasised the need for IELTS preparation to be seen in a broader perspective and to make students aware of what language demands tertiary study would place on them.

In New Zealand, a somewhat similar study was conducted in 2000 by Read and Hayes (2003). The research was carried out in two phases, moving from a broad overview of the national scene to a specific focus on particular language schools. In the first phase a survey was made of the provision of IELTS preparation in the tertiary/adult sector. A questionnaire was mailed out to 96 language schools throughout New Zealand to collect information on whether schools offered an IELTS preparation course for the Academic Module and, if so, to obtain the basic details of how the course was taught. Of the 78 schools which responded, 77% of them offered IELTS preparation. This compared to 58% that taught English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Further Study (EFS), and just 36% that prepared students for TOEFL.

The questionnaire was followed up in Phase Two by 23 interviews with teachers engaged in IELTS preparation at the larger language schools in four of the main centres. The interviews probed the structure and delivery of IELTS preparation in greater depth, as well as exploring the relationship between preparing students for the test and preparing them adequately for academic study through the medium of English. The participants reported that students really needed to be at an upper-intermediate level of General English proficiency before being able to benefit from IELTS preparation and have a realistic chance of passing the test, but there was often pressure to accept students whose proficiency was lower than that. Even students who gained the minimum band score for tertiary admission were likely to struggle to meet the demands of English-medium study in a New Zealand university or polytechnic. IELTS courses varied a great deal in the extent to which they could incorporate academic study skills which were not directly assessed in the test. Despite its limitations, the teachers generally recognised that IELTS was the most suitable test available for the purpose.

The studies by Deakin (1996) and Read and Hayes (2003) revealed the impact that IELTS has had on the development of courses, both in Australia and New Zealand, which specifically set out to prepare students to take the test. In both cases the teachers interviewed, while generally positive about the test, expressed concerns about the aims of such courses and the possible negative effect they might have on student perceptions of the language requirements of university study.

On a much smaller scale, Brown (1998) made a causal-comparative examination of an EAP course and an IELTS preparation course taught at the Hawthorn English Language Centre at the University of Melbourne. He used the context-adaptive model proposed by Lynch (1990) to focus on the writing component of each course. His goal was to determine which of the programmes was most effective in preparing students for the writing component of the Academic Module of IELTS. Quantitative data were collected using recently retired versions of the IELTS test, which were given as pre- and post-test. Brown also sought qualitative data from classroom observations; analysis of staff teaching records; informal interviews with staff; and informal interviews with students. His results indicated that the IELTS preparation program might have been successful, as the IELTS group showed a mean score change of nearly one band whereas the EAP group had a mean decrease of 0.3 of a band. However, there were several difficulties with the study which Brown acknowledges require the cautious interpretation of these results. For example, the sample size in the study was small with only nine IELTS students and five EAP students taking part. There was a difference in the level of motivation among the students regarding IELTS and finally, each group received different types and amounts of language training and test practice due to the difference in course aims.

In his MA thesis, Coomber (1997) evaluated two IELTS preparation courses offered by IDP Education Australia in Taipei. The courses aimed to prepare local students to take the test. Students were given practice tests as pre-and post-tests, the results of which were subjected to a Chi-squared analysis. The control group were taught the 'general preparation course' designed by IDP Education Australia for IELTS preparation, while the experimental group took a listening focus preparation course. Coomber concluded that the listening focus course appeared no more effective than the general course in increasing subjects' scores on the IELTS Listening sub-test. He acknowledged several design weaknesses and added that the study would have benefited from inclusion of classroom observation and questionnaire feedback. Coomber expressed concerns about the quality of test preparation courses and called for closer scrutiny of such programmes by regulating bodies.

Two recent studies have investigated the gains in terms of IELTS scores that students make as a result of participating in language courses. In 2000 Green and Weir were commissioned by IELTS to conduct a project aiming to monitor the band score gains in academic writing in EAP programmes of varying length for students of differing backgrounds preparing to study in the UK. Their study identified several points of concern regarding the preparation of students for tertiary study in the UK – "In short, most learners do not appear to make gains of half a band on the IELTS Academic Writing Module (IWM) for each month of study" (forthcoming). Green and Weir found that best predictor of gain was not the length of the

preparation course, but rather the AWM score the students had achieved at the beginning of the course. Greater gains were seen in those with the lowest entry scores. Candidates entering with scores of 5.5 were making gains, while those with a score above 5.5 were not.

Colman (2000), who made an evaluation of the IELTS practice materials, found that teachers of courses which imposed a minimum entry level "found the IELTS preparation sessions more satisfactory and more successful", with students with lower levels unable to "grasp the strategies being taught" (2000: 34). Colman's study found that "Most teachers were comfortable with the idea of IELTS preparation sessions consisting mainly of training in the strategies needed to manage IELTS, with few language skills included. This was particularly so in cases where the IELTS sessions were part of an academic English program" (2000:34). It also suggested that forms of preparation which aim to raise IELTS scores "will not inevitably foster the full range of skills for UK academic study. Colman points out that EAP skills that may be advantageous for a learner in a university context might not provide a fair basis for testing, as students may expect to gain these skills in the course of their studies.

The most recent study of IELTS impact, Elder and O'Loughlin (2003), looked at what effect three months of intensive English study made to the IELTS scores. The 112 participants, taken from four different institutions, were given pre and post-tests, and questionnaires, and both students and teachers agreed to semi-structured interviews. Preliminary analysis showed that greater gains were associated with:

- being in the 20-25 age bracket;
- not being from China;
- having higher educational qualifications;
- being on a student visa;
- changing accommodation.

Elder and O'Loughlin (ibid.) noted that overall, there were more gains at just one of the four institutions. Another pattern that emerged was that students at a lower initial band score, especially in reading and writing, made higher gains.

These studies are examples of the growing concern regarding the effects of IELTS and the ongoing response in terms of empirical research.

2.7 Summary of washback studies

Research and models presented above indicate that in the last 10 years the interest in washback has not only grown but it has also focused on what forms washback takes, indications of its appearance in specific environments and its influence on participants, processes, and the associated products. The literature on washback has produced some evidence that it exists, but it appears that it is less widespread than researchers have expected. Such research also highlights the complexity of the washback phenomenon and some of the difficulties involved in designing, implementing and interpreting research in this area. The need for further research is also evident in the tentative nature of the reports of the findings.

Some common themes arise from this review of the literature. There are concerns that the introduction or changes to a test may create a negative washback effect, particularly in the case of high stakes tests such as IELTS. Research needs to take a multi-method approach to gather information from a range of different stakeholders. Several articles referred to the effect of the broader issues of impact on what takes place in the classroom. The perspective of the teacher is of particular relevance to washback studies, and data collected from observing classrooms is frequently seen as being an important aspect of the design of washback studies. A growing number of studies, seeking 'empirical' evidence of washback, are being carried out, and data from teachers and students is a common feature. Investigations of band score gains which are also beginning to appear, indicate the complexities of measuring the effect of instruction on test results. This increasing body of knowledge is contributing to a more informed insight into the impact of IELTS on student training.

2.8 Research questions

The present research follows on from that started by Read and Hayes in 2000 (2003). It focuses on observing what happens in language classrooms preparing students for IELTS. The broad research question asks what are the washback effects of the test, as revealed in a study of three classes taking preparation courses for the IELTS Academic Module. Due to the scarcity of similar studies into washback, the objectives of the study were methodological as well as substantive. When studying the three courses, the following questions were considered:

1. What forms of data-gathering provide useful insights into what happens in an IELTS preparation course?
2. What differences are there between courses which focus specifically on IELTS preparation and those that also include learning objectives related to preparation for academic study?
3. How do the teacher's background and perceptions influence the way that the course is delivered?
4. Is there evidence of student progress during the course towards greater proficiency in English for academic study?
5. What are the features of IELTS preparation books and how were they used by the teachers in each course?
6. What evidence is there of washback from the test on the way that IELTS preparation classes are designed and delivered?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

There is general agreement that washback is a complex phenomenon. Many researchers call for empirical studies to explore the concept further. Careful consideration of an appropriate methodology for this research was therefore crucial. The attempt was to ensure that methods and approaches utilised were appropriate to capture the washback traces, if any, in the contexts and learning situations which could develop in a classroom.

Washback research, as advocated by Alderson and Wall (1993), requires the study of particular language teaching programmes and they assert that the best way to identify washback is through a combination of teacher and/or student surveys and direct observation. DeVincenzi (1995:180-181) summarised some of the difficulties in collecting data on test washback, saying that, "Data collection in this area is complicated by the fact that variables such as pedagogical methods, levels of teaching expertise, and attitudes towards teaching and testing area as diverse as the political, social, and economic environments in which they are embedded". In this case, IELTS preparation courses were the focus. As this current study investigates "the processes of teaching and learning as they occur in language classrooms" (Allwright and Bailey, 1991: xiv), it can therefore, be described as 'classroom research'.

3.2 Classroom research in language teaching

Up until the 1960s experimental research was the most influential method used by language teaching researchers. Several major experiments such as the Pennsylvania Foreign Language Project (Smith 1970) were carried out to decide which among the current methodologies of the time was the 'right' approach, but when this psychometric research proved inconclusive, the language teaching profession looked to other forms of research. Work by authors such as Jarvis (1968), Politzer (1970) and Rothfarb (1970) brought systematic classroom observation to the forefront of language teaching research.

Allwright (1988) refers to the 'arrival' of observation in language teaching research in the mid-seventies highlighting the need to understand the instructional processes as well as the learning processes that occur in language classrooms. Research is basically a matter of collecting and analysing data and in the case of classroom research there are two broad approaches to gathering this information – either by directly observing classroom events or by asking those involved to report what they think is happening, traditionally through the use of

surveys. The disadvantage of both these approaches is that the researcher must decide, to some extent, what to look for or ask about, hence the usefulness of more open forms of data collection where the participants have the opportunity to record their experiences and perception of events.

There are some inherent advantages of direct observation. This approach is superior to experiments and surveys when data on non-verbal behaviour is sought and enables investigators to follow ongoing behaviour and identify salient features. Observations take place over a period of time and therefore allow for the development of a more natural environment than that generally found with experiments and surveys, and lastly, they are less reactive. There are however criticisms that observations can be "…subjective, biased, impressionistic, idiosyncratic and lacking in the precise quantifiable measures that are the hallmark of survey research and experimentation" (Cohen and Manion 1994: 110).

More recently, the trend has been towards a more naturalistic observation drawing on several fields such as ethnography, discourse analysis and sociology, including a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods such as observation (live or recorded), questionnaires and interviews, diary studies, collection of materials and documents, and think-aloud or other introspective techniques.

There are currently many different approaches to the study of language teaching and learning. Classroom research differs from research within general education in that it often encompasses the complexities of situations where language is being taught and is also the medium through which it is being taught. The inherent complexities of this type of investigation require the broad view gained by including multiple perspectives in the design of the research. As Cohen and Manion (1994) observe, established approaches can yield a limited and distorted picture, but by drawing from different and often contrasting approaches, we can gain a broader perspective.

When designing a multi-method approach to a problem, the question of which methods to use and how to combine them arises. Cohen and Manion (1994:242 – 244) state that: "No simple directive can be given for the question, how are the methods to be combined, for the answer will depend to a great extent on the objectives of the study, the particular situation, and the relative weightings which the researcher considers desirable to assign to the methods providing her with data." There is however, acknowledgement that washback studies should include both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research (Bailey, 1999).

Some researchers draw on an ethnographic approach to the collection and interpretation of classroom data. One of the aims of this approach, used extensively in the social sciences, is to understand what the participants themselves make of events.

Watanabe (1996b), investigating the washback effect of university entrance exams in Japanese classrooms, argued for the necessity of taking an ethnographic approach and provided a useful model for future research. He refers to the "extremely complex phenomenon" which requires examination from various perspectives:

> Classical experimental research is not appropriate because for the difficulty of controlling for all these variables. Ethnography, on the other hand may be a more suitable approach to understanding the complex nature of washback. (ibid.:211)

He notes four strategies of ethnographic research as defined by Le Compte and Preissle (1993:3), namely that:

- ethnography elicits phenomenological data that represent the world view of the participants being investigated and participants' constructs are used to structure the research.
- ethnography employs participant and non-participant observation to acquire firsthand sensory accounts of phenomena as they occur in real world settings.
- in ethnographic research, the researchers seek to construct descriptions of total phenomena within their various contexts and to generate from these descriptions the complex interactions that affect human behaviour toward and belief about phenomena.
- ethnographic researchers use a variety of research techniques to amass their data.

In a move that is somewhat inconsistent with a true ethnographic approach, Watanabe collected data using an adapted version of COLT, the classroom observation scheme developed by Allen, Froehlich and Spada (1984) along-side interviews and an analysis of the class textbook and supplementary materials.

The trend is towards an increasing recognition of the need to understand the thinking behind what is said and done in the classroom. This requires multiple perspectives – those of the teacher and the learner as well as those of the observer.

Nunan (1991: 250) highlights the factors involved in classroom-oriented research when he defines it as research which is aimed at "…identifying those pedagogic variables that may facilitate or impede acquisition. The variables may relate to the learner, the teacher, the instructional treatment/ environment, or some form of interaction among these."

3.3 Triangulation

The principle of triangulation is particularly appropriate when investigating complex issues such as washback. Triangulation is "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (Cohen and Manion 1994: 233). To elaborate on this point, Brown, quoting Rossman and Wilson (1985), presents the view that "Data from different sources can be used to corroborate, elaborate, or illuminate the research question."(2001: 227). But Brown observes that triangulation must be carefully planned, and that in and of itself is no guarantee of the validity of the results. He reminds researchers of the importance of acknowledging any preconceptions or biases that might affect their choice of data. Here, two forms of triangulation were employed – data triangulation, where data is collected from a number of sources, and methodological triangulation, where different techniques are used to elicit the data.

This study may be considered a pilot for future washback studies as it was designed to:

- investigate and learn techniques to explore washback in classrooms
- refine classroom washback observation instruments.
- identify potential differences and variables which might indicate or effect washback
- identify useful statistical tools
- evaluate the time frames and sample sizes for such investigations
- indicate the necessary scope of future washback investigations

Detailed information regarding all participants in the study was collected, analysed and summarised. A description of each course was also provided to help build the context for the reader. The goal was to create a rich picture of the contexts to enable the drawing of conclusions that were credible, dependable, confirmable and, as far as possible, transferable. Selection of appropriate means of recording the salient data is essential. The options include taking field notes, a standard ethnographic technique, recording on structured coding sheets, an approach used in general educational research; and audio and video recording.

Studies which require the systematic observation of language classrooms often rely on pre-planned observation categories or a systematic observation schedule. There are several such schedules which are widely used, such as the Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) (Flanders, 1970) and the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) (Frohlich et al., 1985). Although there may be some flexibility in the selection or identification of criteria, the fact that such coding schemes are pre-planned means that there must be agreement about what will be recorded and when. While such checklists mean that important features and stages are noted, they can lead to important or interesting data being missed. The necessity of defining the time intervals for recording the unit of analysis also entails some disadvantages. Reducing the data is a form of editing and significant activities that occur within the predetermined segments of the lesson may not be recorded at all.

As Mc Donough and Mc Donough observe, "Any form of observation is going to introduce some distortion from normality" (1997: 110). An audio or video record of classroom events can provide researchers with an invaluable tool for later analysis and checking on coding. However, the use of such tools is not a simple technique. Apart from the possible intrusion of introducing the necessary equipment into the environment, the technology is not always able to record the desired detail with an appropriate amount of clarity.

As previously noted, one influential observation instrument has been COLT, the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme (Spada and Frohlich, 1995). First developed in the 1980s, it is commonly used in language classroom research and was considered appropriate in this investigation of courses aiming to prepare students for a "communicative test". COLT provides a macroscopic description of second language classrooms and has been used extensively in a variety of contexts to "describe the differences in the communicative orientation of language teaching and to determine whether and how this contributes to differences in L2 learning outcomes" (Spada and Lyster, 1997: 788). It has two parts. The first, Part A, consists of five main categories which focus on giving a description of classroom activities, while Part B "...analyses the communicative features of verbal exchanges between teachers and students and/or students and students as they occur within each episode or activity" (Spada and Fröhlich, 1995:13). One important feature of COLT is that it can be refined and adapted to fit the focus of the research application.

COLT has been used as a framework in several recent impact and washback studies. Burrows (1998) cites a study by Blewchamp (1994), who used an early version of COLT to analyse the data collected by Alderson and Hamp-Lyons in their 1996 study of TOEFL preparation. Blewchamp's focus was the influence of the TOEFL test on two teachers working in TOEFL

preparation classes and non-TOEFL classes. Watanabe (1996b) used an amended version of the instrument in his investigation of Japanese EFL classrooms. He used COLT as a framework, along with notes taken during observations, to develop a new coding system, COEPREC (Communicative Orientation for Exam Preparatory Classes). Cheng (1999) also designed an observation scheme based on the categories of COLT, Part A, for her study of teacher perceptions and actions in Hong Kong.

Burrows is another researcher who selected Part A of COLT as the most appropriate instrument for the classroom observation section of her study. She investigated the impact of new assessment practices on teachers of immigrants in Australia where many of the teachers within her context employed a communicative approach to language teaching (1998). Burrows required a 'tested observation tool' and one that would "…assist in minimising the effect of variables external to the study and allow for the closer observation and analysis of the teachers classroom practices" (ibid.: 51) and found the results using COLT "…were revelatory in certain respects" (1998: 237).

Another instrument was needed to identify and, if possible, measure special features of IELTS preparation courses. In 1995 the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) commissioned Lancaster University to begin a long-term investigation into the impact of IELTS, with specific focus on the content and nature of activity in IELTS-related classes and materials, and the views and attitudes towards IELTS of user groups (IELTS Annual Review 1997/98).

As a result of the growing focus on the impact of major tests, UCLES initiated the IELTS Impact Study (IIS) – a long term study consisting of four projects. Initial work on the IIS began in 1995 with the identification of areas to be targeted and the development of instrumentation to collect information that would allow impact to be measured. The second phase, 1997 – 2000, the instruments were validated and rationalised before their implementation in 2001 (Hawkey 2001: 12). The early materials used both quantitative data from sample test populations, as well as qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders. Hawkey (2002: 12 - 13) lists the revised data collection questionnaires and other instruments, including:

- a modular student/candidate questionnaire on IELTS takers;
- a teacher questionnaire;
- a classroom materials evaluation;

- a classroom observation instrument for the analysis of live or video-recorded IELTS preparation lessons; and
- a receiving institute questionnaire.

Turner (2001) raised the issue of the reliability and validity of instruments used for such research, insisting that social science research instruments used in impact studies, which should include both qualitative and quantitative approach, must be validated and reliable. Similarly, Alderson and Banerjee (2001) found little evidence of discussion or appropriate methodologies to establish the reliability and validity of instruments used for the collection of data in impact and washback studies. They make the distinction between piloting, where the aim is to ascertain where respondents have difficulty responding the questions, and validation where the focus is on whether or not the questions capture the information being sought.

When attempting to validate the instruments employed in the IELTS Impact Study, Alderson and Banerjee (2001) concentrated on content, concurrent, response and construct validity. When it came to reliability, they recommend the inclusion of methods such as internal consistency, test-retest, and inter-rater agreement.

The present study used draft instruments used in the IELTS Impact Study and included triangulation as an additional form of validation. Consistent results from the various instruments and the other data sources support the validity of the research.

3.4 The Instruments

In keeping with the general approach outlined above, several instruments were used in this study.

3.4.1 Observation

The scope of the research was narrowed for reasons of feasibility. Financial limitations restricted the inclusion of additional observers and raters and also precluded the use of specialised equipment. Issues of time were important in the early stages of planning: the period when the researcher was able to observe classes; timing of specific classes and, the timing of courses within the academic year. Courses A and B ran at the same time in May and June 2000. Course B was held Monday to Friday in the afternoons from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., and Course A, Monday to Thursday (with some scheduling exceptions) from 6 – 8 p.m. thus

requiring daily observations at two sites for four weeks. Course C ran from the end of January until early March the following year. Classes were held Monday to Thursday from 6-8 p.m.

In this study field notes and structured coding sheets were utilised during the classroom observations. Ethnography typically requires the researcher to compile field notes. In an attempt to include a 'micro-ethnographic' element in the study there was a great deal of less structured, descriptive data gathering. Rather than simply coding the classroom interactions and activities in real-time, notes were taken during the lesson and timings were recorded to the nearest second. While when possible the coding was done at the same time, as the class was neither audio nor video taped, a record which was as detailed as possible was desired in an attempt to maintain a naturalistic aspect to the observations. These notes were used for the coding of COLT and UCOS and later, to complete a further analysis of the features. They also allowed for the composition of an overall description of each lesson and each course as a whole.

The decision not to record or video the lessons was primarily a practical one. The extended classroom observations produced large quantities of data. In the cases of Schools A and B, the observations took place on the same days meaning that there would have been insufficient time between sessions to review and transcribe any recorded data. As an exploration of the methodology was considered one of the aims of the study, it was preferable to retain the ability to respond to classroom events and adjust the instruments as necessary. As a result, in all three cases notes of the lessons were taken in real time. These were reviewed the following day and the interactions coded.

Gaining the informed consent of as many students as possible was also desired. Informal discussions prior to the main study with students on similar courses had raised the issue of the unease of some students about participating in a study that involved video recording. The observer was to be present at all the lessons and the potential further intrusion of a video camera was seen to be an additional burden on all participants. The lack of recordings was a potential threat to the validity of the findings as coding was done according to notes taken during the observation, but this had to be weighed up against the possibility of having to reduce the number of classes and courses observed. As LeCompte and Goetz observe, "Attaining absolute validity and reliability is an impossible goal for any research model" (1982: 55).

The observer did not participate in the classes and attempted to maintain an appropriate 'distance' from the teachers and students so as to limit the effect of her presence. During each

of the classes the observer sat at the back of the classes recording the timing of activities and taking detailed notes of each activity as well as collecting all materials handed out to the students.

3.4.1.1 COLT, Part A

One of the advantages of COLT is that it is can be adapted to suit different contexts. In this study, Part A of the COLT scheme (see Appendix 1) was used in its original version to allow the researcher to become familiar with the instrument and to determine its usefulness in this context. The instrument COLT is designed to be completed in real time, with the observer coding the classroom events as they occur. In this study, detailed notes of the activities and episodes as well as the time, in minutes and seconds, were taken during the lessons. They were reviewed the same day and used to complete the coding sheet.

Part B of COLT, which focuses on the communicative features of classrooms, was not used as this level of linguistic analysis was beyond the scope of the study.

3.4.1.2 University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate Classroom Observation Schedule (UCOS) Part 2

Part 2 of the draft UCLES classroom observation schedule (UCOS) developed as part of the IIS project (Saville and Milanovic, ongoing), was used as the basis for the second stage of the classroom analysis. The instrument contained lists of text-types used in the classroom and a range of task types according to skill. It also identified teacher initiated, exam-related activities as well as grammar and vocabulary activities. On occasions when activities observed were not adequately represented in by the categories in the original form, the instrument was modified so as to reflect what occurred in the class (see Appendix 2).

Several significant activities were observed during the lessons which were not specifically identified by either COLT or the UCOS. These were recorded and analysed separately (see Appendix 3). For example, features such as the teacher giving the students information about the exam or discussing test-taking strategies were specific to the type of class being studied. Instances of the teacher working with individuals or small groups were not adequately reflected within the COLT analysis, which focused on the primary classroom activity. Additionally, the study required a more detailed analysis of classroom materials than COLT could provide in its original form. In intensive courses, such as the ones observed, class time is limited, therefore the amount and type of homework given to each group of students was also recorded. Finally, the instances of laughter in each of the lessons were recorded in order

to gain some indication of the atmosphere in each lesson, as was done by Alderson and Hamp Lyons (1996) and Watanabe (1996b) in their washback studies.

3.4.2 Elicitation of teacher perspectives

In this study the perspective of the teachers was considered to be of particular importance. Basic information regarding the courses at each school was collected with a questionnaire sent to the person in charge of the IELTS course. Before the actual observations began, all teachers were interviewed using an interview schedule (see Appendix 4). The interview consisted of four sections. The first section dealt with the participant's own teaching qualifications and experience. Section B elicited more detailed information about what was covered in the course: how IELTS preparation was organised and delivered in the school, what kind of students were involved and what criteria were applied to admit them to an IELTS preparation course. Section C explored the teaching materials and types of tasks used in IELTS classes. Section D elicited the participants' opinions about the validity of IELTS as a measure of academic language ability and whether they perceived any differences between IELTS preparation and preparing students for the demands of academic study. In Section E, teachers were invited to compare IELTS with the TOEFL test, and a concluding section for any additional comments on the topics covered by the interview was also included.

The interview schedule gave a general structure to the interview. However, the exact wording and order of the questions was not followed slavishly, allowing the interviewer to follow-up on comments and questions which arose in the course of the discussion. All interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. The responses were then analysed qualitatively, following the general structure of the interview schedule.

3.4.2.1 Teacher interviews

In conjunction with the class observations, the teachers' points of view were gathered in several ways. Once the observations were underway, the teachers of Course A and B were interviewed weekly to: a) gather information about the teachers' overall impressions of the class and b) give them the opportunity to describe the materials they had used and the rationale behind their choices. Similar interviews were carried out at School C. However, the structure of the course presented a unique opportunity to collect feedback on a course in which a team of three different teachers taught separate sections based on skill. To take advantage of this, the data gathering for Course C included interviews with each of the teachers conducted after each lesson. This enabled the researcher to gain more immediate and

detailed reflections on the planning behind each specific class and on the events which occurred. It was also practical for the teachers, who were generally only available for a short period after the class. Interviews were also carried out at the completion of all three courses to record the overall observations the teachers had about the course. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

3.4.2.2 Teacher post-course questionnaire

Once the courses had finished, each teacher completed a questionnaire designed to elicit their reflections on various aspects of the course they had just taught. The questionnaire also included a series of questions about the structure of IELTS to assess their knowledge of the exam (see Appendix 4).

The post-questionnaire included the following sections:

Reflections on the course observed: the teachers were asked to reflect on the course to determine whether they had achieved their objectives and offer their opinion on whether the course had gone well. They were also asked whether they believed that this course was typical of the IELTS course they usually taught and what was the percentage of the overall course and materials prescribed by the school.

Reflections on Impact: the teachers were asked whether they thought that the IELTS test influenced the content of this course (i.e. what they taught); the methodology for this course (i.e. the way they taught); the feedback they gave during your lesson or the way you gave it (i.e. the assessment criteria they used; their decision to give feedback immediately or to delay it); and if they were able to make any changes to the content, methodology and/or administration of the course of the course they had just taught, what they would change and why.

Reflections on IELTS (in general): The teachers were given 8 statements about the IELTS test and were asked to indicate whether they were correct, incorrect or whether they were unsure. This section was included in order to get a general indication of the teachers' level of knowledge of the format and requirements of the test of the test as this was considered a possible influence on the way the teachers approached the courses.

Reflections on IELTS teaching (in general): Teachers were asked about the source of materials they had used in their lessons. Their responses were later compared to the analysis of results to determine whether their perceptions of what materials they used were accurate.

The Learners: The teachers' overall impression of their group of students in terms of language level and motivation was sought. The teachers were also asked to indicate whether in their opinion this group of students was typical of the students they usually taught IELTS to. The teachers were asked to be described the dynamics of the classroom. They were also asked whether the course they had just taught met the needs of this group of learners in terms of 7 pre-selected points.

3.4.3 Elicitation of student perspectives

Although there was less emphasis on the students' input, given the teacher orientation of the study, data was collected from all the students that participated in the observed courses.

3.4.3.1 Student pre- and post-questionnaires

At the beginning of the classroom study students in each class were asked to complete a Pre-Observation questionnaire to collect information about their background, English language training, their perceptions of IELTS and their expectations of the IELTS preparation course. Students were also given a Post-Observation questionnaire at the end of the course to record any changes in their perceptions about the test and the course. This questionnaire took the same form as the first.

Additional questionnaires were administered to students at School C at the end of each of the 5 weeks of the course. The students were asked to assess the overall usefulness of each lesson using a five-point scale as well as ranking the usefulness of the five major classroom activities of each class. Information about the language level of the classes and the amount of homework given was also collected at the same time (see Appendix 5).

3.4.3.2 Testing of Students

The data collected by Read and Hayes (2003) indicated that the majority of students enrolled in an IELTS preparation course in order to improve their chances of success on the test. There is a general acknowledgement that students need an intensive and usually extended period of

study to achieve any substantial and measurable progress in their language proficiency. This fact is acknowledged by IELTS in the IELTS Handbook (August 2000) which estimates that individuals can require "up to 200 hours of language tuition to improve by one IELTS band". In a study investigating the relationship between 10 to 12 weeks of intensive English language study and band score gain on IELTS, Elder and O'Loughlin (2003) found that students made variable progress with an average overall gain of half a band. As the three courses observed were 22, 28 and 40 hours long, there was no strong expectation that there would be any significant change in the students' IELTS scores from the beginning to the end of the course. While it was not considered a major focus of the research, pre- and post- tests were administered in order to assess whether the courses had a measurable effect on the students' IELTS performance.

Ross (1998) states that when making inferences about language gain there are two main requirements (1) that all assessment methods must be reliable and valid, and (2) that the assessments of ability must occur at least twice over the duration of the program. The methodology employed in the testing section of the research was designed to meet these requirements.

The IELTS tests used were 'retired' versions of the test. In effect this means that they had been through the formal pre-testing and validation processes carried out on all IELTS materials. These versions were no longer currently in use at the time of the study but were part of a bank of materials which could be reused at a later date.

Students at all three schools were given the same versions of IELTS Listening, Reading and Writing modules - Versions 14, 13 and 38 respectively - as the pre-test in the first three days of the course, and Versions 15, 14 and, 39 at the end of the course. It was decided not to include the speaking module as this part of the test requires a one-on-one interview with a trained IELTS examiner and this was not feasible due to the practical difficulties involved in arranging large numbers of interviews with an examiner within the timeframe of the observations. After completing each of the tests, under test-like conditions, the students in each case were asked to fill out questionnaires to report their perceptions of the difficulty of each of the modules. Students were aware that the results of the tests were going to be used for research purposes and were not connected to the work they were completing as part of their course.

Practical considerations precluded the tests being blind marked as would have been preferred, particularly in the case of the writing module where the marking involves some subjective

judgement and the researcher might have been influenced by acquaintance with students through the classroom observations. In practical terms however, while the observer became familiar with the faces of the students, this was not the case with their names. The pre-tests of the writing modules for students at Schools A, B and C were independently marked by the researcher and another certified and experienced IELTS examiner using standard IELTS band descriptors. Students were not identified by school but were marked as one group. As is standard procedure, all Task 1 essays were scored, followed by the Task 2 essays. From these scores the overall band score was calculated using the scale provided to all IELTS examiners along with the band descriptors. The post-tests were assessed in a similar manner.

The answer sheets for both the listening and reading modules were marked by the researcher following the precise marking schedule provided by IELTS. It should be noted that in the real exam these modules are marked by IELTS administrators rather than IELTS examiners and full answer keys are provided.

Overall scores were calculated in the following way. As in the actual IELTS test, the practice of giving double weighting to Task 2 and rounding scores to whole numbers was followed. The band scores of the Task 1 and 2 writing tasks were combined on an official scale provided by IELTS. The resulting writing score was then added to the reading and listening band scores and averaged.

As part of the post-course feedback each of the teachers was questioned as to their beliefs about the effectiveness of the course and whether or not they felt the course had helped students improve their test performance. These comments were then compared with the actual test score results.

3.5 Course selection

The choice of courses to study was largely determined by practical considerations. The courses needed to be in schools which were reasonably accessible to the researcher and which would be willing to agree to the large amount of data-gathering involved in this study. However, consideration was given to including the most common ways in which IELTS preparation courses were offered to students in New Zealand. The findings of Read and Hayes' survey (2003) showed that IELTS preparation courses in New Zealand take three main forms: - an independent IELTS course, IELTS included as part of a General English course, or IELTS as a component of an EAP/EFS course. Their research identified common approaches to teaching IELTS preparation which were often linked to the length and focus of

the courses. Independent IELTS preparation courses tended to be short and aimed to familiarise students with the test, offer them training in exam techniques and give them practice with IELTS tasks. These courses were most commonly offered by private language schools. When IELTS was included in a General English or EAP/EFS programme, the courses were generally longer and, by definition, included elements of language development and/or academic study skills. These types of courses, particularly the EAP option, tended to be offered at university or other tertiary institutions.

For the present study, courses in two of these broad categories were chosen from language schools located in public tertiary institutions in Auckland. Tertiary institutions were approached to participate in the study for several reasons. Firstly, it was hoped that observing classes in similar types of institutions would make comparisons more meaningful. There was also the expectation that the teachers and resourcing at these institutions would be of a more consistent standard than might be found at private training establishments. Additionally, these institutions are more research-oriented and therefore more likely to accept researchers in their classrooms.

School A had a 32-hour, part-time course that ran for two hours in the evening, four days a week, for four weeks. It was offered monthly subject to demand. When there were sufficient numbers of the General Training Module (GTM) students, they were given separate training for one or two classes per week separate from the Academic Module (AM) students. Although it was possible for students to take the course for a second month, it was designed and advertised as a one-month course. There was no entry test, although the students' level was informally assessed when they enrolled. According to Teacher A, the teacher of the course, the aim of the course was to "prepare the students in terms of exam technique, not in terms of language level. It focuses on the skills they need to cope with the exam and gives them quite a lot of practice in various aspects of the exam." A combination of skills was taught each evening and the maximum class size was 22.

School B offered a two-hour optional class to full-time students who were already studying a General English course at the school for three hours in the morning. It was topic or theme based. Students of a mid-intermediate level, as assessed by the school's placement test, were eligible to take the course. Although it was possible to take it for just one month, students typically remained in the class for several months. The complete course was 320 hours (eight months) long, but only one month of the course was observed. The course was taught by Teacher B who described it as a "skills development course rather than just a familiarisation with the exam". The course focused on "developing the general language skills, academic

English skills, as well as familiarising students with the test". Maximum class size was 12 students. Any students wishing to focus on the GTM were given practice materials specific to their module.

The course at School C was a 40-hour course that ran for two hours in the evening, four days a week for five weeks, and was organised by skill. As was the case at School A, the course could be taken by students of any language level and included students studying for both GTM and AM. The class was taught as one group for Listening, Reading and Speaking. They were divided into module specific groups for the Writing component of the course. No distinction between modules was made in the early part of the Reading section of the course, which focused on task familiarisation and general reading skills which were common to both. Later however, the GTM and AM groups were given module specific reading tasks in class and for homework. When there were sufficient numbers, separate GTM and AM courses were run. When these exercises were reviewed in class, the teacher worked with one group while the other was given another task. Enrolments were limited to 30 students.

The effect of the timing of observations has been identified as a potentially important variable (Watanabe 1996a: 331, Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, and Ferman 1996: 308), and was taken into consideration when planning the classroom observations. Thus, the data was gathered in June 2000 (Schools A and B) and February 2001 (School C), just prior to the beginning of the academic semester, in the expectation that the students studying IELTS at that time would be more motivated than at other times of the year. All lessons at Schools A and C were observed for four weeks and lessons at School B for the full 5-week duration of the course.

3.5.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct the study was gained from the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University of Wellington for all phases of this research (see Appendix 6 for consent forms). The university's guidelines for research involving human subjects were adhered to so that all the participants gave their informed consent and that the information gained from the investigation was used appropriately. Assurance was given that the confidentiality of each institute's intellectual property would be maintained throughout the study. All information and consent letters provided to students and teachers were approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University of Wellington prior to distribution. Participants were not given any information regarding the precise nature of the study other than that the focus was on IELTS preparation courses.

The staff member with responsibility for the IELTS preparation course, either the Director of Studies or the Head of Department, at each of the schools was approached in the first instance to discuss whether or not the concept of being involved in the study was an acceptable one. At this stage, a broad outline of the project was provided and each person was given an information letter and asked to sign a consent form agreeing to allow the school's involvement. Next, the individual teachers who could potentially be involved in the study were given details of the project and subsequently asked to participate.

Gaining access to the courses, teachers and whole groups of students required the ethical consent of all parties. Care was taken to balance the additional demands placed on the students and teachers by agreeing to participate in the research. Hence, while interviewing students on a daily or weekly basis might have enriched the findings, many students were involved in either other study or work. These factors, coupled with the fact that preparing for a high stakes exam was their primary goal, were expected to limit their willingness to agree to commit further time to the study. Thus, the decision was made not to interview students, but just to give them a questionnaire at the beginning and the end of the course.

Ensuring that participating in the study was not an unnecessary burden on the teachers was also important. Interviews were conducted at the end of the week in the case of two schools, Schools A and B, and generally after each lesson at School C depending on the schedules of individual teachers. Keeping in mind the broad goals of this study it was felt that maintaining the motivation of all teachers and students to participate through to the end of the course was of primary importance.

Once the teachers' consent had been given, an observation schedule was planned based around the starting dates. On the first day of each course the classroom teacher introduced the researcher to the students. The researcher then proceeded to introduce the project, explain the procedure and outline the level of their potential involvement. All students received letters containing information about the research and explaining what it would involve for them. All were then given opportunities to ask for further information and clarification before being asked to consent to being part of the study. In no case did any student refuse to participate.

3.6 Data-analysis procedures

When deciding on the coding of data according to coding categories, it was necessary to reduce the categories in a standardised way. Additional notes taken during the observation and materials collected from the classes were used to inform decisions when identification of

an instance was not clear simply from the basic field notes alone. The data collected at this stage was somewhat qualitative and as such the process was an iterative one.

Classroom observation data was recorded in rows and columns in Excel files. Due to the varying lengths of the classes and courses, all activities were expressed as the percentage of overall class time.

Once the data had been analysed quantitatively, a brief summary of the course was written. This description of the course provided a thumb-nail sketch of what the course included and gave a sense of the progression of the course over the duration of the programme. Responses to the open ended interview questions were compiled into matrices according to question number, stage of the course and teacher. As the matrices were scanned for common themes, responses were grouped according to topic.

Data from the questionnaires was collated so that an accurate record of the actual responses would exist in a format that could easily be accessed. Interview data was transcribed verbatim to create a written record.

Intra-coder agreement was checked by the revision of the previous notes and coding before each new set of data was coded and by reviewing the analysis and comparing it with the field notes. Dependability would have been further enhanced by including an additional coder to ensure inter-coder agreement on the coding of the classroom activities. It has to be acknowledged that the lack of an inter-coder check is a significant weakness, which leaves open the possibility that the data analysis was affected by researcher bias.

The pre- and post- test mean scores for each group were compared using a t-test, with the significance level set at 0.05. The writing tasks were also analysed by word count. The length of each task was analysed both by individual task and in combination.

Confirmability requires “the full revelation or at least the availability of the data upon which all interpretations are based” (Brown, 2001: 227). All original documents and data related to the study were kept in hard copy and in electronic versions.

CHAPTER 4: A DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to describe the basic structure and nature of the three observed classes, as well as to portray the teachers and students involved. The term course is used to refer to information that applies consistently to the course as a whole and class for information particular to the classes observed. An overview of the three courses in terms can be found in Table 2.

Several sources of information were used. Information presented below about the schools and courses was collected from the respective Head IELTS Teachers or Directors of Studies at each school. The course teachers confirmed their comments where necessary. The notes kept during the observations in class were a further source of descriptive details about the course. Data on teachers' experience and qualifications was gathered in pre-course interviews. Extracts from the regular interviews with the teachers during the courses were used. Student related information (including details of their background and educational qualifications, expectations of the preparation course and why they needed to take the test) was collected using questionnaires which students completed at the start of the course. The language level was examined, i.e. whether the students in the class had an appropriate language ability to be able to cope with the class, and consequently the exam. This was based on information collected before and during the course.

4.2 The Schools and the Courses

The Read and Hayes survey (2003) showed that there were various forms of IELTS preparation in New Zealand but perhaps the two most distinct types were: a) short courses that familiarise students with the test, offer them training in exam techniques and give them practice with IELTS tasks; and b) longer courses which take a broader approach by combining exam preparation with the development of language and academic skills. For the classroom study, examples from two of these broad categories were chosen, located in public tertiary institutions in Auckland.

Schools A and C, both offering short evening courses accepted students preparing for the General Training Module (GTM) and the Academic Module (AM) of the test. While IELTS has the same listening and speaking tests for both General Training and Academic modules,

the differences in the reading and writing tests is a potential complication when dealing with how a course can be typically structured to cope with two different groups. This issue was explored in the interviews with the teachers. At School A, GTM and AM were split into separate classes when numbers permitted. However, when the numbers did not warrant two classes, Teacher A coped by splitting some of the teaching days into periods which focussed on one specific module allowing at least some focused attention for each group.

School C had a similar situation to School A, with AM students outnumbering GTM students. Here, again depending on numbers enrolled in each course, a separate class was run for GTM students on the night that writing was taught. The reading component was handled differently, i.e. the GTM and AM students followed the same course, learning about the same reading skills, but being given different reading texts for homework.

Perhaps of significance is the fact that Schools A and C were IELTS testing centres. This could have had several implications for the study in terms of the students and their expectations such as how they may have become aware of the course i.e. perhaps when applying for tests as opposed to searching for a General English course. There is also the potential for students to perceive a test preparation course offered by an institution with direct association with the IELTS organisation as having more credibility and value than those at non-test centers.

School A had a 32-hour, part-time course that ran for two hours in the evening, four days a week, for four weeks. It was offered monthly subject to demand. When there were sufficient numbers of GTM students they were given separate training for one or two classes per week separate from the AM students. The class was observed for a period of one month, which could represent a course in its own right, but it was in fact part of an IELTS preparation programme that ran for a total of eight months and most students participated in a sequence of courses over several months. There was no entry test, although the students' level was informally assessed when they enrolled. According to Teacher A, the aim of the course was to "prepare the students in terms of exam technique, not in terms of language level. It focuses on the skills they need to cope with the exam and gives them quite a lot of practice in various aspects of the exam." A combination of skills was taught each evening and the maximum class size was 22.

School B offered a two-hour optional class to full-time students who were already studying a General English course at the school for three hours in the morning. It was topic or theme based. Students of a mid-intermediate level, as assessed by the school's placement test, were

eligible to take the course. Although it was possible to take it for just one month, students typically remained in the class for several months. The complete course was 320 hours (eight months) long, but only one month of the course was observed. Teacher B described it as a "skills development course rather than just a familiarisation with the exam". The course focused on "developing the general language skills, academic English skills, as well as familiarising students with the test". Maximum class size was 12 students. Any students wishing to focus on the GTM were given practice materials specific to their module for independent study. As the students at School B were international students, most did not need to take the GTM.

The course at School C was a 40-hour course that ran for two hours in the evening, four days a week for five weeks, and was organised by skill. As was the case at School A, the course could be taken by students of any language level and included students studying for both GTM and AM. The class was taught as one group for Listening, Reading and Speaking. Students were divided into module-specific groups for the Writing component of the course. No distinction between modules was made in the early part of the Reading section of the course which focused on task familiarisation and general reading skills common to both modules. Later however, the GTM and AM groups were given module specific reading tasks in class and for homework. When there were sufficient numbers, separate GTM and AM courses were run. When the specific exercises were reviewed in class, the teacher worked with one group while the other was given another task. Enrolments were limited to 30 students.

At School C several teachers shared the teaching. Teacher C, the course co-ordinator, who had the most experience of the course, taught Listening and Reading. Teacher D took both GTM and AM students for Speaking. He was assisted by Teacher F who took students for one-on-one interview practice. The Writing component for the AM was taught by Teacher E. The GTM students were taught writing by yet another teacher. This part of the course which focused exclusively on the GTM was not observed although the respective teachers were interviewed before and after the course and their sections of the course described so that the observer had an overall picture of all the people involved.

The data from all three observations was gathered in June 2000 and February 2001, just prior to the beginning of the academic trimester, in the expectation that the students studying IELTS at that time would be more motivated than at other times of the year. All lessons at schools A and B were observed for the full four weeks of the courses and lessons at School C for the full 5-week duration of the course.

4.3 The Teachers

Teacher A was a qualified schoolteacher with many years' experience teaching English at secondary school level. She had been teaching IELTS preparation at School A for approximately two years and was an IELTS examiner.

Teacher B had been teaching ESOL for eight years. He had taught a number of Cambridge exam classes and had been teaching IELTS preparation at School B for approximately three years. He had an MA in another subject and an UCLES/RSA Certificate in Teaching English to Adults (CTEFLA). Both teachers A and B were studying for Masters degrees in the field of language teaching at the time of the study.

There was a team of teachers responsible for delivering the course at School C:

- Teacher C was a part time lecturer and acted as liaison between the IELTS teachers in all administrative matters. She had a BA French, a CTEFLA and had completed a Graduate Diploma in Language Teaching.
- Teacher D was a full time lecturer who had an MA in History CTEFLA, and was completing Graduate Diploma in Language Teaching.
- Teacher E was a part-time lecturer in School C. She had a BA, an RSA CTEFLA, a Diploma in Second Language Teaching and a Post Graduate Diploma in Secondary School Teaching.
- Teacher F was a full-time staff member with a BA and a CTEFLA.
- Teachers C, D and E were IELTS examiners.

4.4 The Students

In Class A, the course began with 22 students, but most days there were approximately 15 students in class and only nine were present for both the pre- and post-testing. All the statistical data reported here refer to these nine students. The issue of the students who enrolled and attended classes at the start of the course but failed to complete the remaining lessons is also discussed.

All nine of the focal students in Class A were Asian, with Chinese being the main language for eight of them. They were aged between 18 and 25 and had studied English for varying periods: three for more than ten years, three for less than three years, and the others in

between. Only two of them had graduated from university before coming to New Zealand. While taking the IELTS preparation course in the evening, six of the students were also studying English at another language school for between five and 20 hours a week. Only one student had attempted IELTS previously but all intended to take the Academic Module within the following six months, in order to meet the requirements for entry into a tertiary institution. In terms of difficulty, on a five-point scale (with 1 being the easiest and 5 the most difficult), three students rated the exam at 3; four gave it a 4 and two a 5.

In Class B, the eight students who attended the course ranged in age from 17 to 45 but most were between 18 and 25. Six Asian nationalities were represented and Chinese was, as in Class A, the main first language of the learners. Three students stated that they had been learning English for less than a year, but between four and nine years was typical. Most of them had already graduated from university in their home country, so they were different from the students at School A in this respect. They studied General English for three hours every morning at School B before taking the IELTS course in the afternoon. Half the class had taken IELTS once before and all except one planned to sit the Academic Module within six months after the course. The majority of the students were interested in getting a good IELTS band score in order to enter university. In terms of difficulty, two students rated it 3, two gave it 4 and two a 5.

Although there was a broader range of nationalities in Class C, 26 of the 28 students were of Asian origin, with Chinese being the most common first language. The largest numbers were in the 18 - 35 age group. Almost half of the students had been studying English for over 10 years. Seventeen of the 28 students were university graduates. Of the 7 who had taken IELTS before, 4 had taken the GTM. The AM was the goal for 19 of the students in the class and this was reflected in the number of students who stated that they were preparing for university or registration by a professional organisation, primarily the Nursing and Medical Councils. When asked for their perception of the difficulty of the test, the most common rating (11 students) was 3. Nine students gave it a 4, six a 5, one a 2 and 1 gave it zero (i.e. very easy). This was the first time any of the students had enrolled in an IELTS preparation course.

Thus, in most respects, the students in the three courses were similar and fairly typical of candidates for the Academic Module of IELTS in New Zealand (Read and Hayes, 2003).

4.4.1 Non-completing students

Both in the interviews carried out by Read and Hayes (2003) and in the interviews with the teachers involved in this study, the question whether or not the students in the class had an appropriate language ability to be able to cope with the class, and consequently the exam, was raised. Questions were asked about the methods of entry onto the courses to ascertain whether or not there was any control of the language level of the students on the courses.

It is important to remember that entry into courses at Schools A and C was open to anyone willing to enrol, subject to places in the class being available. At School B, only students of a mid-intermediate level could study IELTS preparation and this level was determined initially by a placement test or later by their progression through the General English morning classes.

Concern over the level of the students and their ability to cope with the course also arose during the pre-course interviews with the course teacher at School A who, referring to the students, said:

> Most of them are very motivated to get into university. But in terms of their level, I would say there are definitely some question marks, that there are some who I think would have trouble getting 5 let alone 6.

Teacher A commented that some of her students had a weak foundation in grammar and that there was often an expectation of a grammar module within the course, which could not be fulfilled. Although she was aware that students needed grammar instruction, it was not the focus of the course. For Teacher A this created a conflict, as she wanted to do more in this area to help students.

> The business of building up a paragraph is quite difficult for about half of them, and for others it is not a problem.

The teacher at School B observed that there was often a range of language levels in the IELTS classes. In this instance he felt there were only two students who stood out from the others. One woman, new to the class and the school, was more fluent but less grammatically accurate than the others. The second one appeared to be below the level of the class and he subsequently asked to be moved out into an easier class.

Teachers at School C also had some concerns about the level of students on the course. For example, Teacher D said:

> I think the types of students that we get, and because we are an academic institution, they have a certain expectation of the level I think. But we do always get the people who - they either have over-inflated ideas of their level, or they are just desperate and they just have to do whatever it takes to get it. Some of them are going for permanent residency it's that double thing where they wanted further study but the PR thing... So we get a lower level than we would if they'd come through our system and we were only taking high intermediate or upper intermediate and advanced students because of the nature of it being a night class - it tends to drop the level.

Teacher E estimated that the students would range in ability from as low as 4 up to 6.5 or 7 on the nine-band IELTS scale, a view mirrored by Teacher F. Teacher E was aware of lower level students being disadvantaged in a large, mixed ability class:

> I think that in a class of 30 the inevitable happens - the good ones get the most benefit and the poor ones struggle. I try to identify the less able users of the language but it is often hard as they are usually the quietest and the noisy wheels tend to get the most attention. It would be better with a class of 12 - 15 - you could identify those people. It works quite well for the writing because they tend to split them off with the general and academic and so there is a natural split there.

The IELTS administrator at School C made the distinction between the level required for AM and the typical language level of students preparing for GTM:

> Sometimes we've had about 20 odd and 2 or 3 GTs and people have tried to cope with a mixed class, which I believe is absolutely possible to do, but the GTs seem to drop out because they see themselves as so far behind the other ones, which in fact they are very often, so they do drop out and then you end up with a straight class. They sort of sort themselves that way. But it's a constantly hard one

She went on to add that there had been a decrease in the number of students coming along for preparation in the GTM of IELTS in recent times.

> But they are absolutely desperate [to pass IELTS], but they do drop out and you don't really know why because of course they're not there at the end when you do the

evaluation. And it's a short course so we can't be too worried about it really. I mean if they choose to pay all that money and don't last the distance then it doesn't give you any opportunity to remedy the situation. Whereas we are deeply concerned about it in our normal courses, but it just seems to be one that you just have to accept that it happens. It is a puzzle.

The general trend at Schools A and C was for student numbers to decline as the course proceeded. The class at School A began with 22 students. However, most days there were approximately 15 students present. Of these only 9 were present for both the pre and post-testing. Likewise in Course C, the number of students attending class started to fall off over the first week. Student numbers on Course B, however, remained more or less constant at 8. In each case this presented something of a predicament for the teachers and administrators, as the students who quit were unable to be contacted and asked for their reasons for dropping out. Informal discussions with students indicated that at least in some instances the reason was that they felt the course was 'too hard'. The other indication of possible reasons behind the fall off in numbers was the results of the pre-testing for this study. Given in the first week of each course, the pre-test was taken by the majority of students. While only the results of students who completed a full set of all pre and post-tests were included in the analysis of test performance, an analysis of the students who took only the first tests indicated that they were at the lower end of the class.

After all classroom observations were complete the test results were analysed to ascertain if there was any pattern in the level of the students who had 'dropped out'. A list of the students who had completed the pre-tests but not the post-tests was compiled for each school. The average overall band scores for all the students completing the pre-tests were calculated. The average for the '"non-completing students", was also calculated and compared to the average overall band score of the students who remained in class and took the final tests.

School	School A	School B	School C
Pre-Average of all students -	5.04	5.27	5.04
Average of dropouts	4.5	4	4.6
Average of remaining students:	5.39	5.43	5.18

Table 1 - Pre-test scores of "non-completing students"

This table clearly shows the similarity in the results of this comparison across all three schools. The average test result of the class present at the beginning of the school ranged from

5.04 at Schools A and C to 5.27 at School B. The students remaining at the end of the course had average results of 5.39, 5.43 and 5.18 respectively. In each case the score of those students who failed to complete the course was noticeably lower than the average of all pre-test scores.

Another pattern which emerged from this testing was that the average level of the students was lower than the teachers had originally thought. This overestimation of the language level of the weaker members of the class, and the underestimation of the number of lower level students, has potential implications for how the teachers approached teaching the classes. The fact that an accurate measure of the language proficiency of the students entering the IELTS preparation courses is not attained in any of the schools means that teachers must make judgements based on impressions of the typical range of abilities in such classes from previous experience. This guesswork coupled with the short length of the courses and (in the cases of Schools A and C) large class sizes, made the task of meeting the needs of individual students extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the teachers.

4.5 Descriptions of the Courses

We move now to general descriptions of the class activities week by week at each school. Courses at Schools A and B addressed different sections of the IELTS test skills on any one day and will therefore be described by week. The course at School C, due to specific skills being taught in a given day, was described by skill rather than by week.

4.5.1 Course A

The classes were held in a room that was primarily a language laboratory, with listening booths around the outside walls. A series of tables had been placed in a 'U' shape in the centre of the room so that regular classes could be held there. The size and shape of the room meant there was little space for the teacher, or students, to move around. The use of tables rather than desks also placed real constraints on how the space could be used. The room contained a blackboard, a tape-recorder and an overhead projector.

In Week 1 the teacher outlined the course and gave students a general overview of the IELTS test. She gradually began to introduce different question types commonly found in the Listening and Reading sub-tests, often using exercises which gave a section of an IELTS text or practice test and an example of a specific question type for students to complete. Appropriate strategies for each were discussed and students were given the opportunity to

practise applying the strategies to IELTS tasks. Throughout the course the teacher frequently gave the students information about IELTS and tips about how to better cope with the tasks, particularly related to the time pressure created by the test. As the week progressed, the teacher moved on to writing skills. A model academic essay and several Task 2 essay rubrics were analysed. Students planned a Task 2 essay, which was assigned for homework. Some traditionally problematic areas of listening were briefly overviewed on the last day of week one and the students practised Phase 2 of the speaking test with a partner.

In the second week the teacher continued to introduce and give practice with different question types, using materials from IELTS preparation books. Students were given practice reading tests, mostly for homework, and reviewed the answers in class. Students planned two Task 2 essays and wrote part of one (the introduction) in class. They completed several sections of IELTS practice listening tests and checked the answers as a class. The teacher handed back some writing homework and followed up with writing skills practice exercises. The week ended with students practising Phases 1 and 2 of the speaking test.

Week 3 began with the class writing a timed Task 2 essay. Students continued to complete practice reading tests. Answers to these tests were marked in class and the teacher often reviewed the reading strategies she had previously introduced. Students completed two practice listening tests in class this week. Returning to writing, the students worked through a worksheet focusing on task fulfilment and elements of organisation of a Task 1 essay. The homework task that day was to write an essay which was in turn reviewed by peers in the next class. A second full listening test was administered. Students compared answers using an answer sheet and were encouraged to ask questions about possible alternative answers. The teacher read relevant sections of the tapescript. A practice reading test was given for homework. The teacher introduced a marking schedule which was to be used to code errors in student writing. The teacher reminded students that grammar and vocabulary were not being covered in any detail in the course and she encouraged them to take the initiative themselves and correct their own errors. However, because the students were making a large number of errors in the use of discourse markers, an exercise on connectors was given as homework and reviewed in class the next day. Phase 3 of the Speaking test was modelled and the students carried out a role-play in pairs. The teacher gave them the opportunity to practise applying a new strategy to completing a cloze reading exercise. Task 1 was the writing focus and after some language input the class discussed the features of an example rubric and wrote a timed essay. A further reading test was given for homework.

In the final week the teacher's aim was to give the students more exam practice. Reading homework was reviewed and the students completed a listening task. The structure of the whole speaking test was overviewed and the teacher suggested what each phase of the test was designed to elicit. Functional language used to describe plans was elicited before the students practised Phases 3 and 4 of the test. A complete practice writing test, Tasks 1 and 2, was given to the students for homework. The teacher reviewed the speaking test and elaborated on the possible topics that could be discussed in Phase 2. The teacher demonstrated an interview with one of the students in the role of the candidate. She answered the students' questions about different aspects of the speaking test and then gave the class time to practise Phases 2, 3, and 4. Sections 1,3 and 4 of a practice listening test were completed in class. The next day the students were given a reading test for homework. Two processes which could appear in Writing Task 1 were used as the focus of a speaking exercise and the students were presented with some appropriate language to use for this task. The teacher revised exam strategies which could be used in the listening test. On the final day the teacher handed back some writing she had marked and gave the students a copy of a model essay. She gave the class some feedback about some common errors they had made in the writing. The reading homework was marked and students completed three sections of a listening test. In the final hour the students carried out Phases 2-4 of an interview in pairs. The class ended with the teacher giving them advice to help them through the day of the test.

The classes in Course A included several skills, with a balance of skills each week. One of the key features of this course was the extensive amount of test practice that the students completed in class and as homework exercises. In the early part of the course Teacher A introduced the students to the format and possible question types found in the exam. As the course progresses, the students were given increasing numbers of practice tests to complete both as part of the class and as homework activities. Throughout the course the teacher spent significant amounts of class-time providing the students with information about IELTS and tips about how to better cope with the exam tasks.

4.5.2 Course B

The room used for the classes contained 12 desks which had been placed in groups of four. The room was spacious and contained a white-board, tape-recorder and an overhead projector.

In the first week the overall theme of the course was Lifestyle and the first topic was Immigration. The students were given a series of discussion questions as an introduction. The resulting ideas and language were recycled in a role-play at the end of Day 1and the following

day. Revision of vocabulary and grammar was a common feature observed throughout the course and occurred on an almost daily basis. Graphs illustrating different aspects of immigration in New Zealand were used to introduce and revise the language used to describe statistics. They were used in several speaking, listening, writing and graph drawing activities. The students were given one section of a practice IELTS reading test on the topic and six questions to complete. The tests were put away and the class focussed on learning the meaning and pronunciation of some key vocabulary and phrases from the text. Students then re-read the reading text and attempted the questions again. Answers to the task were written on the board by students and reviewed as a class. The final 12 questions relating to the text were then completed and the answers similarly discussed and corrected. The teacher explained how the answers to a summary gap fill could be found by analysing the text.

Continuing with immigration, the second week began with an error correction exercise. The students completed two information exchanges with first a reading and then a listening text. A written summary of the information was assigned as optional homework. The teacher presented students with a Writing Task 2 rubric; the class analysed it and planned the answer. They read a model essay and completed several related vocabulary and discourse tasks. The following day, after correcting errors in homework writing, students in pairs wrote an introduction to the writing task. Students wrote their introductions on the board and reviewed them as a class. The teacher assisted students individually as they wrote the Task 2 essay. On Day 8 the teacher returned to graphs and describing statistics. This section was not related to immigration. The teacher provided some language input and students completed several activities which involved orally describing trends, drawing graphs and writing a paragraph describing a bar chart. They analysed a model of a Task 1 essay before composing one themselves. In addition, they were also given a section of academic word list for self-study at home.

In Week 3 a second topic, Women in Management, was introduced. Students discussed a series of questions designed to elicit key vocabulary and issues. They taught each other and practised writing sentences using the language. They were then given a section of a text to read and summarise in a paragraph. This section ended with a sentence completion exercise to check comprehension as well as vocabulary and grammar. Students were often asked to write their answers on the board where the teacher corrected any errors. Groups of students were given a Task 1 essay rubric with different graphs and charts illustrating trends in the positions of female managers. They described the information to each other and then completed a series of questions. The answers were checked on the board. Sentences of a model answer to the Task 1essay were given to the students to re-order. After analysing the model essay, the

students wrote the task themselves. On Day 14 the students completed an IELTS practice listening test. The task was introduced with a pronunciation/listening exercise in which each student dictated a sentence from the listening text to their partner, who had to count the number of words. They listened to the test once under exam conditions, then split into smaller groups and listened several more times while discussing possible answers. Final answers were discussed and checked as a class. Twice in the third week the students completed speed-reading exercises.

In the final week the topic was Friendship, introduced with a running dictation exercise. Students discussed different aspects of friendship and shared sayings about it from their countries. A lexical set was introduced and practised. Each student was given a section of a text on the subject which they summarised orally while their partner took notes. On Day 16 a practice reading text on the topic of love was completed under exam conditions. Students taught classmates selected vocabulary items taken from the text and completed a gap-fill task. The vocabulary was revised the next day and the class discussed the answers to the reading text. Students were given two more sets of academic word lists for homework. The last class of the course was devoted to the IELTS Speaking test. The teacher introduced an activity which focused on functional language. Students grouped and ranked a number of phrases that could be used in the interview. After the completion of a CV form, the teacher reviewed each phase of the test, including possible topics. Two IELTS classes combined in the second stage of the class. The teachers demonstrated Phase 3 of the test and, after reviewing all phases of the speaking test again, the classes practised the interview with two different partners.

A key difference between Course B and the content of either of the other courses was that it was topic based and had been designed to include a range of skills and tasks within the context of specific topics. The topics were taken from IELTS practice tests but the materials used where taken from a range of other authentic sources. Another salient feature was the inclusion of materials and exercises focusing on language. At School B, exam practice was not a major part of the course. Students were introduced to and practised all sections of the test and occasionally given exam tips, but spent more time discussing issues related to the central topic and language issues arising from them.

4.5.3 Course C

A large classroom was used for the preparation courses. The desks had been placed in rows, with each separate from the next. There was a white-board, tape-recorder and overhead projector available.

While Courses A and B incorporated a range of skills in each lesson, individual skills were taught separately in Course C. Consequently, the classroom activities have been described according to the skill taught rather than in chronological order. In days 1, 5, 9, 13 and 17 the students were taught Listening; days 2, 6, 11, 15 and 19 were for Speaking; days 3, 7, 12, 16 and 20 for Writing; days 4, 8, 10, 14 and 18 for Reading. The course time was equally distributed across skills (listening classes lasted 10.07 hours, speaking 10 hours, writing 9.75 hours and reading 10.26 hours).

4.5.3.1 Listening activities:

Teacher C gave a general introduction to the course on the first day before outlining the schedule of the listening part in more detail. The first skill taught was how to predict answers to questions in the listening module of IELTS. The students were given practice in listening for numbers and differentiating between similar sounding words. Students wrote a paragraph explaining why they were taking IELTS. Further practice was included in the second lesson along with work on tasks involving descriptions of people and different objects. Students also practised completing several forms and listening for detail. A list of listening strategies was also given that week and reviewed in the following lesson. In Week 3 the teacher introduced further skills practice focusing on listening for specific information and vocabulary. The class continued to develop predicting skills and completed several form completion tasks, one of which included pairs practising conversations and role-playing. As the course progressed, the listening tasks began to focus on skills required in Sections 3 and 4 of the IELTS listening module and consequently became longer and more demanding. In the fourth week of the course the students were introduced to a range of strategies for answering specific question types. They were given opportunities to practise multi-choice and short answer tasks as well as completing sentences and diagrams. In the final week Teacher C asked the students to complete a course evaluation form. She also went over some administrative issues such as explaining how the listening answer sheet should be completed. The students were given a complete IELTS listening test under exam conditions and the class reviewed the answers. To finish up this section of the course the teacher spent some time discussing ways the students could continue to improve their listening skills once the class had finished.

4.5.3.2 Speaking activities:

It was the practice in School C to employ two teachers for the speaking section of the test. The main teacher, Teacher D, was responsible for teaching the class while Teacher F took

pairs of students out of the class to give them individual interview practice. Teacher F interviewed one student while the other observed. At the end of Phase 3 and again at the end of the interview he gave students feedback about their performance. This procedure continued throughout the speaking section of the course allowing each student at least one opportunity to have one-on-one interview practice.

On the first day Teacher D introduced the students to the IELTS speaking test and outlined what he intended to cover in his part of the course. He explained that each class was designed to focus on one main section of the speaking interview and gave a general overview of the test. Students introduced themselves to each other and completed a C.V. form. They also practised asking and answering questions. Each week at the end of the lesson the teacher gave the students a list of strategies to help them prepare for and perform well in the speaking test.

The structure of the speaking test was reviewed in the second class. Students were given some phrases to use to ask for information to be repeated or to ask for clarification which they practised. The teacher also discussed strategies for explaining unknown vocabulary and for keeping a conversation going and students were shown a video describing the speaking test. In Week 3 the focus was on Phase 3 of the interview. Some time was spent reviewing basic question types and drilling common patterns of intonation. The students completed a listening gap-fill before carrying out a role-play. The next classes were centred on Phase 4 and the students' future plans. A list of vocabulary and phrases which might be appropriate for this part of the interview was given to the students. The class also completed a listening exercise which focused on the structure of answers. In the final class the teacher overviewed the complete speaking test. Teacher D also decided to give the students additional practice in forming questions for Phase 3. Students were also shown the rest of the video that gave information and tips about taking IELTS.

4.5.3.3 Writing activities:

For writing the class was divided into two groups - those taking General Training and those focusing on the Academic Module. The General training class was taught by another teacher and although the classroom materials were collected, this class was not observed. With the Academic group Teacher D began by giving the class an outline of the writing section of the course. In the first two weeks she focussed on Task 1 essays. In Week 1 students were told how Task 1 was assessed and were given practice in understanding and describing visual data. They also looked at some appropriate language for describing trends and at how to plan and organise their answers. Students were assigned an essay for homework each week and had the

option of handing in a hard copy or of emailing their work to the teacher. In the second week, after marking the students' first writing assignment, the teacher decided to review some of the key elements of the first class, in particular analysing the task and planning the answer. She gave the students some sentence gap-fills to complete to provide them with some models of appropriate language for Task 1 and how to arrange them into paragraphs. In the second part of the lesson the focus was on making comparisons and the language used to describe them.

The class began to work on Task 2 essays in the third week. Tasks 1 and 2 were compared and the teacher discussed how students could find ideas to write about. She introduced the concept of analysing the rubric to find the essay topic and focus and encouraged students to try to form a question from the rubric and then answer the question in their essay. Students brainstormed ideas for several essays. They looked at some model introductions and were given a model answer for one essay. The teacher gave the students a list of academic English internet web sites and encouraged them to access them. A Task 2 essay was set for homework. In Week 4 the teacher continued with Task 2, reviewing the main requirements of the task including the discourse structure of this type of essay. As in Week 3, students were given several model introductions and two complete essays. The class looked at words and phrases used to show relationships of meaning and completed a gap-fill task in class. Students completed a Task 2 essay for homework. In the final week the teacher aimed to review the material covered in the course and give the students a complete writing test under exam conditions. The students completed a gap-fill tasks and several essays. Given the opportunity in the second half of the lesson of either writing 2 essays under exam conditions or completing a range of grammar practice activities, the vast majority of the class chose to do grammar (only one student wrote). The exercises available included a range of grammar points and students completed the tasks in their own time, asking the teacher for assistance when necessary.

4.5.3.4 Reading activities:

For reading both General Training and Academic candidates were taught as one group. In the first week the teacher gave the students a general overview of the reading test, including the different question types, and to get them started on some of the key skills like skimming and scanning. Teacher C gave students information about how to increase their reading speed and efficiency and the class looked at several texts to practise pre-reading skills and scanning techniques. Students were assigned one reading Passage 1 as homework. General training candidates and academic candidates were given different tasks. In Week 2 students in each group reviewed the answers to their homework exercise with the teacher. They were all given

a ‘score interpreter’ sheet which claimed to convert the number of correct answers into approximate IELTS band scores for any listening or reading task. Teacher C explained that it was only a guide. The class worked through several texts and focused on relationships of meaning and identifying important information in a text. Skimming and scanning skills were practised further and students were given a Passage 2 text for homework. In the third week, after reviewing the homework, the class worked on the different task types including multi-choice, short answer, sentence completion and notes/summary completion questions. The teacher wanted to give the students a better idea of the time pressure they would be under in the actual exam. A Section 3 reading was given for homework. Selecting from a heading bank, True/False/Not given and classification and matching task types were the focus of the fourth lesson. Students were given a complete reading test, Sections 1 – 3, to complete at home. In the final week the students checked their homework and then completed a full reading test under exam conditions. The remainder of the lesson was spent reviewing the answers to the test

Because of the structure of Course C, each lesson focused on one specific section of the test. In each case, early lessons introduced students to the test format and requirements and gradually introduced more detail and more practice as the course progressed. Practice reading and writing tasks were also assigned as homework. Language issues were not a significant focus of the classes at School C. Each of the teachers had a slightly different approach to this but tended to touch on them as they arose. Students were taught skills relevant to the respective sections and this included information about how to apply useful test-taking strategies.

A summary of the comparison between the three courses in terms of the course content, teachers and students is presented in Table 2.

Course Features	**COURSE A**	**COURSE B**	**COURSE C**
Focus	Academic Module	Academic Module	Academic & General Modules
Length of Observation	22.10 hours	28.08 hours	40.08 hours
IELTS Course Type	Independent course 2 hour evening course, 4 days/week (4 weeks)	Part of a general English course 2 hour afternoon course, 5 days/week (4 weeks)	Independent evening course 2 hour evening course, 4 days/week (5 weeks)
Course Aims	Aim: to focus on skills needed in the exam and provide practice in various aspects of the exam	Aim: to develop general language skills, academic English skills, as well as familiarising students with the test	Aim: to focus on skills needed in the exam and provide strategies and practice in various aspects of the exam
Organisation	Skills based	Topic based	Skills based
Entry level	No entry test	Entry via placement test	No entry test
Class size	Max class size - 22	Max class size - 12	Max class size - 30

Course Features	COURSE A	COURSE B	COURSE C
Course Design	Designed by teacher, taken from IELTS preparation books	Designed by the school, taken from a range of sources and including material specifically written for the course	Designed by teacher, taken from IELTS preparation books
Method	Mostly Teacher focused	Mostly Student focussed	Mostly Teacher focused
	Primarily based on IELTS text books	Based on a range of sources	Primarily based on IELTS text books
	Many IELTS practice tests	Few IELTS practice tests	Several IELTS practice tests
	No academic study skills	Some academic study skills	No academic study skills
	Lots of information about IELTS	Some information about IELTS	Lots of information about IELTS
	Lots of information about exam strategies	Limited information about exam strategies	Lots of information about exam strategies
	Seldom uses board	Often uses board	Sometimes uses the board
	Students remain in seats	Students often change position/grouping	Students remain in seats
	Students often work individually	Students often work in pairs or small groups	Students work mostly individually but some pair work
	Little error correction in class	Frequent error correction in class	Limited error correction in class
	Rare focus on vocabulary	Frequent focus on vocabulary	Limited focus on vocabulary
	Usually checks tasks by reading correct answers	Usually checks tasks by asking students to write on board	Usually checks tasks by eliciting correct answers; some pair discussion
	Few students responding to prompts	All students participating	Few students responding to prompts
	No personalisation of tasks	Personalisation of some tasks	Limited personalisation of tasks
	No discussion	Frequent discussion	Limited discussion
	Little attention to individuals	Frequent attention to individuals and small groups	Limited attention to individuals
	Little laughter	Lots of laughter	Frequent laughter in some lessons
Room	Horse shoe shape	3 groups of 4 desks	Rows of individual desks
Students	Asian	Asian	Asian
	Interested in gaining entry to university	Interested in gaining entry to university	Majority interested in gaining entry to university; also some for immigration
Teachers	Female	Male	Two females, two males
	30 years teaching experience in secondary school (French, English and TESOL)	7 years teaching experience in ESL/EFL	C: female, ESOL, 9 years teaching experience, RSA Cert, Grad. Dip in Language Teaching, IELTS examiner
	Trinity TESOL Certificate + enrolled in MA in Language Teaching	RSA Certificate in TEFLA + enrolled in MA in Language Teaching	D: male, 5 years ESOL teaching experience, RSA Cert, Grad. Dip in Language Teaching, IELTS examiner
	2 years experience teaching IELTS preparation	3 years experience teaching IELTS preparation	E: female, 10 years experience in secondary school, 10 years ESOL experience, IELTS examiner
	IELTS examiner	Not IELTS examiner	F: male, 5 years ESOL experience, RSA Cert.

Table 2: Summary of courses/ teachers/ students

4.6 Conclusion

While all three courses were designed for "IELTS preparation", the descriptive overview shows differences beyond the basic nomenclature they shared. Distinct similarities can be seen however between Courses A and C. They were both independent, skill-based courses that did not require an entry test, as opposed to Course B, which was part of a General English Course, topic based and with a placement test as an entry requirement. Courses A and C predominantly aimed to provide skills needed in the exam whereas Course B aimed to develop general language skills. Courses A and C were teacher focused and primarily based on IELTS text books. They contained a lot of information on exam strategies and the IELTS test as opposed to Course B where such information was limited. This section of the study highlighted the range of variables that can be found within IELTS preparation courses, showing the importance of clearly defining the context of any such classroom observation. The description of each course provided a better idea of the characteristics of the courses and gave an added dimension to the overall picture of the courses. The distinctive features of the three courses will be analysed quantitatively and in greater depth in Chapter 5, which draws on the data from the observation instruments.

CHAPTER 5: STRUCTURED OBSERVATION OF THE CLASSROOMS

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to present the results of the observations using the COLT and UCOS. Although both of these instruments focus on describing the instructional practices, procedures and materials in second language classrooms, COLT had a more general application while UCOS had been designed to capture features salient to exam preparation courses. Chapter 5 also discusses the analysis of additional categories defined for this study, as the purpose of classroom observation was also to obtain a view of the climate and rapport together with the interaction and functioning of the classes. In the first part of this chapter information from COLT is provided, covering interaction, control of the content of the lessons, potential predominance of teacher fronted activities, most common skills used by the students and materials employed. The analysis using the UCOS provides information on occurrence of activities which might be expected in exam classes, the types of texts actually used in the classes, class time spent on grammar and vocabulary activities and classification of reading, writing, listening and speaking activities. This is followed by a further analysis of the observations which covers the number of times in the lesson when the teachers talked about IELTS, strategies recorded throughout the lessons, teacher-student interaction not covered by COLT, sources of the materials used on the preparation courses and the extent to which the teacher adapted the materials to suit the specific needs of the class, topics appearing in the materials used, homework and instances of laughter (as an indication of the overall atmosphere).

This collection and detailed analysis of the activities of the classrooms was used for two purposes - to gather information about the nature of IELTS preparation courses, and to provide data to inform the discussion of the washback effect of the test on each of the three courses observed. In this section of the study evidence of washback was sought in various ways:

- the nature and focus of the classroom activities and instruction
- the type and content of instruction
- the amount of language instruction
- the amount of exam-related instruction
- the type and origin of the classroom materials
- the atmosphere of the classes

5.2 Analysis of the Observations

The lessons of each class were coded according to COLT Part A (Spada and Frohlich 1995). The basic units of analysis for this part of the observation scheme are 'activities' an/or 'episodes'. Activities and episodes are the units which form the instructional segments of the lesson. Activities may consist of one or more episodes and mark changes in the category of the features of COLT being observed.

Using this information the percentage of time spent on each of the categories under COLT's major features was calculated. Results were then compared for each feature. Activities and episodes, as a percentage of the total class time were also used in the investigation with the UCOS as well as in the Further Analysis.

Table 3 below shows the amount of class time spent on each activity on a daily basis. Class A was used as an example. For example, on Days 1 and 2, the teacher spent similar proportions of the lesson, 48.11% and 47.92% respectively, addressing the class. The average amount of time spent on each activity over the entire duration of the course was also calculated and recorded in the final column. The averages that appear in the final column of Table 3 can be seen in Table 4 (Class A average) and are discussed in 5.2.1.1 below. They appear here to provide an indication on how they were derived and what they represent. It must be noted that weekly averages were also calculated (and are referred to in the analysis) to facilitate a wider view of the data.

Participant organisation	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	D11	D12	D14	D15	D16	Avg
Teacher to Student/Class %	48.11	47.92	66.27	43.04	55.32	61.93	25.77	27.39	36.67	50.07	35.98	63.25	47.40	39.07	71.88	48.00
Student to Student/Class %	23.90	10.42	11.11	12.31	13.74	13.46	2.62	5.22	10.14	14.53	2.65	11.11	3.85	10.46	0.64	9.74
Choral %	0.00	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.00	0.05
Group - same task %	14.78	8.33	10.00	7.11	9.75	21.10	1.70	9.57	11.30	14.16	18.18	11.11	28.04	49.96	12.68	15.18
Group - different tasks %	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Individual - same task %	13.21	33.33	12.38	37.54	21.20	3.52	69.91	57.83	41.88	21.24	43.18	14.53	20.72	0.00	14.80	27.02
Individual - different tasks %	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total % of Participant organisation	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	

Table 3 - Example of how averages were derived

5.2.1 The Results from COLT, Part A

5.2.1.1 Participant organisation

The first COLT category looks at whether classroom activity focuses on the teacher or on the students working as a whole class, in groups or as individuals. In Class A, the most common type of interaction was Teacher to Class/Student, which means that the teacher was the main focus for most of the lesson. The exception was in Week 3, which included a number of practice tests, resulting naturally in individual students working on a single task. Overall, nearly half of the total class time was teacher-centred, while another quarter of the time involved individual work on tasks. About 15% of the time was spent in groups or pairs, either reviewing answers to practice reading and listening tests or carrying out mock interviews.

In contrast, the most common type of organisation in Class B was students working in pairs or groups. They spent almost half of the lesson time working together in groups on speaking, listening and writing tasks. The teacher spoke to the class as a whole for less than 20% of the total class time. Individual work, which almost always involved practice at writing IELTS essays, accounted for 30% of the class activity.

In Class C the teacher was the main focus of the lessons (overall 58% of the total class time). This was more prominent in the teaching of Writing (65%) and less so in the teaching of Speaking (47%). In comparison with Classes A and B there was less time available for the students working on tasks as individuals (overall 21%) or as groups (overall 13%).
Table 4 presents the averaged results of Participant organisation expressed as percentage of each total class time for the three classes.

Participant organisation	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
Teacher to Student/Class %	48.00	17.97	57.99
Student to Student/Class %	9.74	4.93	5.54
Choral %[1]	0.05	0.91	0.36
Group - same task %	15.18	46.71	12.73
Individual - same task %	27.02	29.48	21.31
Individual - different tasks %	0.00	0.00	2.07
Total % of Participant organisation	100	100	100

Table 4: Participant organisation by lesson as a percentage of total class time

[1] This category including activities such as drilling pronunciation as a class

The most obvious difference between the three classes was the extent to which they were engaged in whole-class activities. For Classes C and A, this represented about 64% and 60% of the class time, predominantly with the teacher addressing the class, whereas in Class B it took less than a third of that time. Conversely, the students in Class B were working in groups three times as much as those in Class A were. Classes A and B spent similar amounts of time, slightly more than Class C, working on individual tasks.

5.2.1.2 Content

COLT identifies the content of the classroom activities, measuring where the focus lies – on meaning, form or a combination. The two main categories are topics related to classroom management and language issues. There is also a category which provides a binary distinction to be made about whether the content refers to the immediate classroom and the students' immediate environment (Narrow), or encompasses broader topics (Broad).

Analysis of Participant organisation of Class A indicates the predominance of Teacher fronted activities. This is reflected in Content in the subcategory Procedure, which took up on average almost 18% of the class time. The largest content area was the sub-category Broad, (i.e. the discussion of topics outside the immediate concern of the classroom) and a significant amount of the class time categorised in this way was a reflection of the time the teacher spent speaking about the exam. During the course, students in Class A encountered 84 topics in addition to the topic of the IELTS exam itself. The categories of Procedure and Broad accounted for approximately 85% of the total class time. Only 11% of the class time was spent on aspects of language. Information about written discourse was the most significant language focus, followed by vocabulary, and the combination of discourse and vocabulary, which was typically work related to discourse markers.

In Class B, the discussion of broad topics was central to 54% of the class time. As previously mentioned, the course was topic-based. The students encountered 16 topics in addition to the topic of IELTS itself. The discussion focussing on Narrow subjects was limited to a brief discussion about their feelings about the results of a reading test in Day 3 and describing their important friendships in Day 15. Language instruction played a significant role in the classes at School B. Activities focusing on both vocabulary and grammar were the most common category of classroom content and represented over 15% of the total class time. The learning of vocabulary was particularly important. The teacher and students spent 14% of the time

working on new words, collocations and phrases. The teacher's directions and explanations of classroom procedure to the students made up just under 9% of the total class time.

Broad topics in Class C were similar to the levels of Class A covering 68% of the total class time. Procedural directives were the next largest category (10%) followed by references to vocabulary and grammar (5% each). There was some variation in the content across skills. Broad topics were more evident in Reading (77%) and less so in Speaking (62%). Procedure was highest in Listening (11%) and lowest in Writing (8%). Vocabulary and grammar references were more prominent in Writing (5 and 12% respectively) and less so in Reading (3 and 0.5%).

Table 5 presents the averaged results of content expressed as percentage of each total class time for the three classes.

Content	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
Procedure only %	17.54	8.87	9.90
Form - Vocabulary only %	1.95	14.08	5.22
Form - Pronunciation only %	0.10	1.53	1.48
Form - Grammar only %	1.17	1.64	4.79
Form - Spelling only %	0.00	0.00	0.33
Function only %	1.48	1.05	1.27
Discourse only %	4.09	0.93	4.61
Sociolinguistics only %	0.00	0.05	0.22
Form - vocabulary and Discourse %	1.62	2.62	0.64
Form - vocabulary and Form – Grammar %	0.27	15.20	0.88
Narrow %	4.60	0.14	2.21
Broad %	67.18	53.91	68.44
Total Content %	100	100	100

Table 5: Content of lessons observed as a percentage of total class time

The main focus in all three classes was on meaning with emphasis on discussion of broad topics. There was little focus on Narrow topics (almost absent in Class B), which was to be expected, considering that the classes were meant for adult students and the focus of the courses was IELTS, a topic which itself was classified as Broad as although it was the focus of the class, the test was an event outside the classroom. The teaching of language played a less significant role at School A. This fact had been acknowledged by the teacher to both the observer, before the observations began, and to the students on the first day as not significant in this course. In contrast, a considerable part of the lessons in Class B was spent focusing on language, in particular vocabulary and vocabulary in combination with grammar - one aim of

the course at School B. COLT shows that Teacher A spent more time talking to the class about discourse and vocabulary and discourse than Teacher B. This is not however felt to be a fair reflection of the amount of language work done at School B and this point is discussed in the Further Analysis section. Class C students were exposed to levels of function and discourse teaching similar to Class A. However, the teaching of Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Grammar in Class C took up considerably more time compared to Class A.

5.2.1.3 Content Control

In order to assess the level of involvement of the students in the control of the lesson content, Part A of the instrument identifies who is responsible for content selection. The variables in this category are either the teacher, the student/s, the teacher and text, or a combination.

In Class A, solely the teacher and her choice of the text controlled an average of 65% of the content of days 1 through 15. For an additional 35% of the class time the students shared control of the content of the lessons with the teacher, for example when the teacher asked the students to share their experience of sitting IELTS, or how difficult they found a particular exercise. At no time did the students alone decide on the content of the classes.

Reflecting the amount of student involvement in Class B, the control of the content of the classroom activity was most commonly shared between the teacher, text and students (57%). For example, the teacher might present a text and explain the exercise and then allow the students to work in pairs or small groups to work through it together. The teacher/text alone decided the content of the class for 43% of the total class time.

In Class C the teachers controlled almost 97% of the classroom activities. This was most evident in the teaching of Reading, Listening and Writing (98-99%) and a little less so in the Speaking (92%).

Table 6 presents the averaged results of content control expressed as percentage of each total class time for the three classes.

Content control	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
Teacher/text %	65.10	42.98	96.56
Teacher/text/ student %	34.90	57.02	3.42
Total % of Content control	100	100	100

Table 6: Content control as a percentage of total class time

Content control reflects the additional command over some aspects of the lesson afforded to the Class B students. Information regarding Organisation and Content Control indicates that Class A and particularly Class C were much more teacher centred than Class B and that the students at Classes A and C spent more time using receptive skills than productive skills.

5.2.1.4 Student Modality

Identifying the skills the students are involved in during the classroom activities is recorded in the section called 'Student Modality'. This is broken down into the four skills with a fifth category which allows activities such as drawing or acting to be recorded.

Listening was the most common skill used by the students in Class A, representing almost 47% of total class time. While some of this time involved students listening to IELTS practice tests, they were mostly listening to the teacher explaining procedure, giving information related to IELTS or checking answers to practice test materials. Listening in combination with speaking was the second most common modality at an average of 21% of the total class time. Students read for an average of 10% of the total class time. They were involved in activities which involved an equal focus on reading and listening for 7% of the total class time. This combination was usually encountered when they reviewed reading tests with the teacher. The students wrote for 7% of the total class time. This figure is not indicative of the amount of writing included in the course, as writing tasks were often assigned for homework. Students were also given IELTS practice reading tests to complete at home and, as this event is not included in COLT, it is addressed under Further Analysis.

In Class B writing was the most common skill, at 21%, closely followed by listening at 19% of the total class time. The combination of listening plus speaking (18%) was also significant, reflecting the amount of time students spent discussing both language and broad topics. Students were involved in reading and speaking activities for similar amounts of the total class time, approximately 13%. There were several combinations which were unique to Class B. Listening plus speaking plus writing indicated activities where students exchanged information and took notes, and speaking plus reading was used when students were reading and summarising information to a partner.

Listening was the most common skill in Class C, representing on average 53% of the total class time. Across skills listening remained the most common activity varying from 62% in listening classes to 42% in speaking classes. As in School A, listening plus speaking was on

average the second most common skill combination at 10% of the total class time. The second most common activity however, seen across skills, was speaking in speaking classes (23%), writing in writing classes (22%), reading in reading classes (25%) and listening and speaking in listening classes (10%).

Table 7 presents the averaged results of student modality expressed as percentage of each total class time for the three classes.

Student Modality	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
Listening only %	46.59	19.28	52.79
Speaking only %	1.77	12.61	9.32
Reading only %	9.96	13.19	9.25
Writing only %	6.75	21.27	7.60
Other only %	1.30	1.92	1.81
L + S %	21.14	17.62	10.36
L + R %	6.61	1.01	1.91
L + W %	2.82	1.81	3.09
S + R %	0.00	2.31	3.60
L + S + W %	0.00	5.08	0.27
L + S + R %	3.05	3.91	0.00
Total % of Student modality	100	100	100

Table 7: Student modality as a percentage of total class time

Listening, both alone and in combination with other skills, was the most common skill used by students at all schools. However, this pattern was much more obvious in Classes A and C. In general, students in Class B used a broader range of skills and covered the four skills more evenly. These students spent almost three times more of the class time writing than the Class A or Class C students.

5.2.1.5 Materials Used

COLT records significant features about the materials used during the class. The type of text is broken down into length with short pieces of written texts, for example single sentences or captions, being labelled as ‘minimal’ and longer ones ‘extended’. Audio and video texts are also identified here. The origin of the material is also considered important and this identified the intended audience for the text i.e. was it designed for teaching language to non-native speakers learning a second language (L2 NNS) or was it an authentic piece written for native speakers. Any adaptations made to materials were also noted in this section.

Minimal texts designed for non-native speakers (Minimal + L2 NNS) were the most common type of material used in Class A (25% of the total class time). Examples of this text category included IELTS Task 2 writing rubrics, speaking test role-play cards, and a range of short texts. Minimal and extended texts designed for non-native speakers (Minimal + Extended L2-NNS) were used in activities that accounted for 20% of the total class time. This category mainly consisted of practice IELTS reading tests. Students at School A listened to 3 full and 2 partial practice IELTS listening tests (recorded as Minimum + Audio + L2-NNS). Minimum + Visual + L2-NNS materials, such as IELTS Task 1 writing rubrics, were used for almost 8% of the total class time.

Table 8 presents the averaged results of materials on which activities were based in the three classes expressed as percentage of each total class time.

Materials Used	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
Minimal L2 - NNS %	24.51	41.11	28.10
Extended L2 - NNS %	3.27	2.07	5.79
Minimal + Extended + L2 - NNS %	20.01	13.66	18.28
Minimal + Audio + L2-NNS %	4.56	4.31	8.76
Extended + Audio + L2-NNS %	0.00	1.90	0.00
Audio + L2-NNS %	0.00	0.15	0.00
Audio + Visual + L2-NNS %	0.00	0.00	2.08
Minimal + Visual + L2-NNS %	7.97	3.93	1.29
Minimal + Student Made %	0.00	4.18	0.55
Extended + Student Made %	1.57	3.12	0.00
Minimal + Visual + L2-NS	0.00	1.98	0.00
Visual + Student Made	0.00	0.57	0.00
Visual + L2-NNS	0.00	1.52	0.00
Total % of Materials used	62	79	65

Table 8: Materials used, minimal and extended texts, as a percentage of total class time

In broad terms a similar range of materials was used in Classes A and C. Materials categorised as Minimal + L2 – NNS and Extended + L2 – NNS were used in Class C almost as frequently as in Class A. There was a difference however in the listening materials, i.e. Minimal + Audio + L2 – NNS materials were used in Class C twice as often as in Class A or Class B where the listening texts tended to be practice listening tests as opposed to the short practice listening exercises that were more common in Class C.

Compared to Classes A and C, Class B used a wider range of materials. In Class B, by far the most common category was Minimal + L2-NNS (41%) which included vocabulary revision exercises, discussion questions, and academic word lists. Minimal + Extended L2-NNS

materials (typically IELTS practice reading test materials) took up 14% of the class time. Even though in Class B the IELTS practice listening test given on Day 14 was the only example of a Minimal + Audio + L2-NNS, students in Class B worked with this type of material for almost as much of the total class time as the students in Class A.

Some combinations of material types were only found in one of the three courses. For example, only Class C included materials which were coded audio+visual+L2-NNS. This reflects the use of an IELTS training video by Teacher E, and although this day was dedicated to 'Speaking', the video included information on all modules of the test.

All materials and instruction in all three classes were in English. While language use was not specifically recorded, the observer noted that students in Courses A and C were more likely to use their own language during class than those in Course B. There are several possible reasons to account for it. The issue of whether or not to allow students to speak their first language in class is something teachers have different beliefs about and this is usually reflected in how they manage their class. But there are other possible factors. For instance, the fact that there were larger numbers of students in Classes A and C meant that there was potentially more opportunity for students with common languages to congregate and share ideas in their common language. Large classes are also more difficult to monitor than smaller groups if the teachers had decided that they preferred the use of English in the class. The mixture of lower level and more able students in those two classes may also have been responsible for some students using their first language as they struggled to follow the class.

The materials were further analysed to identify their source (see Further Analysis of the Observations).

5.2.2 The Results from UCOS, Part 2

The UCOS had three main areas of focus. First was the analysis of how much class time was spent on activities that were directly related to the test. The types of texts used in each course were also recorded. There was a separate category which identified any language foci that occurred and categorised them into broad topics, for example, concentrating on cohesion or on prepositions. A large part of the UCOS focused on what skills the students were using in the classroom. Here UCOS gives much more detail that the 'modality' category of COLT by describing the activity.

The original UCOS was adapted for the purposes of this study, as the existing categories did not always comprehensively reflect what happened in the classrooms (see also 3.4.1.2 and Appendix 2). The UCOS contains an extensive list of possible task and text types. However, it was found that a large number of the texts actually used in the classes did not fit into the existing categories and were therefore recorded as additional categories. Examples included IELTS texts and tasks, such as complete reading tests, and texts designed to introduce or practise IELTS task types. Initially, anything that occurred in the classrooms that did not fit under the existing classifications was listed separately. Once the data from all schools had been classified in this way, these activities were revisited to see whether or not there were any commonalities. Similar activities were then used to form a new category which was added to the instrument under the existing framework. In other instances, categories mentioned in the UCOS were not observed and these were eventually deleted from the instrument.

5.2.2.1 Exam-Related Activities

This category focuses on the teacher and records activities which might be expected in exam preparation classes.

Overall exam-related activities in Class A accounted for 31% of the total class time. The teacher gave the students tasks under exam conditions for 16% of the time. During the third week, the teacher gave the students practice IELTS tests for almost 40% of the total class time. In week four, the students sat the post-test administered as part of the classroom observation. Teacher A most commonly gave the students feedback on reading and listening tests by giving the answers and explaining where in the text they could be found, or in the case of listening, reading from the tape-script. Students in Class A were sometimes encouraged to reflect on their performance on the practice tests and to initiate the necessary additional study.

In Class B these exam-related activities accounted for 10% of the total class time. Students spent 3% of the total class time completing tasks under exam conditions. Reviewing answers to reading or listening tasks was a common activity. This typically involved the teacher providing the answers, identifying the answers in the text or tape-script or, on occasion, asking students to compare answers. In Class B, the teacher only supplied answers after the students had spent some time discussing the task in groups and reaching some form of agreement.

Exam-related activities were the focus of 17% of the total class time in Class C. The teachers gave the students tasks under exam conditions for 5% of the total class time. This was not equally distributed across skills: in reading, such tasks accounted for 11% of the class time, in sharp contrast to the writing where they registered below 0.5%. Teacher C identified answers in a listening or reading text for 9% and 8% respectively. In speaking classes Teacher D gave students tasks under strict time pressure for 9% of the total class time. The corresponding percentage in listening and reading classes (Teacher C) was 17% and 38% respectively. Students in writing classes worked on timed exercises for 6% of the total class time.

Table 9 presents the exam-related activities observed in the three classes expressed as percentage of each total class time.

	EXAM-RELATED ACTIVITIES	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Behaviour Observed	Average	Average	Average
ER1	Teacher gives the students tasks under exam conditions	15.90	2.96	4.69
ER2	Teacher gives the students the test to do at home (self-timed)	1.02	0.00	0.47
ER3	Teacher gives students feedback in the form of IELTS band scores	0.00	0.00	0.11
ER4	Teacher gives feedback on student performance item by item (T gives the right answer without explanation of reasons)	5.09	0.57	1.55
ER5	Teacher identifies answers in a text (Reading or Listening) and explains	4.05	2.84	4.63
ER6	Teacher asks students to consider their strengths and weaknesses with respect to the test requirements	1.41	1.33	1.54
ER7	Teacher sets tasks under strict time pressure	4.00	2.62	4.44
	Total % of exam-related activities	31.47	10.32	17.44

Table 9: Exam-related activities as % of total class time

A comparison between the three schools shows several marked differences, the most significant of which is the percentage of class time in which Teacher A set her students tasks under exam-like conditions. This figure was three times that of School C and five times that of School B. This had a flow-on effect when it came to recording the difference between the schools in the amount of time the teachers spent going over answers to test items – both those completed in class and those given as homework. In addition to class work, students at Schools A and C were regularly given test materials for homework and this was checked in class. Table 8 shows a similar focus on confirming and explaining answers at these schools. It also recognises the fact that Teacher A spent a greater amount of time listing correct answers and this can partly be attributed to the total number of tests this class completed. As Teacher B did not give his students any tests to complete at home, he encouraged the students to

discuss the answers to classroom tasks and tended to give answers only as a final check; this is reflected in the small amount of time spent giving feedback on items. All teachers spent similar amounts of class time getting their students to analyse their performance on tasks and to identify the areas they needed to improve on. Teachers A and B did not give any feedback to students in the form of IELTS band scores. The only comparison between performance on classroom exercises and IELTS band scores was found on one occasion at School C when students were given feedback of the approximate band range at the end of a listening lesson. In all other instances feedback was of a more general nature. In Table 8 we can see that students in Classes A, B, and C all spent a similar amount of class time doing tasks under time pressure (3-4%).

5.2.2.2 Text Types

The original UCOS contained an extensive list of possible text-types. However, in the course of this study it was found that a large number of the texts actually used in the classes did not fit into the existing categories and they were therefore recorded as additional categories. Examples included IELTS texts and tasks, such as complete reading tests, and texts designed to introduce or practise IELTS task types. Some of the text types lists by UCOS did not appear in any of the three classes and these were therefore not included in the following discussion and table.

Class A worked with several text types not used in Class B. The students were given one model academic essay and a written outline of the exam. While students in Class A spent over 7% of the total class time on exercises focusing on selected IELTS task types, none of these materials existed in Class B. Likewise, over 11% of Class A was spent on complete IELTS practice reading tests, although Class B included none. The most common material in Class B, minimal texts, making up almost 32% of the course time, was absent from Class A. This also applied to graphs, reviews and descriptions used in Class B.

In Class C the most common text type was exercises given to the students to introduce and practise IELTS question types and strategies (22% of the total class time). This was more evident in the teaching of listening and reading where Teacher C based 38 and 34% of her class time on such texts, which were absent from Class B. Minimal texts, such as individual sentences, word lists and discussion questions were the second most common category at 8% (more frequently used in writing and speaking at 12 and 10% respectively).

Table 10 presents the types of texts on which activities were based in the three classes expressed as percentage of each total class time.

	TEXT TYPES [for listening, reading and writing activities]	School A	School B	School C
	Text-types observed	Average	Average	Average
T4	Forms (e.g. application forms)	0.00	0.00	0.91
T7	Dialogues (of groups of people)	0.00	0.00	0.14
T9	Charts, Graphs	0.00	8.29	0.00
T10	Critical reviews of issues in non-specialist EAP fields	0.00	4.57	0.00
T11	Descriptions with a non-specialist EAP theme	0.00	3.20	0.00
T15	Lecture/ Discussion/ Debate (recorded or 'live')	0.74	0.00	0.00
T20	Exam rubric Writing Task 1	5.41	4.81	2.96
T22	IELTS model essay	2.98	3.93	2.09
T23	Model academic essay	0.44	0.00	0.13
T24	Information about IELTS	0.92	0.00	2.20
T25	IELTS reading text	6.62	10.17	1.24
T26	IELTS reading exam (3 sections)	11.12	0.00	3.60
T27	IELTS listening section	2.58	0.00	0.00
T28	IELTS exam listening (4 sections)	8.25	3.73	2.16
T29	Exam rubric Writing Task 2	5.45	4.93	1.20
T30	IELTS CV form	1.03	0.31	0.20
T31	Student errors	0.57	2.23	0.00
T32	Essay plan	1.60	0.05	0.05
T33	Exercise to introduce/practise IELTS question types or strategies	7.65	0.00	22.32
T34	IELTS essay (section)	1.76	0.68	0.86
T35	Monologues	0.86	4.43	0.00
T36	Speaking role-play cards	1.00	0.21	1.56
T37	Minimal text - individual sentences, word lists, discussion questions	0.00	31.91	7.94
T38	Watching IELTS training video	0.00	0.00	1.22
	Total % of text types	58.97	83.44	50.80

Table 10: Text Types

Classes A and C spent less total class time working with texts supporting listening, reading and writing activities than Class B. The most common material in Class B, minimal texts, making up almost 32% of the course time, was absent from Class A and appeared only in 8% of the time in Class C. The most common material in Class C, exercises to introduce/practise IELTS question types or strategies, covering 22% of the course time, appeared in 8% of the time in Class A and was absent from Class B. Similarly, the three sections of the IELTS reading exam, which was the text type used in Class A for 11% of the total class time, covered only 4% of the time in Class C and was absent from Class B. Category T38, which involved the students in watching an IELTS training video, was only present in Class C.

5.2.2.3 Grammar and Vocabulary

In Class A, the amount of class time spent on grammar and vocabulary activities generally increased as the course progressed. Cohesion, focusing on written discourse, was the most common focus (2.12%). Question structures (0.81% overall) appeared only on Day 11 (12% of the class time on that day). The teacher explained the meaning of some vocabulary items (0.71%) on 9 of the 15 days of the course.

Vocabulary work was the most common feature in Class B and was observed on 12 of the 18 days of the course (18 day average: 9.25%). Vocabulary revision, at almost 6% of the total class time in Class B, was the second most common activity. It was absent from the other two classes.

Explanation of words, phrases and idioms (almost absent from Class A) was the most common grammar and vocabulary activity in Class C at 4% of the total class time. This was more evident in the reading and listening classes at 6 and 5% respectively. Cohesion was the second most common category (4 and 5% in the writing and reading classes) at similar levels with Class A (3% overall).

Table 11 presents grammar and vocabulary activities in the three classes expressed as percentages of each total class time.

	GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY Grammar and Vocabulary Activities	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
GV1	Cohesion	2.12	0.33	2.80
GV2	Synonyms and antonyms	0.15	0.43	0.12
GV3	Concord	0.00	0.27	0.07
GV4	Explanation of words/ phrases/ idioms	0.71	9.25	4.47
GV5	Explicit rules of grammar are provided	0.00	0.03	0.18
GV6	Guessing the meaning of unknown words	0.00	1.43	0.82
GV7	Homophones	0.00	0.00	0.15
GV8	Making distinctions of meaning (word clines)	0.00	0.85	0.04
GV9	Phonology (intonation, prosodic features, phoneme articulation)	0.00	0.00	0.35
GV11	Prefixes, suffixes and compound words	0.00	0.00	0.08
GV12	Prepositions	0.00	0.00	0.05
GV13	Sentence structures (simple and complex, sentence combining)	0.11	1.22	0.79
GV14	Small corrections of phrases/ word choice	0.00	2.50	0.70
GV15	Spelling of words	0.00	0.00	0.29
GV17	Tenses (identifying appropriate tenses)	0.07	0.20	2.36
GV18	Restatement/paraphrasing	0.00	1.11	0.36
GV19	Vocabulary revision	0.00	5.98	0.06
GV20	Question structures	0.81	0.13	0.61
GV21	Identifying parts of speech	0.08	0.00	0.17
GV22	Punctuation	0.00	0.03	0.00
GV23	Word Lists	0.00	0.16	0.00
	Total % of grammar and vocabulary related activities	4.06	23.91	14.45

Table 11: Grammar and vocabulary related activities as % of total class time

Class B was the most grammar and vocabulary oriented one with 24% of the total class time dedicated to related activities, followed by Class C where 14% of the time was given to activities enhancing grammar and vocabulary skills. Grammar and vocabulary were less prominent in Class A where (with the exception of Days 10, 11 and 12) such activities were rare.

5.2.2.4 Tasks in the Four Skills Areas

During the classroom observation all activities were divided into reading, writing, listening and speaking according to which skill the students were using. The skills were then broken down into the specific tasks the students completed. The original list of tasks was drawn from the UCOS. However, the tasks were then grouped into broad categories according to whether they were seen as specific to the requirements of IELTS, or of a more general nature. The percentages of total class time spent on each task within the four skills were then compared across the three classes. In this section the tables include only the most common task types. It

is important to note that this section of the analysis is very much at the micro-level, hence it is not surprising that certain resulting percentages are small. It was imperative to express the class time spent on tasks as percentage of the total duration to make the expressions comparable between the three classes. However, to maintain a grasp of what amount of time these percentages represented the duration in minutes is also presented what time a percentage actually represented. As a guide, 1% represented the following amount of class time for each course: Class A, 13 minutes; Class B, 17 minutes; and Class C, 24 minutes.

Reading Tasks

Analysis showed that Class A focused more on selected exam-related tasks, particularly in the earlier part of the course. Completing practice test readings took almost 4% (56.75 minutes) of the whole class time. This was the single most common reading task.

In Class B the course included several different types of IELTS tasks as well as more general reading skills. Of the latter, reading for detail at 1% represented the most consistently used skill. Interpreting statistics, graphs and diagrams was the most common reading task at 2% of the total class time.

In Class C reading tasks that students completed accounted for 30% of the total class time. Class C focused more on general reading skills rather than exam tasks. Completing practice reading tests took 3% of the total time overall. In the teaching of reading this was the most common task at 11% followed by finding the answers to questions in a text at 2%.

Table 12 presents reading tasks that students completed in the three classes, expressed as a percentage of each total class time.

	READING TASKS Reading tasks for students to complete	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
	EXAM TASKS			
R1	Completing multiple choice items involving directly stated information	1.76	1.04	0.27
R2	Writing short answers using directly stated information from a text	0.00	0.45	0.13
R3	Completing sentences using information inferred from the text	0.00	1.12	0.29
R4B	Matching phrases to complete a coherent summary of the text	0.06	0.84	0.00
R4C	Completing a gap-fill summary or a cloze based on the text	0.36	0.51	0.29
R4D	Interpreting statistics/ graphs/ diagrams	0.00	2.41	0.00
R4E	Using prose descriptions to label a diagram/ flow chart or to complete a table	0.00	0.00	0.08
R5	Choosing from a list of headings to label paragraphs and sections of the text	1.49	0.79	0.46
R6A	Completing True/False or Yes/No/Not given items involving directly/ indirectly stated information	0.43	0.00	0.32
R7	Classifying information according to the text	0.00	1.42	0.28
R8B	Matching lists with information from the text	0.46	0.10	0.41
R26	IELTS Reading Test (3 sections)	4.28	0.00	2.65
	GENERAL SKILLS			
R10	Making notes based on a reading of the text	0.00	0.00	0.14
R11	Reading quickly to get the main idea of the text (previewing?)	0.55	0.05	0.36
R12	Reading quickly for detail	0.00	0.00	0.27
R13	Analysing text structure and organisation	0.40	0.00	0.65
R14	Arranging paragraphs in a text to form a coherent text	0.00	0.53	0.29
R15	Arranging sentences in a paragraph to form a coherent paragraph	0.00	0.00	0.35
R16	Circling/underlining words or phrases that contain the main ideas of the text	0.00	0.09	0.23
R20	Finding information in text which supports/justifies an opinion/position	0.00	0.00	0.06
R21	Speed reading	0.00	0.90	0.00
R22	Identifying position statements/ topic sentences	0.00	0.00	0.51
R23	Finding the answers to questions in a text	0.00	0.10	0.55
R24	Reading carefully for detail	0.61	1.38	0.27
R25	Identifying key words	0.24	0.00	0.27
	Total % of reading tasks	10.65	11.75	9.15

Table 12: Reading tasks as % of total class time

The most common reading task, the completion of practice reading tests, made up over 4% of the time at School A and 3% in Class C, 57 and 64 minutes respectively, but it was completely absent from Class B. In Classes B and C there was a larger range of tasks. Tasks such as using prose descriptions to label a diagram, making notes based on a reading, reading quickly for detail, arranging sentences in a paragraph to form a coherent paragraph, finding information in text which supports an opinion and identifying topic sentences, which featured in Class C, were absent from Classes A and B. Interpreting statistics, graphs and diagrams, the second most common reading task in Class B, was absent from Classes A and C.

	READING TASKS	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Reading tasks for students to complete	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)
	EXAM TASKS			
R1	Completing multiple choice items involving directly stated information	23.34	17.52	6.49
R2	Writing short answers using directly stated information from a text	0.00	7.58	3.13
R3	Completing sentences using information inferred from the text	0.00	18.87	6.97
R4B	Matching phrases to complete a coherent summary of the text	0.80	14.15	0.00
R4C	Completing a gap-fill summary or a cloze based on the text	4.77	8.59	6.97
R4D	Interpreting statistics/ graphs/ diagrams	0.00	40.60	0.00
R4E	Using prose descriptions to label a diagram/ flow chart or to complete a table	0.00	0.00	1.92
R5	Choosing from a list of headings to label paragraphs and sections of the text	19.76	13.31	11.06
R6A	Completing True/False or Yes/No/Not given items involving directly/ indirectly stated information	5.70	0.00	7.70
R7	Classifying information according to the text	0.00	23.92	6.73
R8B	Matching lists with information from the text	6.10	1.68	9.86
R26	IELTS Reading Test (3 sections)	56.75	0.00	63.73

	READING TASKS	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Reading tasks for students to complete	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)
	GENERAL SKILLS			
R10	Making notes based on a reading of the text	0.00	0.00	3.37
R11	Reading quickly to get the main idea of the text (previewing?)	7.29	0.84	8.66
R12	Reading quickly for detail	0.00	0.00	6.49
R13	Analysing text structure and organisation	5.30	0.00	15.63
R14	Arranging paragraphs in a text to form a coherent text	0.00	8.93	6.97
R15	Arranging sentences in a paragraph to form a coherent paragraph	0.00	0.00	8.42
R16	Circling/underlining words or phrases that contain the main ideas of the text	0.00	1.52	5.53
R20	Finding information in text which supports/justifies an opinion/position	0.00	0.00	1.44
R21	Speed reading	0.00	15.16	0.00
R22	Identifying position statements/ topic sentences	0.00	0.00	12.26
R23	Finding the answers to questions in a text	0.00	1.68	13.23
R24	Reading carefully for detail	8.09	23.25	6.49
R25	Identifying key words	3.18	0.00	6.49
	Average duration of reading tasks (in minutes)	141.22	197.96	220.04

Table 13: Reading tasks in minutes

Writing Tasks

Although in Class A students wrote sections of the IELTS practice tests, i.e. individual Task 1 or Task 2 essays, only one complete writing test was done during the course. The main type of Task 2 essay written by the students in this class required the justification of an opinion. Students planned several essays during Weeks 1 – 3, writing longer pieces as the course progressed.

In Class B students were asked to complete a variety of tasks, and while some mirrored IELTS writing tasks, more emphasis was placed on general skills such as note-taking and writing summaries based on written or oral texts.

In Class C writing tasks accounted for 22% of the total class time. General tasks were the focus with writing selected parts of an answer being the most common task (2% overall and

8% of the total time in writing classes). Analysis of a model answer with focus on language form was the second most common task (1% overall and 5% of the total time in writing classes).

Table 14 presents writing tasks which students completed in the three classes expressed as percentages of each total class time.

	WRITING TASKS	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Writing tasks for students to complete	Average	Average	Average
	TASK 1			
W1	Organise, present and compare data	0.88	6.29	0.04
W3	Describe and object or event or sequence of events	0.03	0.00	0.00
	TASK 2			
W6	Present and justify an opinion	5.14	0.00	0.00
W21	Complete IELTS CV form	0.54	0.24	0.19
W7	Compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications	0.00	2.46	0.00
W23	Complete IELTS Writing Task 1&2	0.11	0.00	0.00
	GENERAL SKILLS			
W9	Planning an answer	1.36	0.68	0.70
W10	Copying out good paragraphs and model answers	0.00	2.76	0.04
W11	Writing selected parts of an answer	0.00	1.55	1.94
W12	Making notes	0.00	0.00	0.19
W13	Writing a summary based on input students have read or listened to	0.00	2.65	0.00
W16	Analysing a model answer, focus on language form	0.00	1.54	1.20
W17	Analysing a model answer, focus on discourse (e.g. referencing, macropattering, cohesion, coherence)	3.07	1.12	0.26
W19	Analysing the rubric	0.33	0.36	1.09
W20	Drawing/plotting information of a graph/chart	0.13	0.70	0.00
W22	Reviewing error correction from an IELTS writing task	0.45	1.70	0.08
W24	Non IELTS General Writing Task	0.00	0.00	0.99
	Total % of writing tasks	12.05	22.04	6.72

Table 14: Writing tasks as % of total class time

Students in Class B spend more time writing a large range of tasks, reflecting the emphasis on writing. Organising, presenting and comparing data in Task 1 writing type tasks was the most significant writing task in Class B, at over 6% of class time, while the corresponding figure in Classes A and C was less than 1%. The task that was more prevalent in Class A was the analysis of model answers. Model essays were also given in Classes B and C but the exercises were more likely to focus on language issues.

	WRITING TASKS	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Writing tasks for students to complete	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)
	TASK 1			
W1	Organise, present and compare data	11.67	105.97	0.96
W3	Describe and object or event or sequence of events	0.40	0.00	0.00
	TASK 2			
W6	Present and justify an opinion	68.16	0.00	0.00
W21	Complete IELTS CV form	7.16	4.04	4.57
W7	Compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications	0.00	41.45	0.00
W23	Complete IELTS Writing Task 1&2	1.46	0.00	0.00
	GENERAL SKILLS			
W9	Planning an answer	18.03	11.46	16.83
W10	Copying out good paragraphs and model answers	0.00	46.50	0.96
W11	Writing selected parts of an answer	0.00	26.11	46.65
W12	Making notes	0.00	0.00	4.57
W13	Writing a summary based on input students have read or listened to	0.00	44.65	0.00
W16	Analysing a model answer, focus on language form	0.00	25.95	28.86
W17	Analysing a model answer, focus on discourse (e.g. referencing, macro-pattering, cohesion, coherence)	40.71	18.87	6.25
W19	Analysing the rubric	4.38	6.07	26.21
W20	Drawing/plotting information of a graph/chart	1.72	11.79	0.00
W22	Reviewing error correction from an IELTS writing task	5.97	28.64	1.92
W24	Non IELTS General Writing Task	0.00	0.00	23.81
	Average duration of writing tasks (in minutes)	159.78	371.33	161.60

Table 15: Writing tasks in minutes

Listening Tasks

Although students in Class A spent time in the early part of the course working with 3 of the 7 task types found in the IELTS listening exam, more general listening skills were also practised. IELTS practice listening tests were the most common task and were concentrated in the second half of the course. The range of listening tasks in Class B was limited. The largest percentage was accounted for by a listening exercise on Day 5 and the practice listening test on Day 14. In both these activities students were given time to work in groups and listen to the cassette times. In Class C listening tasks accounted for 29% of the total class time.

Listening for gist was the most common activity followed by students completing the IELTS listening test (30% of the class time on day 17).

Table 16 presents listening tasks that students completed in the three classes expressed as percentage of each total class time.

	LISTENING TASKS	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Listening tasks for students to complete	Average	Average	Average
	EXAM TASKS			
L1	Multiple choice	0.95	0.00	0.33
L2	Short-answer questions	0.41	0.00	0.13
L3	Sentence Completion	0.00	0.00	0.39
L4	Notes/summary/diagram/flow chart/table completion	1.79	0.00	0.19
L28	Completing an IELTS listening test	6.47	3.63	1.51
L7	Matching	0.00	0.24	0.00
	EXAM SKILLS			
L8	Reading the questions and guess what the listening passage is about	0.10	0.00	0.00
L9	Reading the questions and predict the kind of answers required	0.37	0.00	0.88
L10	Extracting factual details/ taking notes while listening to a monologue/ dialogue/conversation	0.95	1.18	0.28
L11	Completing sentences while listening to a monologue/ dialogue/ conversation	0.00	0.00	0.59
L13	Filling forms/tables with dictated details	0.00	0.00	0.93
L14	Following oral instructions using charts and maps	0.00	0.00	0.10
L15	Matching descriptions with pictures	0.00	0.00	0.22
L16	Taking dictation of numbers or letters	0.00	0.00	0.41
	GENERAL SKILLS			
L23	Listening to and summarising all or part of a recording	0.00	1.39	0.00
L24	Practising listening for information which is repeated in different words (repetitions and reformulations)	0.00	0.00	0.24
L26	Taking dictation of dialogue/ conversation/ statement	0.00	1.34	0.00
L27	Listening for gist	0.00	0.00	2.96
	Total % of listening tasks	11.03	7.78	9.16

Table 16: Listening tasks as % of total class time

In terms of listening tasks, in Classes A and B more time was spent on general skills than on exam tasks and skills directly linked to the exam. In Class C the amount of time spent on general skills was almost equal to the time spent on exam tasks and skills.

	LISTENING TASKS	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Listening tasks for students to complete	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)
	EXAM TASKS			
L1	Multiple choice	12.60	0.00	7.94
L2	Short-answer questions	5.44	0.00	3.13
L3	Sentence Completion	0.00	0.00	9.38
L4	Notes/summary/diagram/flow chart/table completion	23.74	0.00	4.57
L28	Completing an IELTS listening test	85.79	61.16	36.31
L7	Matching	0.00	4.04	0.00
	EXAM SKILLS			
L8	Reading the questions and guess what the listening passage is about	1.33	0.00	0.00
L9	Reading the questions and predict the kind of answers required	4.91	0.00	21.16
L10	Extracting factual details/ taking notes while listening to a monologue/ dialogue/conversation	12.60	19.88	6.73
L11	Completing sentences while listening to a monologue/ dialogue/ conversation	0.00	0.00	14.19
L13	Filling forms/tables with dictated details	0.00	0.00	22.36
L14	Following oral instructions using charts and maps	0.00	0.00	2.40
L15	Matching descriptions with pictures	0.00	0.00	5.29
L16	Taking dictation of numbers or letters	0.00	0.00	9.86
	GENERAL SKILLS			
L23	Listening to and summarising all or part of a recording	0.00	23.42	0.00
L24	Practising listening for information which is repeated in different words (repetitions and reformulations)	0.00	0.00	5.77
L26	Taking dictation of dialogue/ conversation/ statement	0.00	22.58	0.00
L27	Listening for gist	0.00	0.00	71.18
	Average duration of listening tasks (in minutes)	146.26	131.08	220.28

Table 17: Listening tasks in minutes

Speaking Tasks

In Class A practised all parts of the speaking test including some exercises which focussed on specific functions and several complete tests. On several occasions they had the opportunity to talk about the test. They also discussed the answers to reading, and to a lesser extent listening, practice tests.

Students spent time practising all phases of the speaking test in Class B. With the exception of Phase 3 which took up over 5% of the class time in Week 1, all other phases of the speaking test were introduced in the final week of the course. Discussions about various topics occurred each week, in fact on 8 of the 18 days, and this was the predominant speaking task. Discussions about answers to reading or listening tasks, discussing the IELTS exam and sharing ideas about writing tasks also occurred on several days.

Students at School C also had experience in all sections of the speaking test. As the course had one lesson per week dedicated to speaking, the test was covered more systematically than the other two courses. The remaining speaking activities were of a general nature with discussions on general topics or topics related to task feedback and the test itself being the most significant. It should be remembered that the school employed an additional teacher who gave students one-on-one interview practice. Pairs of students were taken out of class during the speaking classes and each was given the opportunity to take part in a mock interview. As this activity occurred outside the classroom, it was not possible to include the interaction in the data; however, it is a feature that was not present at either of the two other schools. In Class C speaking tasks that students completed accounted for 18% of the total class time. Discussing answers to a reading task, the single most common speaking activity was encountered in reading classes. The discussion of general issues, ideas and exchanging opinions and matters related to the test were the other frequent topics for speaking tasks followed by discussing IELTS requirements.

The courses in Classes A and B practised all phases of the IELTS speaking tests but class time was spent on other speaking tasks and it is this focus which differentiates the two schools. At School A the predominant speaking activity was students discussing the answers to reading tasks, and while this also happened at School B, it was for less than half the amount of time. At School B students spent almost 9% of the total class time discussing issues and exchanging information.

Table 18 presents speaking tasks that students completed in the three classes expressed as percentage of each total class time.

	SPEAKING TASKS	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Speaking tasks for students to complete	Average	Average	Average
	EXAM TASKS			
S1	**Phase 1**	0.00	0.08	0.00
S2	Using social formulae	1.49	0.00	0.04
S3	Providing personal information	0.00	0.00	0.38
S5	**Phase 2**	1.11	0.19	0.00
S6	Providing general factual information	0.24	0.00	0.09
S9	Describing and comparing	0.00	0.15	0.26
S10	Narrating events and sequencing events	0.00	0.00	0.17
S12	**Phase 3**	2.21	1.43	0.48
S13	Eliciting general factual information	0.00	0.00	0.88
S15	Eliciting information about objects, events and sequences of events	0.00	0.00	0.02
S18	**Phase 4**	0.60	0.72	0.00
S21	Expressing opinions, intentions, attitudes, moods, possibilities, values and emotions	0.00	0.00	0.05
S22	Describing and comparing objects, events and sequences of events	0.00	0.00	0.04
S24	Speculation on future events and their consequences	0.84	0.00	0.97
S25	**Phase 5**	0.03	0.11	0.00
S42	Complete speaking task	1.87	0.79	0.00
S27	Saying farewell, thanking	0.00	0.00	0.28
	GENERAL SKILLS			
S28	Discussing events and their possible consequences	0.00	0.00	0.05
S29	Discussing issues/ ideas/ and exchanging opinions	0.00	8.92	2.84
S30	Practising pronunciation (words/ individual sounds/ rhythm/ stress/ patterns	0.27	0.68	0.41
S32	Practising using signposting in speech (e.g. furthermore, I have two points…)	0.04	0.00	0.00
S33	Working in pairs to ask questions about things/places/activities	0.00	0.00	0.43
S35	Working in pairs to exchange/ provide information (personal and information gap)	0.00	1.95	1.28
S36	Working in groups to exchange/ provide information (personal and information gap)	0.00	0.00	0.51
S37	Discussing requirements of IELTS	3.01	0.45	2.70
S38	Discussing the IELTS preparation course	0.12	0.00	0.17
S39	Discussing answers to a reading task (exam or other)	5.72	2.35	3.16
S40	Discussing answers to a listening task (exam or other)	1.04	0.65	1.76
S41	Discussing/brainstorming ideas for an IELTS writing task	4.02	1.94	0.97
	Total % of speaking tasks	22.60	20.39	17.92

Table 18: Speaking tasks as % of total class time

	SPEAKING TASKS	Class A	Class B	Class C
	Speaking tasks for students to complete	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)	Average (in minutes)
	EXAM TASKS			
S1	**Phase 1**	0.00	1.35	0.00
S2	Using social formulae	19.76	0.00	0.96
S3	Providing personal information	0.00	0.00	9.14
S5	**Phase 2**	14.72	3.20	0.00
S6	Providing general factual information	3.18	0.00	2.16
S9	Describing and comparing	0.00	2.53	6.25
S10	Narrating events and sequencing events	0.00	0.00	4.09
S12	**Phase 3**	29.30	24.09	11.54
S13	Eliciting general factual information	0.00	0.00	21.16
S15	Eliciting information about objects, events and sequences of events	0.00	0.00	0.48
S18	**Phase 4**	7.96	12.13	0.00
S21	Expressing opinions, intentions, attitudes, moods, possibilities, values and emotions	0.00	0.00	1.20
S22	Describing and comparing objects, events and sequences of events	0.00	0.00	0.96
S24	Speculation on future events and their consequences	11.14	0.00	23.33
S25	**Phase 5**	0.40	1.85	0.00
S42	Complete speaking task	24.80	13.31	0.00
S27	Saying farewell, thanking	0.00	0.00	6.73
	GENERAL SKILLS			
S28	Discussing events and their possible consequences	0.00	0.00	1.20
S29	Discussing issues/ ideas/ and exchanging opinions	0.00	150.28	68.30
S30	Practising pronunciation (words/ individual sounds/ rhythm/ stress\ patterns	3.58	11.46	9.86
S32	Practising using signposting in speech (e.g. furthermore, I have two points…)	0.53	0.00	0.00
S33	Working in pairs to ask questions about things/places/activities	0.00	0.00	10.34
S35	Working in pairs to exchange/ provide information (personal and information gap)	0.00	32.85	30.78
S36	Working in groups to exchange/ provide information (personal and information gap)	0.00	0.00	12.26
S37	Discussing requirements of IELTS	39.91	7.58	64.93
S38	Discussing the IELTS preparation course	1.59	0.00	4.09
S39	Discussing answers to a reading task (exam or other)	75.85	39.59	75.99
S40	Discussing answers to a listening task (exam or other)	13.79	10.95	42.32
S41	Discussing/brainstorming ideas for an IELTS writing task	53.31	32.69	23.33
	Average duration of speaking tasks (in minutes)	299.68	343.53	430.94

Table 19: Speaking tasks in minutes

5.2.3 Further Analysis of the Observations

Several significant activities were observed during the lessons which were not specifically identified by either COLT or the UCOS. These were analysed separately. The additional analysis focused on six main features:

IELTS information and strategies
Teacher – student secondary interactions
Sources of materials
Topics
Homework
Instances of laughter

5.2.3.1 IELTS Information and Strategies

Neither COLT nor the UCOS identified the number of times in the lesson when the teachers talked about the exam. All teachers referred to IELTS in two ways. They provided the students factual information about the exam and they gave them information about exam strategies or test-taking tips. Under further analysis, when the teacher provided information about IELTS or gave the students exam strategies, the relevant activities were calculated as a percentage of the total class time.

Students in Class A received information amounting to 2% of the total class time compared to 1% in Class B. They spent more of the course receiving instructions about effective strategies to use in the exam (13% at School A, 1% at School B). This information partly explains why under COLT the teacher at School A was so often the focus of the organisation of the class (procedure) and accounts for a portion of the class time spent discussing 'Broad' topics, (which included IELTS).

In Class C students received more information about the IELTS exam than in either the other two classes. The instructions about test taking strategies were closer to the level of Class A. Teacher E (Writing) gave students more information on IELTS and taught more exam taking strategies (7 and 14% respectively) than the other teachers in Class C.

In terms of evidence of washback, this shows the degree of focus on the test in each class. It is also a useful indication of the amount of class time that the respective teachers spent on

providing students with training in general test-taking strategies and assisting students develop test-wiseness. According to Millman, Bishop and Ebel (1965: 707), 'test wiseness' is the ability to profit by utilising test characteristics regardless of the content area of the test. Examples of such strategies, given by Amer (1993:72), include: efficient use of time, deductive reasoning and guessing, precisely the kind of information the teachers of the three classes gave the students to help make their test-taking more effective and efficient. The pertinent activities were recorded as 'IELTS strategies'. This category was, in all three cases, far more significant in terms of the amount of class time than the other form of references to IELTS, i.e. 'IELTS information', which recorded teacher presenting factual information about the test.

Table 20 presents the IELTS references that reached the students in the three classes expressed as percentage of each total class time.

IELTS References	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
IELTS information	1.64	0.98	5.20
IELTS strategy	13.09	1.11	9.29
Total % of IELTS references	15	2	14

Table 20: IELTS references as a percentage of total class time

5.2.3.2 Strategies

The previous table, Table 20, illustrates the different amount of time each group of students spent on test-taking strategies and this data was further analysed to identify which strategies the teachers referred to. In all, one hundred and fifty exam-taking strategies were recorded throughout the lessons at all three schools. The strategies were grouped according to skill and were further analysed to determine what percentage of the total class time the teachers spent discussing each one. The most popular strategies were also identified according to the percentage of class time. The types of strategies discussed at each school were analysed on a course by course basis and then compared to find which, if any, were common.

The time spent discussing exam strategies was higher than the amount of class time spent on providing factual information about the exam itself. As has been discussed, Classes A and C had a similar focus on strategies, with Class B including only a few test tips. Overall, Teacher A spent over 13% of the total class time on a total of 94 strategies – an average of 15 per day. The strategy on which she spent the largest amount of time talking about in class was

encouraging her students to predict the answers to listening tasks, followed by advising them to plan essay tasks before writing. Both these strategies were taught in Class C, though to a lesser extent, but were absent from Class B. Time management was a common topic and was applied to several skills.

Teacher B suggested 20 strategies to his students and this took up just over one percent of the total class time. Using a range of language and avoiding repetition in writing tasks were most significant in terms of whole class time followed by advice about analysing the writing rubric carefully and being sure to answer the question. These strategies were also taught to students in Class A and Class C.

In Class C students were often advised to plan essay tasks before starting to write. Identifying the key information before starting to answer Task 1 writings and over-viewing reading passages by looking at title and topic sentences were also seen as key. Some strategies were common to all teachers. For example, they all advised their students to volunteer information during the interview rather than answering with a 'Yes' or 'No'.

Table 21 presents the 10 most commonly used strategies in Class A cross-referencing them to Classes B and C. Strategies in the three classes are expressed as percentage of each total class time. This cross-referencing allowed a comparison to be made across the classes i.e. if a strategy was predominant at one class, it could be seen whether it was given in the other classes and if so, for how long. For example: Class A students were taught Predicting (listening) for 1.05% of the total class time and that was the No. 1 strategy they were taught (took on average 1% of the total class time). However, this strategy was absent from Class B (i.e. the Ss there were not taught this one). In Class C, students were alerted to that strategy but to a lesser extent (just for 0.29% of the total class time). These tables show that while some strategies are considered important by all teachers, the emphasis varied and in some cases, particularly at School B, many strategies were not mentioned at all. Note that the figures related to School C are a compilation of the comments of all three teachers.

As a reminder, 1% represented the following amount of class time for each course: Class A, 13 minutes; Class B, 17 minutes; and Class C, 24 minutes.

S/N	Skill	Description	Average School A (%)	Average School B (%)	Average School C (%)
S5	L	Predicting (listening)	1.05	0.00	0.29
S14	W	Plan the essay	1.00	0.00	0.53
S1	All	Time management - think and work fast	0.59	0.02	0.18
S81	S	Speaking - Phase 3 - take a minute to ask for clarification if necessary/ read role card carefully	0.48	0.00	0.19
S3	R	Previewing (Reading)	0.48	0.00	0.06
S7	All	Guess answers if unsure	0.38	0.00	0.24
S15	S	Volunteer information during the interview (not Y / N)	0.38	0.03	0.07
S11	W	Don't copy the question/ rephrase (Task 2)	0.37	0.09	0.16
S6	All	Practice	0.35	0.00	0.32
S20	R	Scan for the answer (reading)	0.34	0.05	0.25

Table 21: 10 most commonly used strategies in Class A (and corresponding % in Classes A and C) as a percentage of total class time

S/N	Skill	Description	Average School A (in minutes)	Average School B (in minutes)	Average School C (in minutes)
S5	L	Predicting (listening)	14	0	7
S14	W	Plan the essay	13	0	13
S1	All	Time management - think and work fast	8	0.3	4
S81	S	Speaking - Phase 3 - take a minute to ask for clarification if necessary/ read role card carefully	6	0	5
S3	R	Previewing (Reading)	6	0	1
S7	All	Guess answers if unsure	5	0	6
S15	S	Volunteer information during the interview (not Y / N)	5	0.5	2
S11	W	Don't copy the question/ rephrase (Task 2)	5	2	4
S6	All	Practice	5	0	8
S20	R	Scan for the answer (reading)	5	1	6

Table 22: 10 most commonly used strategies in Class A (and corresponding durations in Classes A and C) rounded to the nearest minute

The predominance of advice about how to approach listening is perhaps not surprising considering the focus on listening in this class. The three top strategies refer to fundamental test taking strategies – predicting, planning and being aware of the time constraints. In general terms this table shows how little relationship there is between the strategies introduced at School A compared to School B. All of the strategies were, however, also mentioned at School C.

Table 23 presents the 10 most commonly used strategies in Class B cross-referencing them to Classes A and C. Strategies in the three classes are expressed as percentage of each total class time

S/N	Skill	Description	Average School A	Average School B	Average School C
S61	W	Use a range of language, avoid repetition	0.06	0.18	0.29
S13	W	Read the writing question carefully and answer the Q	0.24	0.11	0.24
S4	R	Speed reading/ advantages of	0.25	0.10	0.00
S100	S	Use a variety of Q structures	0.00	0.09	0.02
S11	W	Don't copy the question/ rephrase (Task 2)	0.37	0.09	0.16
S60	W	Structure and vocab must be accurate	0.12	0.07	0.06
S97	S	Write something interesting about your hobbies/ work that you could talk about in Phase 2	0.00	0.06	0.03
S87	S	If you don't know an answer, say so and try and explain or say something related	0.13	0.06	0.28
S20	R	Scan for the answer (reading)	0.34	0.05	0.25
S70	W	Task 1 - select key information only	0.12	0.05	0.43

Table 23: 10 most commonly used strategies in Class B (and corresponding % in Classes A and C) as a percentage of total class time

S/N	Skill	Description	Average School A	Average School B	Average School C
S61	W	Use a range of language, avoid repetition	1	3	7
S13	W	Read the writing question carefully and answer the Q	3	2	6
S4	R	Speed reading/ advantages of	3	2	0
S100	S	Use a variety of Q structures	0	2	0.5
S11	W	Don't copy the question/ rephrase (Task 2)	5	2	4
S60	W	Structure and vocab must be accurate	2	1	1
S97	S	Write something interesting about your hobbies/ work that you could talk about in Phase 2	0	1	1
S87	S	If you don't know an answer, say so and try and explain or say something related	2	1	7
S20	R	Scan for the answer (reading)	5	1	6
S70	W	Task 1 - select key information only	2	1	10

Table 24: 10 most commonly used strategies in Class B (and corresponding durations in Classes A and C) rounded to the nearest minute

Far less class time was spent advising students in Class B about how to do better on the test with the use of test tips than the other two classes. The teacher focused on encouraging students to produce a range of language and to focus on appropriate ways to complete tasks.

Table 25 presents the 10 most commonly used strategies in Class C cross-referencing them to Classes A and B. Strategies in the three classes are expressed as percentage of each total class time.

S/N	Skill	Description	Average School A	Average School B	Average School C
S14	W	Plan the essay	1.00	0.00	0.53
S70	W	Task 1 - select key information only	0.12	0.05	0.43
S94	R	Overview reading by looking at title, topic sentences, intro, conclusions and diagrams	0.03	0.00	0.41
S6	All	Practice	0.35	0.00	0.32
S109	R	Read the question carefully	0.00	0.00	0.31
S61	W	Use a range of language, avoid repetition	0.06	0.18	0.29
S5	L	Predicting (listening)	1.05	0.00	0.29
S87	S	If you don't know an answer, say so and try and explain or say something related	0.13	0.06	0.28
S20	R	Scan for the answer (reading)	0.34	0.05	0.25
S7	All	Guess answers if unsure	0.38	0.00	0.24

Table 25: 10 most commonly used strategies in Class C (and corresponding % in Classes A and B) as a percentage of total class time

S/N	Skill	Description	Average School A	Average School B	Average School C
S14	W	Plan the essay	13	0	13
S70	W	Task 1 - select key information only	2	1	10
S94	R	Overview reading by looking at title, topic sentences, intro, conclusions and diagrams	0.4	0	10
S6	All	Practice	5	0	8
S109	R	Read the question carefully	0	0	7
S61	W	Use a range of language, avoid repetition	1	3	7
S5	L	Predicting (listening)	14	0	7
S87	S	If you don't know an answer, say so and try and explain or say something related	2	1	7
S20	R	Scan for the answer (reading)	5	1	6
S7	All	Guess answers if unsure	5	0	6

Table 26: 10 most commonly used strategies in Class C (and corresponding durations in Classes A and B) rounded to the nearest minute

Essay planning in general and Task 1 in particular predominated as the number one and two strategies at School C. Also featuring in the top three is a basic reading strategy which encourages students to overview the text before starting to read. This table shows that the Teachers at School C along with Teacher A emphasised the importance of practice, but Teacher B made no mention of this strategy.

5.2.3.3 Teacher-Student Interaction

COLT primarily records the activities which are the exclusive focus and the primary focus with combinations. However, Spada & Frohlich (1995: 116) comment that

> It is important to note once again that the secondary focuses (that is, check marks which do not indicate either a primary/exclusive focus or combinations with equal focus) were ignored in our calculations above. We have not included these because in our work with COLT we have been more interested in those categories which are more prominent in different classroom settings. Depending on the goals of the research, it may be important to take note of these secondary emphases.

During Course B a secondary focus was seen to be a significant form of classroom interaction and these instances were recorded and calculated as a percentage of total class time. Teacher B often spent time assisting students while they were working on tasks, both individually, and in pairs or groups. This secondary interaction focused on issues relating to task and language. The assistance given to the students by the teacher varied each week, depending on the type of tasks the students were working on. Teacher B helped his students more often during writing exercises. While students wrote, he attempted to give each student individual attention. This kind of help accounted for 15% of the total class time. During discussion exercises, he clarified the task for the students, answered questions about language and corrected errors as they occurred, for another 12% of class time.

This pattern of the teacher working with small groups was also seen at School C. Teacher C assisted her students in listening classes for 13% of the total class time. During reading classes she spent only 2% of the total class time on this activity. These figures are interesting in that they show a difference in how the two skills were taught by the same teacher. In the speaking classes Teacher D assisted his students for 25% of the total class time reflecting the amount of pair/group work which occurred in his classes. Once again, this large figure could be seen as linked to the skill focus of the lessons. During writing classes Teacher E assisted her students for 8% of the total class time.

While Teacher A occasionally went around the class monitoring the students, there was no significant interaction of this type (i.e. the teacher spending time assisting students while they were working on tasks, both individually, and in pairs or groups). This individual attention was an important difference in teachers' methodology and approach. This distinguishing characteristic of School B was present but less prominent at School C. While this could

partially be attributed to the approach and teaching style of Teacher B, other factors such as the structure of the course, the number of students in the class, and inflexible nature of the seating arrangement of the room must also be considered. What was clear was that this type of interaction allowed the students to have greater access to the teacher. When they had questions about the task or related to some language point, they were able to attract his attention and ask for an explanation. It also meant that Teacher B was able to monitor the students' performance on a more individual basis.

Table 27 presents the teachers' assistance to individual students in the three classes expressed as percentage of each total class time

	School A	School B	School C
T assistance to individual Ss	Average	Average	Average
Total % of T assistance to individual Ss	0	43	13

Table 27: Teacher – student interaction as % of total class time

5.2.3.4 Topics

In addition to the other forms of analysis, the materials were also considered in terms of the numbers of topics, excluding language structures and functions, which the students encountered. The introduction of each new topic places an additional cognitive load on students, particularly if the topic is given to the students 'cold' or without any introduction or support in terms of potentially unknown vocabulary. The number of topics encountered in each course was recorded as part of the additional analysis and distinct differences were seen.

While these differences can be seen as a reflection of the differences in the structure and total length of the courses, the size of the differences reflects the considerable amount of time spent developing the contexts of the texts in Course B, which was expected considering the course was topic based.

In Course A, the students encountered 84 topics. This total was boosted by the large amount of practice test material used both in and outside class, each containing several texts with different subjects. Topics covered a wide spectrum ranging from car theft to fish oil and urban agglomerates. Course B had a thematic focus, 'Lifestyles', and many of the texts were on the same subject. The main sub-topics were Immigration, Women in management and Friendship. Texts were also typically covered in more depth, which reduced the total number

of topics. As a result of these factors, Course B included 16 topics. Coming somewhere between the two, Course C included 60 of a similar range to those included in Course A. These figures reflect the differing number of practice tests administered during class, activities which took up a greater proportion of the class time in Course A.

5.2.3.5 Homework

A record was kept of all homework assigned to the students during the courses. Once again, similarities were seen between Courses A and C. At both these schools the homework was a regular feature of the class. Practice tests, usually reading or writing, were handed out at the end of class to be completed at home. The answers to these exercises were then reviewed as part of the following class. Over the course, students in Class A were given a total of 5 practice IELTS reading tests as homework. Two Task 1 essays, one Task 2, one complete IELTS writing task and an essay of introduction were also assigned. All essays were marked by the teacher, who commented on the organisation of the writing and indicated errors in structure. The teacher also asked the students to prepare different phases of the speaking test at home by thinking about possible questions that might be asked during the interview.

In Class C the amount and type of assigned homework depended on the teacher and therefore the skill. On Days 4,8 and 10 students were given an example of Sections 1, 2 and 3 respectively of practice reading tests to complete at home. Likewise, each week students were given IELTS writing tasks for homework. In the first weeks these consisted of two Task 1 essays and on Days 12 and 16, Task 2s. These writing assignments could either be handed in during class or sent to the teacher via email. Teacher E corrected all work and gave feedback on the strengths and weakness of the essay. Teachers C and D encouraged the students to practise their listening and speaking skills outside class by doing things such as listening to the radio and chatting with native speakers. During the course each student completed each of the sections of the speaking test, during the speaking lessons, and participated in and observed a one-on-one mock speaking test with a speaking teacher.

Formal homework was not a regular feature of the course in Class B. Students were given sections of the academic word lists for self study and completed writing tasks they had not finished in class.

Students at School C were surveyed to find out how they felt about the amount of homework they were given. Most weeks around 80% of the students considered the assignments sufficient – those wanting more homework were always in the minority. This information was

not collected from the first two schools. However, when the differences in the amount of homework given in the first phase of the classroom study became obvious, it was felt that gathering comments from the students in the third course regarding their homework preferences was desirable.

The students were asked each week whether the amount of homework was appropriate. The majority felt that it was the right amount. Detailed results are shown in Table 28.

Options	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	avg.
Yes	78.9%	78.9%	50.0%	85.7%	82.4%	75.2%
Too much	10.5%	7.0%	5.6%	0.0%	5.9%	5.8%
Too little	10.5%	14.0%	44.4%	14.3%	11.8%	19.0%

Table 28: Amount of homework (% of Ss)

Options	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Yes	15	15	9	12	14
Too much	2	2	1	0	1
Too little	2	2	8	2	2

Table 29: Amount of homework (number of Ss)

In all cases the majority of the students were content with the number of homework exercises they had been given. After the first week when the class was divided on the desirable amount of homework, the number of students who wanted more remained reasonably constant with the exception of Week 3 (for some unidentified reason). In general the most common complaint was that there was not enough homework rather than that there was too much.

5.2.3.6 Instances of Laughter

The overall atmosphere at each school was different and it was felt that counting the instances of laughter gave an indication of the general feeling in the classes. At School A on average three instances were recorded, compared to 11 at School B. The personalities of specific members of the class and the types of relationships which existed between students and between the students and the teacher could be expected to have affected instances of laughter in the classrooms. Laughter typically arose during pair or group activities, the very types of interactions which predominated at School B. This pattern of laughter occurring more frequently when the students were interacting with one another was also observed in Class C.

However, it was not found equally across all classes or with all teachers. There was more laughter during the speaking classes and least in the lessons focusing on writing. While these differences reflected the skills involved, the observation of the different personalities and approaches of the teachers was also seen as influencing the amount of laughter but to a lesser extent.

Table 30 presents the averaged instances of laughter in each of the three classes.

	School A	School B	School C
Incidents	Average	Average	Average
Laughter	3	11	21

Table 30: Instances of laughter

5.3 Conclusion

Analysis of the observation data using Part A of COLT indicated that Classes A and C shared more similar characteristics with each other than with Class B. Results showed that Class B was clearly distinctive as shown in the following summary of the key points. Classes A and C spent most of the course engaged in whole-class activities with the teacher addressing the class, as opposed to Class B, where the students mostly worked in groups. As a result Classes A and C were much more teacher-centred than Class B and the students at Classes A and C spent more time using receptive skills than productive skills. The main focus in all three classes was on negotiating meaning rather than language analysis. The teaching of language played a less significant role at School A. In contrast, a considerable part of the lessons in Class B was spent focusing on language, in particular vocabulary and vocabulary in combination with grammar - one aim of the course at School B. Class C students were exposed to levels of function and discourse teaching similar to Class A. However, the teaching of Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Grammar in Class C made up a larger proportion of the class time compared to Class A. Listening was the most common skill in Classes A and C when compared with Students in Class B who used a broader range of skills and covered the four skills more evenly.

The summarised results of the analysis using COLT appear in Table 31.

Participant organisation	Class A Average	Class B Average	Class C Average
Teacher to Student/Class %	48.00	17.97	57.99
Student to Student/Class %	9.74	4.93	5.54
Choral %	0.05	0.91	0.36
Group - same task %	15.18	46.71	12.73
Individual - same task %	27.02	29.48	21.31
Individual - different tasks %	0.00	0.00	2.07
Content control			
Teacher/text %	65.10	42.98	96.56
Teacher/text/ student %	34.90	57.02	3.42
Content			
Procedure only %	17.54	8.87	9.90
Form - Vocabulary only %	1.95	14.08	5.22
Form - Pronunciation only %	0.10	1.53	1.48
Form - Grammar only %	1.17	1.64	4.79
Form - Spelling only %	0.00	0.00	0.33
Function only %	1.48	1.05	1.27
Discourse only %	4.09	0.93	4.61
Socio-linguistics only %	0.00	0.05	0.22
Form - vocabulary and Discourse %	1.62	2.62	0.64
Form - vocabulary and Form - Grammar %	0.27	15.20	0.88
Narrow %	4.60	0.14	2.21
Broad %	67.18	53.91	68.44
Student Modality			
Listening only %	46.59	19.28	52.79
Speaking only %	1.77	12.61	9.32
Reading only %	9.96	13.19	9.25
Writing only %	6.75	21.27	7.60
Other only %	1.30	1.92	1.81
L + S %	21.14	17.62	10.36
L + R %	6.61	1.01	1.91
L + W %	2.82	1.81	3.09
S + R %	0.00	2.31	3.60
L + S + W %	0.00	5.08	0.27
L + S + R %	3.05	3.91	0.00
Materials Used			
Minimal L2 - NNS %	24.51	41.11	28.10
Extended L2 - NNS %	3.27	2.07	5.79
Minimal + Extended + L2 - NNS %	20.01	13.66	18.28
Minimal + Audio + L2-NNS %	4.56	4.31	8.76
Extended + Audio + L2-NNS %	0.00	1.90	0.00
Audio + L2-NNS %	0.00	0.15	0.00
Audio + Visual + L2-NNS %	0.00	0.00	2.08
Minimal + Visual + L2-NNS %	7.97	3.93	1.29
Minimal + Student Made %	0.00	4.18	0.55
Extended + Student Made %	1.57	3.12	0.00
Minimal + Visual + L2-NS	0.00	1.98	0.00
Visual + Student Made	0.00	0.57	0.00
Visual + L2-NNS	0.00	1.52	0.00

Table 31: Combined results from COLT, Part A

The analysis using the UCOS also indicated similarities between Classes A and C. Students in these classes completed more tasks under exam conditions and exam-related activities. Some differences surfaced such as the students in Classes B and C receiving significantly more grammar and vocabulary related activities. However, the total amount of time spent in the classrooms in Reading, Listening and Speaking tasks was comparable in all three classes. Writing tasks, making up similar amounts of class time in Classes B and C, were more extensive in Class A.

These two instruments, Part A of COLT and the UCOS, proved useful for building a description of the class activities. While each instrument had its own areas of focus which added to the profile of each course in different ways, in some areas they also served to confirm patterns picked up in other parts of the study.

The further analysis indicated that Students in Classes A and C received more information about the IELTS exam than those in Class B. However, in all three classes teachers spent more time discussing exam strategies with the students than giving factual information about the exam itself. In Classes B and C teachers spent time assisting students while they were working on tasks, both individually, and in pairs or groups. This secondary interaction, separately recorded, focused on issues relating to task and language. All three classes were distinct in terms of materials used. In Class A IELTS preparation texts were mostly used as opposed to materials developed by the school in Class B and a specific textbook in Class C. The sources of texts on which activities were based were more similar in Classes A and C. Patterns were noticeable in the instances of laughter. Students in all classes laughed more during communicative group or pair work and this was a pattern of interaction more common at School B. The larger number of instances of laughter in Class C can be linked to group work and the approach of one particular teacher. Because Classes A and C tended to focus on individual materials for a relatively short time, their students encountered large numbers of topics and both shared the same approach to the regular assignment of practice test materials for homework.

Overall, then, what information has COLT provided? Firstly, let us address the issue of the difference in the types of activities in each of the classes. The students in Classes A and C received a great deal of information about the test and tips for taking it successfully, and thus a large proportion of the class time was focused on the teacher. By contrast, Class B spent the most time on a range of activities related to language development, with test familiarisation and test-taking strategies playing a very minor part. The teacher in Class B frequently worked with individual students, whereas this kind of interaction was less common in Class C and

quite rare in Class A. If we accept the basic presupposition that IELTS is a modern, communicative test, we might expect it to have the effect of encouraging a communicative, learner-centred type of methodology in the classroom, but this seemed to apply only to Class B. The effect on the teachers' methodology in the other two classes was more negative from this point of view.

However, in order to understand the situation in Classes A and C, it is necessary to take a broader perspective. These schools offered IELTS preparation courses on a commercial basis, to cater to a high level of demand from students from Asian countries and particularly China. The students were primarily predisposed to accept exam preparation only if it was delivered to them in a way they were familiar with. Their educational expectation was to step into a class where they would be listening to the teacher present information, and that was exactly what they experienced for most of the class time in these two courses. Another commercial influence on the courses was the number of students that were allowed by school administrators to enrol in the classes. It is important to acknowledge here the size of the classes and the limitations on the type of classroom interaction that was manageable in classes of around 20 students. Apart from the language schools themselves, the universities and polytechnics can be seen as having some responsibility for the situation as well. Tertiary institutions in New Zealand, rely on a score on the IELTS test to determine whether an international student has the necessary language skills, ignoring in the process the possibility that the student may get the rather low score required but still not be ready for academic study. Thus, teachers that deliver IELTS preparation courses similar to those observed in Classes A and C are constrained by student expectations that have been determined more by student background and tertiary admission regulations rather than from IELTS.

The teachers at the three schools observed in this study seemed to acknowledge that there was an element of IELTS being a marketing tool, and that institutes offering IELTS preparation courses capitalised on the important role IELTS played in admission to tertiary institutions and the resulting demand among students for anything associated with 'IELTS'. Acknowledging this, the teachers who designed and taught the IELTS preparation courses at School B, however, set out to deliver a language course that not only supported students in developing their proficiency but also in preparing for academic study by introducing them to some of the basic skills they would need in the next stage of their studies. It is in this respect that Course B differs from the other two courses.

Similar patterns were clear in the teaching materials used. The teacher of Class B drew on a bank of texts from a wide range of sources of the kind we would expect to be used in a

communicative course of English for academic purposes. Many of the texts that were given to Classes A and C were similar in appearance to those in Class B, but the crucial difference was that they were mostly taken from IELTS preparation books. As a result the texts, and the classroom tasks based on them, were tailored to meet the IELTS testing requirements, rather than the students' needs for language development and the learning of academic study skills. The teaching materials will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 6: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COURSES

6.1 Introduction

Having described the courses and the results of the classroom observations, we turn now to the teachers because it is they who have the final responsibility of presenting the courses to students. The stakeholders in the testing process include the teachers and school administrators. Teachers are a prominent feature of washback studies and many findings are directly associated to them (see for example Alderson and Wall, 1993; Burrows, 1998; Shohamy, 1993; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Qi, in press; Cheng, 1999; Watanabe, 1997, and Cheng and Falvey, 2000). Their perceptions are key to investigations of washback and in this study the teachers were questioned as to their beliefs about IELTS, the courses they taught and their students. Input from the teachers makes a considerable contribution to the overall study and is a crucial part of the triangulation and interpretation of the results.

Data from the teachers of the courses was collected at various stages of the study. The teachers' perceptions contribute to this study by providing insights into their opinions about preparing students for the test. Looking into their decision making when planning and presenting the courses was a valuable complement to the data collected in other parts of the study. Teachers were interviewed before the classroom observations began through the course of the observations and again once the classroom phase of the study was completed. They also filled out questionnaires at the start and end of the course.

The pre-questionnaires were designed to collect information on a teacher's position, qualifications and experience, as well as his/her perception of the course that was about to be taught, ranging from the structure of the course to the materials that were to be used. The teacher's experience and perception of IELTS were also sought.

Shifts in the teachers' strategies after the courses started, as well as their reflections on what was happening in their classrooms and how it influenced the way they were teaching the courses, were addressed in the 'mid-term' interviews. Once the observations were underway, Teachers A and B were interviewed weekly to gather information about their overall impressions of the class and give them the opportunity to describe the materials they had used and the rationale behind their choices. Teachers C, D and E were similarly interviewed after each lesson. Teacher F, who taught on the course but was not directly involved in the

classroom observations, was interviewed before the observations at School C. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The post-questionnaires called on the teachers to assess whether their goals had been met at the end of the course and consider changes in their strategy depending on whether what they had envisaged at the beginning of the course actually took place. Their reflections on impact were elicited by asking them whether the IELTS test had influenced either the content and methodology of the course or feedback they gave to the students. How familiar the test was to the teachers was assessed through a series of questions on IELTS. Their reports on the contents of the lessons were compared to data recorded in the observation analysis.

Here their comments are presented.

6.2 Teacher A

Teacher A was a qualified school teacher with over 30 years of experience teaching General English at secondary school level. She had been teaching IELTS preparation at School A for approximately two years and at the time of the study was completing a Masters in Language Teaching.

6.2.1 Pre-course Interview

In the pre-observation interview, Teacher A mentioned that there was no written prescription for the course. The content was dictated by the exam format and the available commercial resources. The school prescribed neither the methodology nor the materials to be used on the course and therefore, she had complete control of course content. When planning her IELTS preparation course Teacher A stated that she moved from a focus on skills in the beginning of the course to more exam practice as the course progressed. Typically, she tried to practice three skills in each lesson. Because there was often a strong demand from students for listening practice, she gave them additional practice if she agreed that they needed it. This also applied to the practice of other skills. In the third and fourth weeks of a typical course, the students completed one IELTS practice test. In the last week they were usually given two sub-tests in one lesson. Reading tests were traditionally given for homework in the first two weeks of the course, but in the final weeks they were given during class so students were working under strict time limits and could practice transferring their answers to the answer sheet.

When asked about the average level of the students coming onto her courses, Teacher A said that she often observed a discrepancy between particular skills - that students might be stronger in some skills than others. She felt that this was often a reflection of their previous language learning experiences. Students from certain countries had extremely good reading and writing skills but were "…still learning to tune into New Zealand English." She later went on to identify listening as causing many students considerable anxiety. However, she felt that in general, reading was the most problematic section of the IELTS exam for the majority of her students, because of problems with vocabulary and unfamiliar concepts coupled with time pressures.

6.2.2 Mid-course Interviews

The student makeup of the class varied from day to day at the beginning of the course. On the first day there were 22 students present but this number decreased as the week progressed. An additional IELTS class was opened and students were given the opportunity to remain in the class or transfer to the new one. By the end of the first week class numbers had stabilised at around 15. The teacher commented that most of the group seemed "very quiet and very serious." They were very motivated to get into university and from the writing they had given her, she got the impression that some of the students had been told by their parents or previous teachers to "settle down and do some work" because they had been "fooling around". In terms of their language level, the teacher felt that there were some students in the class who would have trouble achieving an overall band score of 5.0, let alone 6.0, on the exam.

During the first week the teacher's aim was to (a) familiarise students with the kinds of questions they were going to get in the exam and (b) introduce them to some of the strategies they could use in the various parts of the exam. This was reflected in her choice of materials. While most of the materials were taken directly from published texts, in Week 1 Teacher A wrote four examples of IELTS Task 2 writing rubrics. She made them herself because she wanted to give students practice in unpacking the essay topics but felt the examples available in the books were not 'wordy' enough to give students realistic practice.

In Week 2 Teacher A observed a division in the class between those students who were genuinely motivated to take the course and those who were either having second thoughts about it or felt they would be able to just "sail through". The focus on question types and exam strategies continued. The teacher had experimented with different methods of checking the answers to reading tasks. She had encouraged pairs and groups of students to discuss and

reconsider their answers together, but she had not found the students particularly receptive to this approach. However, when they analysed an essay together, the teacher felt that they completed the task reasonably well, perhaps because they had had experience with that kind of task in other language courses. She also decided to demonstrate on the board the steps in essay writing, something she usually tried not to do as it was boring for those students who already had the skill. In this case, as about half the students in her class were not building up paragraphs appropriately, she considered the time spent on this task well justified.

The teacher's overall comment about the progress of the class in Week 3 indicated that the students had a better understanding of what strategies they should be using, but were not consistently applying them. In terms of their basic understanding of English she observed that several of them still had "quite a way to go." The overall goal for the week was to apply some of the strategies the class had been working on and give the students exam practice. The teacher introduced skills necessary for Task 1 essay writing. She usually left this section of the exam until this stage of the course and introduced it with an example of a simple line graph and a model essay. In the context of Task 1 writing she also asked the students to reflect on their writing in general. She expressed frustration that some of the students had quite good ideas and a good idea how to organise them but their grammar structures were still quite poor. Her feeling was that some of the keen students might only score 3 or 4 on IELTS for this reason. At this stage of the course, Teacher A gave students a marking guide which she planned to use to indicate errors when marking written work. She corrected the language in several of their essays and thought the students would have liked this kind of feedback all the time. She felt that she could spend the whole time working on grammar but that there were many different levels within the class and grammar was a difficult area to deal with in a limited course such as this. She suggested to the students that it was their responsibility to follow up on recurring grammatical problems but that none had taken up her offer to ask questions about the corrections or comments she made on their written work. This week the teacher also decided to change the main textbook that she was drawing materials from because she wanted to expose the students to different approaches and levels of difficulty in the practice materials.

References to time constraints and lack of time were a common feature of the weekly interviews. This had a particular impact on speaking tasks, which she tended to put off until the end of the lesson. As a result often she did not have enough time to complete them. Normally by Week 3 of the course she would have spoken and listened to everyone on the course several times but had not on this occasion because of time constraints. However, she planned to spend more time on speaking in the final few days.

In the last week Teacher A gave the students further exam practice. She would have given the students a full test in the last week so they could have experienced the pressure before they actually took the exam. However, as her students sat post tests as part of the observation, she had less class time available in the final week. In Week 4 time was also spent on the speaking section of the exam, giving the students experience of different types of questions which might arise during the speaking test. She also introduced students to writing tasks in which they had to describe a process. Students explained their processes to a partner and as this exercise generated a lot of speaking practice, Teacher A said that she would repeat it in other courses.

6.2.3 Post-course Interview

The students in this course were fairly typical of the students Teacher A usually had on this course. However, she thought that there was a larger than normal proportion of "on the edge [doubtful] candidates" with a band score of 4.5 and 5.0, whose success in the exam was possible but not probable. Most students were very motivated and expected answers from the teacher, who they saw as an authority figure.

Teacher A felt she had met her objectives for the course. The students had been acquainted with the format of the exam, learnt strategies and had enough practice to be able to approach the exam with confidence. Although she thought the course had gone reasonably well, she was frustrated because the lack of time and suitable classroom space meant that she had not had the opportunity to establish much rapport with the students. This limitation was largely a result of the dimensions of the room, fixed furnishings and number of students which had to be accommodated within the space.

Teacher A thought that as the course was so intensive the content was completely directed towards coping with the exam. Therefore, there was no general skills or general language component in the course. "It's basically IELTS exam technique and practice." Her feedback to students was also influenced continually by the exam. Teacher A felt that the intensity of the course influenced the methodology she used. In her opinion although the IELTS exam tests many of the effects of communicative teaching, "…it is quite hard to teach such an intensive course in a communicative way." In addition to the brief nature of the course, Teacher A also mentioned the effect which the physical limitations of the classroom had on the methodology which she could use. The configuration of the seating made it difficult for

students or the teacher to move around the classroom. This limited the interaction between groups of students and restricted where in the class the teacher could stand.

Methodology was an area that the teacher would have liked to change to allow her to have more interaction with the students. She also wanted to create more sense of learner responsibility in the class. If the course had been longer and could have been held in a bigger room, Teacher A felt she could have spent more time moving around the class working with individual students and giving them feedback on what they were doing. It should be recalled that the class was conducted in a relatively small classroom with fixed seating which was not conducive to such activities.

Teacher A felt that the course had met the learners' needs in terms of giving them knowledge about the exam and test taking strategies and that it had provided them with practice under exam conditions. She thought her students had gained some knowledge about the language requirements of the exam and developed some study skills appropriate for university. Although she did not think the course had improved their General English proficiency, she said that she thought it would have given the students an improved band score.

6.3 Teacher B

Teacher B had been teaching ESOL for 8 years. He had taught a number of Cambridge exam classes and had been teaching IELTS preparation at School B for approximately 3 years. He had an MA in another area of the Arts and an UCLES/RSA Certificate in TEFLA. Like Teacher A, he too was enrolled in a Masters in Language Teaching.

6.3.1 Pre-course Interview

Teacher B described the students in the class as "very good on motivation" but commented that they had different levels of language ability and familiarity with the exam. They were a typical group and the classroom dynamics were good. In addition to teaching IELTS preparation in the afternoons, Teacher B also taught General English in the mornings. As a result, he was familiar with some students as he had been their morning teacher.

He said that the school prescribed 90% of the course content and the materials used on the course but that there was considerable flexibility when it came to methodology.

Most of this group of students had already had some experience studying IELTS preparation at School B. Although the entire course was eight months long, students could study IELTS preparation on a month by month basis. Most of the students had been in previous classes, some of which had been taught by Teacher B. Teacher B was asked how the course for these students differed from other IELTS courses at the school. He said that basically the format was the same but that particularly in the first week or two of a class consisting of students completely new to IELTS, there was more of a focus on the exam itself, on question types in the different sub-tests, test-taking strategies and time limits. After the initial introduction the format was similar for any type of class. The topics throughout the course were graded so that completely new classes begin on simpler units.

> [the students] think it's much more difficult than the TOEFL. I tried to explain to them that I thought IELTS was a much better exam than TOEFL and probably a much fairer exam. That it gave a more accurate representation of their level. I think that was a distinction they probably were not particularly interested in. I think this is exams generally rather than IELTS particularly, that generally some of our students seem to think that you can teach an exam almost as if you're kind of teaching a trick to passing the exam and they find it rather frustrating that so much emphasis is being put into developing a skill which the exam tests rather than just teaching them how to pass the exam. Maybe IELTS is a good exam in that respect in that I don't think there's a trick you can teach them.

6.3.2 Mid-course Interviews

This class was made up of a pre-existing class with the addition of a new student. Teacher B felt that with one exception, the students were all of a similar language level, shared a similar level of knowledge of IELTS and had the same experience of communicative language teaching. The new student, while orally as fluent as the rest, had not had the same amount of formal language training.

School B provided master copies of all the materials needed for the lessons. Each set of materials contained a plan which indicated the aims of the lesson, how the materials should be used and approximately how long the lesson should take to complete. When asked how closely he stuck to the lesson plans, Teacher B said that he was quite familiar with the course and usually able to work out how to use the materials without looking too closely at the instructions. He explained that the course followed a broadly repetitive pattern. Within each

topic there were usually several related subtopics. Each subtopic was discussed and high frequency language associated with the subject was introduced. IELTS reading and writing practice materials on the subject were also used. Teacher B tended to supplement the course with extra materials when he felt the class needed additional practice or when for timing reasons some activities were inappropriate. He also tried to ensure that within a month-long course, all the IELTS sub-tests were covered, especially for students only studying for one month.

In the first week Teacher B wanted to get the class "up and running" and get some "vocabulary and ideas about the new topic circulating" while still maintaining relevance to the exam. As part of the introduction to the first topic the teacher asked the students to discuss several questions. The teacher gave this speaking exercise to elicit vocabulary and initiate discussion of some of the issues associated with the subject. He felt that recycling of vocabulary was very important if it was to "sink in" and said he would slowly move to the students producing sentences and using the vocabulary. Throughout the course new vocabulary was recycled in various ways including gap-fill exercises, peer elicitation and word/definition matching exercises. During the speaking exercise Teacher B monitored the discussions and noted the errors made. He used these to make an error correction exercise selecting what he considered "typical student mistakes". He often included errors in question structures because of the focus on this area in the exam. His reasoning for collecting errors from the students was that it gave speaking exercises a language focus as well as a focus on fluency. He also said that he preferred using authentic errors rather than studying the somewhat "more artificial" exercises from books. Finally, his note-taking exerted some pressure on the students to perform, which was something that they would have to cope with in the exam. The next exercise focused on graphs related to the topic. After a discussion the students worked in groups to write the first sentence of an introduction to a Task 1 essay describing the graphs. This teacher felt that it was valuable to get students to write sections of essays, but that it was not necessary to always write the full task.

Part of an IELTS reading task, again on the chosen topic, was given to the students to complete under exam conditions before further work on the text was done. Teacher B did this to satisfy the students' need to do practice tests but he also felt that any difficulties they had finishing the task within the time limit helped justify to some extent spending time on vocabulary and other text work. He thought it helped make the students more aware of why they may have had problems successfully completing the task and that it was better to let them discover their weaknesses than tell them. He gave the students a chance to review their original answers in pairs or small groups after the language work and then asked them to

write their answers on the board. Teacher B thought this way of reviewing answers gave the class a positive feeling as the correct answers were all on the board and could be discussed as a group. He found it a very constructive way to review answers and used this technique almost exclusively during the course.

In Week 2 the major focus was working towards the writing of a Task 2 essay. To this end, students were given further input on the topic through a jigsaw or split-listening exercise that had been made by the school. As a warm-up exercise they discussed a series of questions which served to introduce the arguments and language presented in the listening texts. The students taught each other the vocabulary, a technique used by Teacher B to encourage communication. The students were asked to take notes from the recorded monologues (split listening exercise) to encourage them to focus on the language used. They then explained the position of the speaker they had heard to a partner. The teacher said that for high-level classes such as this, this kind of listening task was a rather indirect way of getting the students to think about the pros and cons of a position in preparation for writing a Task 2 essay, but that it was good communicative practice.

The next major task Teacher B gave the students was the actual writing of the essay. For the benefit of the new student Teacher B asked the class to brainstorm ideas, drawing on the various forms of input they had had in the previous days. They planned the essay on the board. He expressed his uneasiness with asking students to plan essays because he found it "a bit frightening when they write plans because it shows how little they have really grasped the whole concept." He also felt it was hypocritical as he had never planned his own academic essays. In Class B the students always worked with a model essay before writing the task themselves so they could see what they were expected to produce. The teacher said that he was trying to do more and more writing in writing classes from single sentences through to complete essays and correcting the work on the whiteboard as a class. He said he had observed that many students felt that they needed warning and time to prepare for a writing lesson but that he wanted his students to expect to do writing in class just as much as any other skill. However, marking student writing was an area Teacher B admitted not feeling completely confident about. Having tried marking codes, he had found that helping students while they were writing in class gave them some immediate feedback. He also marked their finished essays and gave them time to correct their errors the next day in class but admitted it was a time-consuming process. In this second week the teacher adapted the existing course materials which had been designed to review and practice describing statistics. He said that the materials, taken from a writing skills book, contained too many topics so he reduced them to focus on just two. He said that, in order to make the course more communicative, there was

some kind of discussion activity to lead the students into each topic and to activate their existing schemata. If there were several topics in a day or even over several days, the introductory exercises would be too time consuming. One additional self-study exercise he gave to students was based on the Academic Word Lists.

Week 3 focussed on developing and practising reading and listening skills. This week Teacher B described the students as motivated, mature and independent. He introduced a new topic with the usual general discussion of the issues and introduction of a lexical set. The teacher asked the students to teach each other a list of words. He used this method partly to make vocabulary learning more communicative and to "make the students do more of the work", in other words, researching the words independently, getting used to thinking about parts of speech and explaining meaning to other people. Speed reading exercises were also reintroduced this week. Teacher B normally did these exercises on a more regular basis and thought that they definitely helped the students read faster over time although he felt that he could more fully explore how the students applied speed reading techniques to IELTS reading tasks. At the end of the week the teacher decided to skip ahead and give the students an exam listening task as they had not yet done one. As with the writing, the teacher gave the students practice under exam conditions, then allowed them to take control of the cassettes, listen as a group and identify the answers as they occurred. He said that when the students found a section difficult this technique created a lot of discussion but that if the task was easier a second listening often clarified any misunderstandings. Although there was insufficient time on this course, Teacher B often gave students a language exercise working with the tape-script of one section of the exam, usually Section 4. Time was a factor mentioned several times by Teacher B. He felt the course was always "a bit rushed" because two hours a day, less the break, was not much time. For this reason he felt that giving the students homework, particularly reading exercises, would help speed the process along.

In the final week the teacher had several topics on the same general theme to chose from and selected one that he thought the students would find most interesting. On the final day of the course the teacher focused on language, expressing opinions in preparation for practice of the IELTS speaking test. Although he set up an exercise that he hoped would require the students to use the new language, they did not seem to use the target language. Two IELTS classes were combined for the practice section of the lesson to make the interview situation a little more realistic. Teacher B felt that demonstrating Phase 3 to the students gave them a model of how to form questions using the cues and how they could use a variety of question structures.

6.3.3 Post-course Interview

Teacher B felt that he had met the objectives set for the course but commented that time is always short in IELTS classes and there was always more he could do. While this was generally typical of the IELTS preparation course he usually teaches, he would normally get students to prepare and present a seminar and include more speed-reading. He also observed that he had spent more time than normal on writing in this specific course because most of the students had been studying IELTS for some time and writing was an area they needed to spend more time on. On the whole he thought the topics were appropriate and motivating. Most were from IELTS textbooks that had been developed further by the senior staff members at the school to create the course. He had no suggestions for changes to the methodology given the time limits. However, if changes could be made, he thought that running an EAP course without any IELTS focus and another course solely to give students exam strategies and practice could be an alternative to the existing course. However, he acknowledged that the exam focus motivated students throughout the course.

When asked to comment on whether the IELTS exam influenced his choice of methodology, Teacher B said that he felt that there was no significant difference from the way he taught General English. He thought that the content of the course was influenced by the IELTS test because of the inclusion of IELTS practice test materials. He felt that the feedback he gave the students was not significantly different from that of a General English class.

Reflecting on the course in general, Teacher B stated that it gave the students knowledge of the language requirements of the exam and provided practice under exam conditions. He thought that the course met the students' requirements in terms of improving their General English proficiency and developing their academic study skills. However, he acknowledged that the course had only given the students some knowledge of the structure of the exam and test taking strategies and had only improved the students' band score to some extent.

6.4 Teachers C, D, and E

The IELTS Preparation Course at School C was a part-time evening course which ran for 5 weeks. The focus was on providing students with an introduction to the test and with a range of practice exercises. The course was organised on a skills basis, with each skill being taught one night per week. It was taught by a team of teachers, each responsible for a different section of the course. Teacher C taught Reading and Listening, while Teacher D took writing and Teacher E speaking. The Programme Co-ordinator, as well as the four teachers involved

in the course in School C were interviewed. Their feedback is presented separately as reflects their individual experiences of the class and the skill they were responsible for teaching.

6.4.1 Pre-course Interviews

6.4.1.1 Teacher C

Teacher C was a part-time lecturer who had been working at the school for seven years and acted as liaison between the IELTS teachers in all administrative matters. Her highest language teaching qualification was a Graduate Diploma in Language Teaching which she had completed in 2000. She was an IELTS examiner. Teaching both internationally and locally had provided her with opportunities to teach a range of exam preparation courses including TOEFL and Cambridge main suite exams as well as EAP. She had been teaching on this IELTS course consistently since the beginning of 2000 and was therefore the teacher most familiar with the programme. Teacher C handled Listening and Reading (two nights per week) and she was responsible for day to day co-ordination of the IELTS teachers.

In response to the question regarding the aims of the course, Teacher C said she appreciated that most of her students saw the course as a way to increase their band score. Thus, she made sure they understood that the course was going to familiarise them with the exam and the rest was up to the effort they put in.

> I try to communicate it to the students, as not necessarily moving them up a band in a month and a bit, but more getting them … comfortable with the process of the exam so there are no surprises with the types of questions they are going to have and hopefully they have done practice in each of the skills to a level where they feel prepared.

6.4.1.2 Teacher D

Teacher D was a full-time lecturer and an IELTS examiner. He had a Certificate in Teaching English to Adults and was completing a Graduate Diploma in Language Teaching. He had taught at School C for five years, had experience of teaching a range of courses from General English through to EAP and ESP and had been employed at the school for almost five years. For Teacher D it was the third time teaching on the evening course. Once he had taught listening and this was the second time he had been responsible for the speaking component.

Teacher D saw the aim of the course as attempting to raise the students' IELTS level by familiarising them with the exam and giving them appropriate exam techniques, approaches and strategies.

> Simply to get their IELTS level as high as possible. More specifically I guess to give them 2 things: an idea of what's in the exam and exam techniques and approaches, strategies.

6.4.1.3 Teacher E

Teacher E was a full-time lecturer at School C and had had extensive teaching experience both in ESOL and in the secondary school sector. Her highest ESOL qualification was a Diploma in Second Language Teaching and, like the other core teachers on the course, was an IELTS examiner. She took the writing component of the course.

Teacher E saw the course focused on exam preparation aiming to familiarise the students with the exam and teach them appropriate techniques. It was up to the students to improve their language level.

> One hopes that they may improve their English later on but I don't think you can improve their English that much in 5 weeks.

Referring to the Task 1 essay, she commented that, in effect, the task was successful in identifying less able students as they were unable to complete the essay within the allocated time and under test-like conditions.

> There are no tricks you can give them that will make them appear to be better than they are. We just take away the unknown and they have to practise the timing. That's one of the things we can offer them - to just really point out that there is no point doing the practice if they take hours and do revision. They've got to do it in 20 minutes. So I do see it as exam preparation.

All teachers at School C felt that a high percentage of their students went on to actually sit IELTS and that on most courses the majority of students were preparing for the Academic Module for admission to further study. However, in this particular class only 45% of the students stated that they were taking the IELTS course to enter tertiary institutions, others needing it for immigration, entering professional organisations or assessing their level of

language for work purposes. Having to teach this mixture of students preparing for different modules of the test in one class created some difficulties for the teachers. The Programme Co-ordinator explained that the General Training Module students often found the combined classes structure difficult as they tended to be a little intimidated by Academic Module students who were often of a higher level and as a result these General Training Module students often dropped out during the course. Teachers found it challenging to try to cater for both Academic Module and General Training Module students because while the listening and speaking were common to both modules, the reading and writing differed. One measure School C had taken to address this issue was to introduce separate writing classes. But the issue of module was only part of the reason for the differences between students. Another significant feature was the different language levels present in the class, something that itself was seen as being linked to which module students were taking.

As Teacher C explained, no specific level was required for students entering the IELTS course at School C because it was a night class. There was no entrance test and it was explained to the students that they had to have a certain proficiency to be able to benefit from the course. The teachers agreed that the students joining the course usually had a band score between 4 and 7 and felt that because the course was a night exam preparation class the level of students attending tended to be lower than for daytime courses. This range of levels in the class was seen as a problem by Teacher D, who said that identifying the less able users of the language who might need help was further hindered by the large numbers attending. There was a general consensus that the widely varying range of levels in the class was something that had to be managed by the teacher and was not a problem as long as the teacher had some flexibility in the focus and range of materials.

Teacher C commented that students with a lower level of English but who were determined to join the class could still benefit from it, but only if they focused on the General Training module. She added that they should be admitted on the condition that they were not going to take the exam before they were ready. She went on to say that students expected high gains in terms of band score and by the time they realised that this could not be achieved within the short duration of the course, they felt disappointed. She pointed out that due to the large class size, students tended to remain anonymous, something not happening in any of her other classes. She felt students were disappointed at not getting a clear indication of what their band score was.

Overall, teachers reported good feedback from the students about the course. The school had responded to the students' need for individual attention by introducing the one-to-one

interviews but class size was a concern for students as well as the teachers. Teacher E identified student requests for a longer course time and more teaching of grammar as recurring ones but as she pointed out, it was made clear to the students that these elements were not factored in the course.

Teacher E considered that she had a good rapport with students while they were on the course and was a little disappointed when she tried to keep in contact with them after it ended and there was no communication. She reasoned that this was possibly because they failed to achieve their required score.

> … [I] said 'I'd love to know how you get on and please let me know' - I've never had an email from someone who has gone out of here to sit it. So I don't know if that's because they've all failed to get the level they want. That's sort of disappointing because I really try to establish the email relationship where they would just let me know how it went.
>
> If they are very good they get the marks and if they are very poor they won't and if they come to me with about 6, it's possible that this course could get them to 6.5. I would think that about 0.5 is all the difference you could make unless they are people who through a real lack of confidence and who are sort of panicked by the strangeness of it all and in that case just having it explained to them might make a difference.

All four teachers agreed that their students perceived IELTS as a very difficult test but stated at the same time that many had high expectations of their performance and that these issues were addressed to some extent by the completion of the course. Teacher D said that students found the reading and the writing were very hard and that for this reason they preferred to take TOEFL, which they perceived as easier. He commented that students often questioned the reliability of the assessment (they wanted to know about the impartiality and qualifications of the examiners) and the quality of the listening equipment used during in the test in one particular testing centre.

> I think a lot of them come from countries where they tend to be suspicious of bureaucracy. I don't think that they ever consider that they could buy a result, but they tend to be a bit suspicious. But I had one Chinese student who felt that Chinese students were marked harder on the test. I don't know where that impression came from but he was fervent.

A similar comment from Teacher F raised the issue of a lack of trust in the test. He said that his students saw IELTS not only as difficult but also as something subject to circumstances beyond their control such as the examiner they were going to get on the test day.

With regard to the sub-test that the teachers identified as being most difficult for the students, there were slightly different opinions. Teachers D, E and F identified listening as the sub-test their students had most problems with. Teachers C and F identified reading. At the end of the first week students were asked what skills they needed most help with. Most students identified writing, followed by listening, reading and speaking. The teachers reported that their students completed IELTS practice tests but that they did so under exam-like conditions only in the last week of the course. Mostly the practice tests or sections of tests were completed for homework.

6.4.2 Mid-course Interviews

Whereas Teachers A and B had been interviewed on a weekly basis throughout the course, at School C teachers were asked to reflect on each lesson immediately after teaching the class. The reasons for this were mainly practical: the teachers only taught once, or in the case of teacher C, twice a week. In terms of effectively analysing Class C, it is more appropriate to follow each skill area through the course separately, rather than dealing with the whole course week-by-week.

As mentioned, Teacher C was responsible for teaching Reading and Listening. Her reflections on each skill class were recorded separately.

In the first Listening lesson Teacher C gave students an outline of the course including a list of all the IELTS materials which they had access to in the School's library. The format of the Listening test was introduced via a listening exercise taken from the set text. She also collected a sample of writing and some basic information from the class to get a picture of their language level. The focus of the second night was on starting to develop specific listening skills, in listening for details and looking at the different number systems as used in the US and the UK. Teacher C felt it was important as students usually knew something about them but not the full range. Several wanted further chances to listen to the exercises and she took the opportunity to remind them about the resources available in the library, as she wanted to encourage the students to be more autonomous. Another thing she mentioned was having to skip one of the exercises because she ran out of time.

Week 3 began with a revision and further reminders to the students that they were expected to be actively seeking opportunities to listen to English outside class, something Teacher C did not feel they were doing. She wanted to break up the lesson so that it wasn't all 'tape-work'. She felt the group had a few strategies and skills they were using but that she knew that she would go over time for the lesson so did not spend time on specific language issues such as vocabulary. She included an item of radio news to give students the chance to listen to an extended listening text. She wanted to give them some ideas about how to avoid feeling overwhelmed by the huge amounts of information. She felt that students needed to listen for gist and learn to identify chunks of information rather than trying to listen for specific details without considering the context. To this end she suggested that students get additional practice by listening to the radio at home. Teacher C then continued introducing other question types and giving the students more practice picking out key words. She was pleased that the students had some knowledge of different parts of speech as some classes did not.

A practice test was given in the final lesson. Teacher C had to choose a different test to the usual one as she had seen one student using the book it came from. She spent some time on how to complete the answer sheet as "It's always really valuable to have them really familiar with the answer sheet concept, you know, how that's filled in but also the whole thing of - write on your paper then transfer." With this group she noticed the usual intensification of motivation in the last class. Students were suddenly concerned and asking about: 'Can I get away with X, Y and Z answer?. They might have thought 'Yeah, yeah, yeah' in all the practices, but suddenly on the last night it's like 'Yeah, right I really have to listen for endings', or 'I really have to get my spelling sussed'". She felt it was good for them to have a 'reality check'.

As in the first Listening class, Teacher C wanted to use the first Reading lesson to give the students an overview of the reading test and the basic elements of time and question types. Then she wanted to start getting into some of the key skills like skimming and scanning with time limits to help them feel comfortable with global skills like looking at the features of the text. She was also aware of having to 'keep up the pace' because there was a lot she wanted to get through. Materials were taken from the set text. Teacher C was very aware of the different levels present in the class, broadly defined by the AM and GTM modules. She said the exercises she had chosen were good for the first two weeks because it did not matter which stream the students were in. The materials were still challenging for the academic people and manageable for the GTM students, perhaps with the exception of the later section. Another consideration was which materials the students might have accessed in the past. Although she

had planned to do a quick survey of which books the students were familiar with, she had not been able to undertake it.

In the second reading lesson Teacher C wanted slightly longer texts but was not entirely happy with the ones she used. For example, she used an exercise from the school folders for which she adapted extra exercises on the spot because as it existed it was too easy. She used another text which she admitted she would not use again as she did not really understand the point of the exercise as it was presented and felt that even the higher level students had had problems with it. An exercise with linkers she described as 'laboured' and overlapping a lot with reading. Teacher C was aware of the heavy nature of the lesson and consequently ended it with a lighter skimming exercise to ease the tension.

The main goal of the lesson in Week 3 was "…to get them feeling the pressure of a time limit and to have some experience of the different question types, to do more, take more responsibility for checking their own answers". Here she mentioned the level division in the class and how it put an extra pressure on the types of materials she selected. The teacher also talked about the uneasiness she felt at not knowing the names of the students.

Week 4 saw the introduction of more challenging, 'trickier' question types "… to just emphasise that the whole thing, that point that I said about it it's sort of sorting out the sheep from the goats and I think they took that on board". She had decided to stick with the materials from the set text because they raised some active discussion which she thought was constructive.

For the final lesson Teacher C selected a reading test from the same book that she had taken the final listening practice from. She wanted to stress the importance of timing and she noticed that many students were still spending too long on the first section of the test. The lack of time came up again: "And again, similar to last night (Listening class), I feel the lack I suppose of time because we've got two groups we can't really do an in-depth feedback [on the reading texts and tasks]".

Speaking was taught by Teacher D. His aim for the first night was to get the students to know each other; create some rapport with them; give them an outline of the five stages; and try to get them into the habit of providing him with information about their approaches and their answers to problems. Teacher D said that he was not a very materials-based teacher, so he tried to give them a minimum in terms of paper but rather to encourage them to produce and share as much as possible either with him or the class or their partner. He acknowledged that

in the first lesson there was a lot of teacher input but that that would decrease in future lessons. He found that the students were familiar with the basic information about the exam but that following lessons would help fill in the gaps in that knowledge. A slight overlap between what Teacher D had planned and what Teacher F also planned to cover in Lesson 1 caused some on-the-spot planning. He handed out a 'dos and don'ts' sheet because he liked to include materials which contained some practical guidelines. When asked about the materials he used in class, he said that the lessons had been prepared by previous teachers on the course and that he followed them to some extent but a lot of it was not appropriate for use in a classroom. Like Teacher C, Teacher D saw a clear distinction between the more and less competent students. He made comment about the evening time slot of the class, meaning that sometimes students came to class feeling 'a bit dead'.

Revision of the main sections of the test was the goal of the initial part of the second speaking class. Teacher D introduced a video at this stage and showed them the part pertaining to the speaking test to reinforce the structure and give the students some tips.

Teacher D 'despaired with' the third lesson because it isolated question forms, as an area of grammar in which the students were 'very, very weak'. He was at a loss as to the best approach to take and considered changing his programme around so that on the final night of the course they could spend more time doing a straight grammar lesson. When asked about the level of the students, he said some were as low as IELTS band 4 and that now, half way through the course, attendance was starting to dwindle, as was typical. His impression was that it was usually the weaker students who felt out of their depth and dropped out at this stage – "They are all in such a hurry to get on that they try to do it (IELTS) too soon". In the past Teacher D had had some problems with this lesson because he was required to progress onto the next stage of the interview, give an overview and some strategies, but was very conscious that there were people who couldn't "put together a coherent question".

In Week 5 Teacher D decided to keep the material a bit 'looser' because the tape he wanted to use had terrible sound quality. He felt that the lesson lacked structure, however, and he would completely revamp the lesson before presenting it to another class.

On the final day Teacher D took the opportunity to concentrate on revising question forms, an area he had identified the students needing more practice in. He then finished off the lesson by letting the students see the rest of the IELTS video as they had given him feedback that they found it useful, if a bit long.

Teacher E taught the Writing section of the class to the academic students. Of all the teachers at School C, Teacher E was the least reliant on either the set text or the materials provided in the school folders. While she was aware that the school preferred that teachers use the class sets of books, there were some things she wanted students to take home so she sometimes copied materials from the text. She also found that some materials worked better than others and had, over her time teaching on the course, found exercises which she preferred. The first lesson was to make sure the students knew the basic requirements of the writing module. She had identified from the writing sample collected on the first day of the course that their main problem was not what to write, but rather, how to choose amongst all the things they could write about. So the process of selection and organisation under time pressure were the key points of the first writing lesson.

In this interview Teacher E said that she found it strange not spending time getting to know the students but knew that there was no time for that on this kind of course. She thought most of the students were pretty keen but that the level varied. Contrary to her expectation, each IELTS group she taught was different and she rethought her lessons each time.

After reading and correcting the homework set in the first week, Teacher E decided that the lesson she had planned was not appropriate for the group. Although the organisation of their essays was generally acceptable, there were a lot of basic errors in areas such as tenses. There was also a lot of inaccuracy in the interpreting of the graphs. Another problem was the incorrect use of subjects e.g. 'consumer goods increased' rather than 'the production of consumer goods increased'. There was also little variation in the language e.g. too much 'has' rather than 'shows' or 'illustrates'.

In light of these problems she decided to go back over the things she had covered in the previous lesson, using the homework task as the example and focusing on the basics. She planned to give models that the students could look at with gap-fills to help them focus on specific language and parts of the charts. She wanted to work on the known example to allow them to focus on the language and hoped it would not be too repetitious. She planned to give the same example as homework. Teacher E said she realised that the task had some parts that were difficult for the students and would change it for use in the future and use a different one as the first homework.

In Week 3 the class started on Task 2 essays beginning with an analysis of the rubric, brainstorming of ideas, input of some examples and finally some practice. She had decided that the students would be in more familiar territory with this essay type. The students had

found the previous lesson difficult and many had been unsure about the grammar and language used in the examples, so she wanted to avoid that in this lesson.

Some of the fourth lesson was set aside for reviewing essay structure before progressing on to looking at conclusions and doing some grammar and vocabulary work. Due to a shortness of time, Teacher E knew she would not get everything done but wanted to encourage the students to be more productive in class. She described one specific group writing exercise which she thought would work well with the class but had to be discounted as it would have taken at least an hour.

For the final lesson, her aim was to review and test. As she knew time would be short, she picked exercises that would review some aspects of the IELTS writing tasks for students to complete individually and then planned to go over them orally. In the second hour Teacher E had decided to give the students exam practice but ended up giving them the choice of writing practice or continuing to do grammar exercises. To her surprise only one person chose to do the practice essay. Her comment was:

> I ended up sitting there thinking 'Well obviously the next course that should be offered is Grammar help for IELTS' and I'm also realising that a lot of their problem - they do know the basics of writing essays, they do know about the exam, they've got fossilised faults in their grammar and it really does, especially the lack of use of the verbs. The same few faults come through again and again and again.

and,

> I don't think it was so much they wouldn't have practised but they wanted some grammar and it's not offered during the course.

6.4.3 Post-course reflections on the course observed

Upon completion of the course at School C the teachers were asked to reflect on the course. Teacher C felt she had achieved the objectives she set, i.e. to familiarise students with the IELTS test and equip them with strategies to perform well or better in the exam. Teacher D believed he had also achieved his objectives which were to familiarise students with the speaking test and possibly improve their band scores. Teacher E felt she had partly achieved her objectives by giving some of the students more confidence about sitting the exam in that they knew how to approach it and hoping that the level of the students had improved during the course.

Teachers C, D and E felt that the course had gone well. Teacher C mentioned that a potentially disruptive student settled in well and that many students fed back that they had gained valuable strategies from the course. She felt that the group was generally responsive. Teacher D mentioned that participation was patchy due to class sizes. Teacher E said that the measure of the course going reasonably well was, in her opinion, the continued attendance and the responses of the students.

All teachers believed that this course was generally typical of the IELTS course they usually taught. Teacher C added that the materials were essentially the same in every course and because of time constraints, there was little time for much digression or 'tailoring' to a particular group. Teacher E said that the overall level of the students seemed to be lower than some other groups.

Teacher C stated that School C prescribed a minimal percentage of the overall course, the only prescribed element being the one-skill-a-night pattern. Teachers D and E found the question hard to answer, possibly because they were not involved at this level of decision making. Teacher C mentioned that none of the materials they used during the course was prescribed by the School directly; they were simply presented as being a bank of resources which had been used by previous teachers. Teacher C felt that the methodology was not prescribed by the school as there was considerable flexibility apart from the fact that the general culture of the school was based on the communicative model. Teachers D and E agreed that there was considerable flexibility to the methodology they adopted within the range of effective teaching.

All three teachers C, D and E agreed that the IELTS test influenced the content of their course. Teacher C said that the text was closely based on the exam requirements. She felt it was highly motivating for students to feel they were practising closely-aligned tasks, and this was one of the criteria she used when selecting material – that they were IELTS-like. Teacher D mentioned that little work was done outside the constraints of IELTS although he consistently tried to improve proficiency. Teacher E felt that the focus was on preparation for the test, not just to improve the students' writing. Teachers C and D believed that the IELTS test influenced the methodology for this course. Teacher C added that insofar as IELTS is a reflection of the 'revolution' in language teaching (communicative/ deductive, etc.), she believed the methodology she used was in keeping with the exam, including such things as encouraging guessing, communication, real-life language, and globalism (a variety of accents). Teacher E felt that since she could choose the methods that suited her and the class

and her approach varied depending on her perceptions of the class, the IELTS test had not influenced her methodology for this course.

Teachers C and E thought that the IELTS test influenced the feedback they gave during their lesson or the way they gave it (i.e. the assessment criteria they used; their decision to give feedback immediately or to delay it). Teacher C felt however that she was somewhat restricted in how specific she could be in feedback due to the 'inside' knowledge she has of some aspects of the exam, as an examiner and sometime centre co-ordinator. This awareness of maintaining the confidentiality of information held by examiners was also mentioned by Teacher E.

All teachers said that they were willing to make changes to the content of the course they had just taught. Teacher C wanted to discard some confusing exercises, confusing even to a native speaker, in favour of other practice test material. Teacher D would favour a new format for his IELTS speaking, would prefer smaller classes and wanted some demonstration interviews other than video. Teacher E found herself using fewer examples and trying more ways of getting some depth of understanding especially in Task 2. After marking the first set of homework assignments Teacher E recognised that with this particular class:

> …there were a lot of basic errors in areas such as tenses and there was also a lot of inaccuracy in the interpreting of the graphs. Another problem was the incorrect use of subjects e.g. 'consumer goods increased' rather than 'the production of consumer goods increased'. There was also little variation in the language e.g. too much 'has' rather than 'shows' or 'illustrates'.

In light of these problems she decided to re-assess her plan to focus more on 'the basics'.

Teachers C and E favoured some changes to the methodology used in the course. Teacher C said that she incorporated a little more role-play in pairs this time, which seemed to aid the bonding that the class experienced. She would like to try to incorporate more of that. Teacher E would like to talk less and involve the students in some practice instead. Teacher D would stick to his current methodology.

Teacher C said that she would make some changes to the administration of the course. One aspect would be the length of the course, even though that would restrict entrance for other waiting candidates. She also mentioned the entrance requirements which could possibly eliminate those students who seemed to get very little from the course because it was beyond

their level, though perhaps the mere experience helped them (e.g. in deciding to wait longer/ study more before taking the exam). Teacher D thought that the format of the course was good although there could be some changes to assist part-time students getting access to student services after hours.

6.4.4 Post-course reflections on IELTS Teaching (in general)

Teachers C, D, and E were asked about the source of materials they had used in their lessons with Class C. This data was used to assess the level of awareness that the teachers had of the range of materials they used. Their responses appear in Table 1.

			How often?		
Source of Materials	**Y**	**N**	**every lesson**	**many lessons**	**few lessons**
Commercial IELTS textbooks	C, D, E		C, E		D
Other commercial textbooks	D	E			D
Personally designed materials	C, D, E		D	E	C
School designed materials	C, E	D			C, E
Integrated language course textbooks		C, D, E			
Skills focused textbooks	D	C, E		D	
Listening materials similar to the IELTS test	C	D			
Reading materials similar to the IELTS test	C	D			
Writing tasks similar to the IELTS test	E	C, D	E		
Speaking tasks similar to the IELTS test	D	C		D	
Authentic[2] listening		C, D			
Authentic reading materials		C, D			
Authentic writing tasks		C, D, E			D
Authentic speaking tasks	D	C			
Commercial IELTS practice tests	C, E	D		E	C
School designed IELTS practice tests		C, D, E			
Personally designed IELTS practice tests	E	C, D		E	

Table 32: School C – Source of materials used by the teacher

This task showed that the teachers were aware of the sources of materials available to them but that they chose to use IELTS preparation books as their main source of materials. All teachers made use of the practice materials which had been provided by the school, but only Teacher D used materials she had personally designed for the course.

Teachers C, D, and E were given a list of IELTS preparation tasks, adopted from the UCOS and were asked to indicate which ones they did with their students and at what point of the

[2] Materials taken from authentic sources i.e. not written for NNS

course. Their responses appear in Table 33. It should be noted that the writing teacher (Teacher E) said that, although she did not ask the students to consider their strengths and weaknesses with respect to the test, she felt that she should.

	when during the course				
IELTS Preparation Task	**start**	**middle**	**end**	**throughout**	**never**
Give the students tasks under exam conditions			C, E	D, E	
Give the students the test to do at home (self-timed)		E		C	D
Give students feedback in the form of IELTS band scores	C				D, E
Give feedback on student performance item by item				E	C, D
Give students information about what the test might contain (i.e. task or text types)				C, D, E	
Explain the rubric that is likely to be used in the test		D		C, E	
Discuss the requirements of the test with the students				C, D, E	
Ask students to consider their strengths and weaknesses with respect to the test requirements				C	D, E

Table 33: School C – IELTS preparation tasks used in class

With the exception of Teacher E (writing), the teachers did not give feedback to students on their performance item by item. Also, only Teacher C (listening and reading), asked the students to consider their strengths and weakness with respect to the test requirements, possibly a reflection of skills Teacher C was responsible for teaching. The results from the reading and listening sections of the test are easy to quantify objectively. However, all the teachers gave students tasks under exam conditions and test tasks to do at home. They also gave information about what the test might contain, explained rubrics likely to be used in the test and discussed the requirements of the test with the students. Differences in the personal approach of each of the teachers, and the fact that each was responsible for a different skill would influence the variation in the extent to which they used each task

Teachers C, D, and E were asked on what they thought they spent the class time. Only teachers D and E responded. Their answers were compared to the findings of the observation, in cases where a comparable category occurred in COLT or UCOS.

Teacher D

	Perceived	Actual
Giving information about IELTS:	5%	6%
Giving information about IELTS task types:	15%	NA[3]
Giving exam strategies:	50%	6%
Reviewing test-like practice tasks:	10%	NA
Explaining grammar:	10%	13%
Explaining vocabulary:	0%	NA
Explaining discourse features:	10%	3%
Explaining sociolinguistics:	0%	1%

The analysis of the classroom data showed that Teacher D (Speaking) spent 6% of the class time giving the students information on IELTS; 6% on IELTS strategies; 9% on exam-related activities; 13% on vocabulary and grammar related activities (UCOS). Using COLT the same figure was obtained: [Form vocabulary + grammar + pronunciation + spelling + combined vocab & grammar]: 12.5% of the class time devoted to speaking. Teacher D spent 3% of the class time on discourse and 1% on socio-linguistics.

Teacher E

	Perceived	Actual
Giving information about IELTS:	15%	7%
Giving information about IELTS task types:	15%	NA
Giving exam strategies:	20%	14%
Reviewing test-like practice tasks:	40%	NA
Explaining grammar:	5%	21%
Explaining vocabulary:	5%	NA
Explaining discourse features	0%	8%
Explaining socio-linguistics	0%	0%

The analysis of the classroom data showed that Teacher E (Writing) spent 7% of the class time giving the students information on IELTS; 14% on IELTS strategies; 6% on exam-related activities; 21% on vocabulary and grammar related activities (UCOS). Using COLT the same figure was obtained: [Form vocabulary + grammar + pronunciation + spelling + combined vocab & grammar]: 21% of the class time devoted to writing. Teacher E spent 8% on discourse and 0% on socio-linguistics. This comparison shows that there is little consistency or pattern in the teachers' perceptions of the content of their lessons and the way in which the instruments recorded what happened in class. The ways in which individuals

[3] NA= not available from the observation instruments

understood the categories may also have had an influence on how they reported their activities. This comparison illustrated the value of the classroom observations in terms of providing an accurate picture of what occurred in the classes, rather than relying solely on teachers' self-reporting.

Next, the teachers were asked whether the course they had just taught met the needs of this group of learners. The following table captures their responses:

	Yes	No	To some extent
knowledge of the structure of the IELTS exam?	C, D, E		
knowledge of test taking strategies?	C, D, E		
knowledge of the language requirements of the IELTS exam?	C, E		D
improvement in General English proficiency		E	C, D
providing practice under exam conditions	D, E		C
developing study skills appropriate for university study		C, D, E	
an improvement in band score			C, D, E
other (Please explain)			

Table 34: School C – Teachers' perceptions on course outcomes

This section of the questionnaire provided information on two levels. Firstly it showed that the teachers were clear that the course in no way helped the students develop tertiary study skills. Secondly, while a little circumspect, they considered that the course had gone some way to helping the students gain a higher band score on the test. Two of the three teachers also indicated that there had been some improvement of the students' language proficiency, although it is unclear to what extent they considered this as contributing to any score gains. What the teachers were more confident of, justifiably so, was that they had provided their students with ample information about the test.

6.4.5 Teachers' perceptions of teaching IELTS

The School C teachers were asked which elements they did and did not enjoy about teaching IELTS. Teacher C stated that there were four main aspect of teaching IELTS which she liked:

a. "Its clarity: this is the exam, here's some practice: do more in your own time."
b. "Its demystifying function: it is possible to improve your score if you pay attention to developing these skills."
c. "The maturity and motivation of the students."
d. "The straightforwardness of prep and delivery."

Teachers D and E specifically mentioned enjoying having a variety of motivated students with a clear objective to focus on. Teacher E appreciated the fact that the controlled content allowed her more time to work on refining her presentation of the material.

In all cases the teachers at School C singled out the limited time of the course as being a negative feature. They expressed frustration at not being able, within the constraints of the length and structure of the course, to be able to meet the language learning needs of the students. They saw some students struggling and felt that these students were focused on 'preparing for the exam" without a full understanding of where their weaknesses lay and what the most efficient way to do well on the exam was. This also had an impact on the kind of relationships that developed between themselves and the students, and among the students themselves.

The teachers from School C, like Teachers A and B, were each asked to comment on the students in their class. The most common concern was the range of levels of proficiency within the class. Teacher C felt that some students' language level was low, which meant that they struggled with some parts of the class. She identified a more vocal and motivated group of students who tended to sit at the front of the class and asked plenty of questions, especially during task and test feedback sessions. Teachers D and E also spoke of more highly motivated and able students who tended to be more involved in the class activities. Teacher D estimated that the level of the class ranged between 5 and 7.5 on IELTS which was typical of the students to whom he taught IELTS. Teacher E's opinion was that the majority of the class was having more basic writing and grammar problems than usual. These difficulties aside, the teachers were all reasonably happy with the level of motivation of the students.

With a range of abilities in the class, teachers felt that they had to teach to the 'average' student. This meant that the lower students were somewhat left behind and the more able students were not sufficiently challenged. The materials they selected and the activities they used had to be of a generic type and level which were neither too difficult for lower level students nor seen as wasting the time of more capable class members. At this school, with the mix of AM and GTM students there was also the consideration that the majority of the materials in the reading, listening and speaking classes had to be applicable for both modules. This necessitated a compromise on the part of the teachers who recognised the fact that parts of the course might not meet the specific needs of a large proportion of the class in terms of language development. It also meant that there was more onus on the students to take what they needed from the course which was presented to them. The size of the group also had a significant impact. Had the classes been smaller, something that happened to some extent

when the AM and GTM students were divided into groups, the teachers would have been able to adjust the input more appropriately and give individuals more attention. While acknowledging these constraints, the teachers at School C were confident that the students came away from the course with a better understanding of how the test was structured and what it required and this was, after all, what the course set out to do.

In terms of how satisfying it was for the teachers to teach these groups, the class size, the limited number of contact hours with the students and the very nature of a test preparation course was reflected in some of the comments the teachers made.

Teacher C felt there was a range of issues she did not like when teaching IELTS:

a. The lack of time to develop any real relationship with the students
b. The repetition of material every 5 weeks (though of course she could develop alternatives)
c. The hassle of checking enrolment/ fees documentation

Teacher D felt that students often could not see past the exam, giving little thought to how they would cope with the demands of entering tertiary study in an English speaking medium. Teacher D commented that the course provided students with 'exam sitting' skills that had the potential to raise their band scores, but that one consequence of this was that it gave students unrealistic expectations of their ability to cope with tertiary study.

Like the other teachers at School C, Teacher D referred to the lack of time in an intensive course to go into anything in any depth. He made the observation that a small number of students seemed to have been told to do the course but were not self-motivated. He also mentioned the difficulties he experienced with the range of levels in the class and that he tried to pitch the class at an Upper Intermediate level. However, having said that he added that he was extremely conscious of making sure that people in the IELTS band 7 or 8 range did not dominate the class and if necessary he approached them individually to ask them to give others a chance to contribute.

> I think that in a class of 30 the inevitable happens - the good ones get the most benefit and the poor ones struggle. I try to identify the less able users of the language but it is often hard as they are usually the quietest and the noisy wheels tend to get the most attention. It would be better with a class of 12 - 15 - you could identify those people.

He went on to say that:

> The other thing that tends to kick in that I've noticed is that you suddenly find a student that you haven't really noticed in the first 2 weeks suddenly isn't there any more. That would be a reflection of an inability to cope with the level that we are trying to teach at.

There was conflicting feedback from the teachers about how they saw IELTS preparation. On the one hand they felt that the IELTS preparation courses they taught helped the students get a better IELTS score – a realistic belief considering the fact that they volunteered to teach on the courses, but they also felt that course did not necessarily help improve the students' English. For example, Teacher D said, "I'm sure IELTS preparation courses help them get a better score. I'm convinced of that". And then went on to say that:

> Well I don't think it helps proficiency very much. The help it gives proficiency is purely incidental. Really its focus is on getting that IELTS score as high as possible. Preparing them for what is in it and the tricks that they can employ to raise their level. So in some ways I think it does them a disservice.

6.4.6 General comments

The teachers involved in this study were all experienced and qualified in the field. In all cases they had indicated their willingness to teach these IELTS courses. The willingness that these teachers displayed in consenting to be involved in this study added to the fact that all had gone on to become IELTS examiners are factors which should be considered when reviewing their statements for two reasons. Firstly, it shows that the teachers felt that, despite any doubts or misgivings they might have about the test or test preparation classes, they did believe they could help the students in some way by teaching on the courses. Secondly, these teachers were positive enough about the test to remain involved. One could argue that both teaching and examining IELTS offer financial reward; however, in a climate where there is abundant teaching work available, this is perhaps less of an influence.

Teacher C felt that this group really responded to and gained from their involvement in the study. This enhanced the quality of the classroom dynamics, their evaluation feedback and, she believed, their interpersonal relationships. She would be very willing to join with another group in participating in a follow-up study at a later date, for these reasons. She also felt that they all did exceptionally well to stay focused and fresh in some very hot and uncomfortable

conditions for the five-week period and that this was a testimony to the commitment of everyone involved.

6.5 Conclusion

The interviews brought out the point that Courses A and C were much more self-contained than Course B. Teachers A, C, D and E had to teach a "complete" course of IELTS preparation within the one-month period, whereas Teacher B was delivering one of a series of IELTS courses at his school. Teachers at both Schools A and C devoted a significant amount of class time to introducing their students to the test and providing information that the students at School B had received in an earlier course. Furthermore, the students at Schools A and C had come together just for this one course while most of those at School B had continued on from a previous course and were concurrently following the General English programme at the same school in the mornings. Teacher B had the advantage of being able to draw on a course design and bank of materials that had been developed by a team of teachers at his school over several years. By contrast, Teacher A had to depend more on her own resources and the published materials which were available to her. The teachers at School C were in a similar situation. The school provided a set of resources which the teachers were free to draw on and had folders in which previous teachers had collected useful materials. Although in one sense teachers on Courses A and C had the freedom to use whichever materials in whichever way that suited them, in reality they were all constrained by the intensive nature of the courses and the need to give the students a basic knowledge of the test components as well as a certain amount of practice within a short period. There was no time for the language development work or the topic-based study activities that had been incorporated into Course B and their statement indicated a recognition of a perceived gap between teaching IELTS preparation and improving the students' language proficiency.

The observations showed that the teacher at School A did indeed provide students with a significant amount of information about the exam. Here, 13% of the class time was spent providing students with strategies to use in the exam, while just less that two percent involved factual information about the IELTS test. Similarly at School C the overall amount of class time spent with direct reference to the test was high at 14%, again with the main focus on strategies rather than on simply referring to the test per se. Individual teachers, however, each gave it a different focus - Teacher C used 12% of the Listening and 14% of the Reading class time on IELTS information and strategies, Teacher E used 21% of the Writing class time and Teacher D 12% of the Speaking class time for the same purposes. By way of comparison, we

see that only two percent of the class time was used by Teacher B to give test information or test-taking strategies for the exam, with the time shared evenly between the two.

With regard to the effect of IELTS, several observations can be made. Firstly, these test preparation classes were clearly influenced by the test. References to IELTS were numerous in all of the interviews and in the written feedback. However, there were noticeable differences between the way the different teachers presented their course, or in the case of School C, their section of the course. Many of these differences can be linked back to the approaches the individual schools had taken to their courses i.e., the length and structure of the course. Other variations, such as the supplementary materials the teachers' chose, can be put down to the experiences and approach and methodology of the individuals as well as their knowledge of the books and in practical terms the amount of time they could allocate to preparing for the classes.

When reviewing the comments of the teachers, what was most significant were the overall similarities in their responses regarding the good and bad aspects of preparing students for this test. All teachers seemed to enjoy teaching IELTS preparation and were generally positive about the test as an instrument, although they expressed concerns about how it was being used for admission into university. The students were, on the whole, more focussed and motivated than in other, non-exam preparation, classes. All teachers raised the issue of the time and often commented that had the course been longer, then they would have been better able to meet the needs of their students. It is an example of the traditional 'test-preparation' class format focusing primarily on developing test-taking strategies and providing test practice. While the teachers' complaint about time restrictions was most prevalent at Schools A and C, Teacher B also expressed these concerns, indicating that even the extended nature of Course B was still inadequate. Courses which keep the teachers from teaching in a way that they feel would be most beneficial to the students can be considered to be an expression of the negative consequences of the test.

Another issue which can be seen as a negative result of the traditional approach to test-preparation was the effect including in the class students with a range of language abilities – something that was in all cases decided by administrators and out of the teachers' control. Once again, this was more significant at Schools A and C, which ran large IELTS preparation classes and which did not screen students for level prior to commencement of the course. In both cases, running large classes with no minimum level of language ability was a practice that was only used in IELTS test preparation courses. In all other language courses, students were streamed according to proficiency. The negative effects of these decisions were reported

by the teachers, who commented on the less able students being unable to cope with the content of the classes. This limited their participation and, presumably, the effectiveness of the programme and was identified as a possible factor in the large number of students who failed to complete the course. It is important to note here that these decisions regarding the structure and timing of these courses had been made historically and independently of the current teachers.

The approach taken by School B was that IELTS preparation was a part of their General English programme. This impacted positively on the classroom in several ways. It meant that students were streamed according to language ability, only those of an appropriate level were able to attend the preparation class, and the number of students in the class was limited to a maximum of 12. Additionally, all students on Course B were also attending General English classes in the morning, which meant that they had additional language input, whereas, on Courses A and C, students were not required to be undertaking any other training while enrolled in the preparation course. In effect this showed a devaluing of such General English tuition in the eyes of the students compared to classes labelled 'IELTS Preparation' and was a result of the students' perception of what IELTS measured and how best to prepare for it. In the case of School B, the IELTS preparation course had been designed by senior staff members who had significant experience of both preparing students for the test and in making courses. Due to the flexibility of the school's overall programme, they were able to create a course which they considered most appropriate for the students they taught.

Despite their concerns, all the teachers who took part in the study felt that their course had gone some way to improving their students' test performance. While this may not have been borne out in practice, or measured with the methods used here, such positive comments contribute to a positive test effect by giving students more confidence when taking the test while at the same time failing to address the issue of enabling the students to develop adequate language and skills to be able to succeed in a tertiary environment.

CHAPTER 7: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter records how the students felt about the courses and the test itself. While this was not the main focus of the study, it was important to gain some information from the point of view of the students attending the courses. Thus, all students were asked to complete a pre-observation questionnaire which aimed to gather information about their background, English language training, and their perceptions of IELTS, as well as their expectations of the IELTS preparation course. They were also given a questionnaire at the end of the course which asked questions about the course they had just attended and aimed to see if there had been a change in their perceptions of the course or the IELTS exam. The results of the student questionnaires were recorded and analysed.

The observed courses aimed at preparing students to take a test and the implicit and - as can be seen in the teachers' interviews - often explicit goal was to help students improve their scores. Consequently, data on how the students might perform on IELTS before and after the instruction was sought. In the first and last weeks of the course the students took sections of recently retired versions of IELTS as pre- and post-tests. Questionnaires were given to students after both tests to elicit their perceptions of the level of difficulty. At the end of the course, students were offered the opportunity to have a brief informal discussion with the observer. They were also encouraged to raise any concerns about the IELTS test or language learning in general. This chapter records students' opinions as well as the results of the pre- and post-course IELTS tests and questionnaires administered at each school and notes some comparisons between the test results from the three courses.

7.2 School A

7.2.1 Student Questionnaires

Most of the students attending the course at School A were aged between 18 and 25 years old. All of them were Asian and Chinese was the main language. Only three of the 9 students had graduated from university before coming to New Zealand. While studying the IELTS preparation course at School A in the evening, two thirds of the students were also studying English at another language institute for between 20 and 80 hours. Only one student had taken IELTS previously but all intended to take the Academic Module within the next 6 months, 6

students within the next month. At the end of the course these plans had remained unchanged. All needed the exam to meet the requirements for entry into a tertiary institution. Most had to achieve an overall IELTS band score of 6 although 2 needed an average of 6.5. The IELTS results were very important to all the students. In terms of difficulty, on a five-point scale, four students thought the exam was a 4, three gave it a 3 and two a 5.

A set of 8 questions designed to assess the students' knowledge of the IELTS test was given to the students at the start of the course. The same questions were again given in the post-observation questionnaire to determine whether their awareness of the IELTS requirements had changed after the course. The correct answers of the students that completed the relevant section of both the pre- and post-questionnaires were compared:

		Pre Correct	Post Correct	(Post) – (Pre)
a.	The IELTS test includes a section testing grammar	4 Ss	4 Ss	no change
b.	In the speaking module candidates have to both ask and answer questions	7 Ss	9 Ss	+ 2 Ss
c.	Reading and writing together carry more than half of the marks	1 S	3 Ss	+ 2 Ss
d.	Candidates have two opportunities to hear the cassette in the listening module	7 Ss	8 Ss	+ 1 S
e.	Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module	6 Ss	9 Ss	+ 3 Ss
f.	In the listening and reading modules, candidates are given extra time to write their answers on the answer sheet	4 Ss	6 Ss	+ 2 Ss
g.	The reading module has three sections	0 Ss	0 Ss	no change
h.	In the listening module, candidates may have to label a diagram	1 S	6 Ss	+ 5 Ss

Table 35 - Class A: Comparison of pre- and post questionnaire responses

The students obtained a mean score on these items of 3.95 in the pre-course questionnaire as compared to 5.26 in the questionnaire at the end. A t-test (paired sample of two means) showed that this difference was statistically significant ($t=3.75$, $df=18$, $p<.05$), meaning that there was a real increase in their knowledge of the test by the end of the course.

In terms of difficulty, on a five-point scale, one student thought the exam was a 5 (very difficult), four gave it a 4, three gave it a 3, and one student felt it was only a 2. Their perception of how difficult IELTS changed very little during the course.

The students were asked to consider which of the following activities were **useful** to them:

	Pre Preferred by	Post Preferred by	(Post) – (Pre)
Doing practice IELTS tests	5 Ss	8 Ss	+ 3 Ss
Practising writing skills	8 Ss	8 Ss	no change
Practising speaking skills	7 Ss	6 Ss	- 1 S
Practising reading skills	4 Ss	8 Ss	+ 4 Ss
Practising listening skills	5 Ss	9 Ss	+ 4 Ss
Learning exam tips or ways to do better on the test	5 Ss	6 Ss	+ 1 S
Learning the different types of questions in IELTS	6 Ss	4 Ss	- 2 Ss
Studying vocabulary	2 Ss	3 Ss	+ 1 Ss
Reading newspapers and magazines	2 Ss	1 S	- 1 S
Watching TV programs	2 Ss	1 S	- 1 Ss
Learning about different topics	7 Ss	5 Ss	- 2 Ss
Talking with classmates	2 Ss	4 Ss	+ 2 Ss
Studying grammar	1 S	2 Ss	+ 1 Ss
Listening to the news on the radio	5 Ss	4 Ss	- 1 S

Table 36 - Class A: Pre- and post perceptions of 'useful' activities

There was a notable increase in how useful the students found ‘learning reading skills’, and ‘learning writing skills’. The most preferred activities were ‘practising listening skills’ and ‘practising reading skills’ followed by ‘practising writing skills’, and ‘doing practice IELTS tests’.

Table 37 presents the results of the section of the questionnaire where students at Class A were asked to rank the 3 most important reasons they were taking this IELTS preparation course.

Reason	Importance 1 most important	2	3	0 not important at all
Find out more about structure of test	0	0	2	7
Find out better ways to answer questions	3	1	1	4
Improve General English level	1	2	1	5
Practise exam under exam conditions	0	4	1	4
Learn study skills to help me at Uni	0	2	2	5
Get a higher band score	5	0	2	2
Other	0	0	0	9

number of students that consider 'exam conditions' their number 3 priority

Table 37: Ranking of reasons for which students take class A

All 9 students confirmed that they were going to take IELTS. The number of students that planned to take the test between August and September 2000 remained the same during the course. Most still planned to take the Academic module for entry to a tertiary institution, although two switched to another module. The most common band score students said they needed for admission was 6 (4 of 9 students) followed by 6.5 (2 students), and 5 (1 student).

In the pre-observation questionnaire two thirds of the students were planning to study English at another language institute. This was confirmed in the post-observation questionnaire where the same number stated that they had been taking another English course, for between 20 and 80 hours, at the same time as the IELTS preparation course at School A.

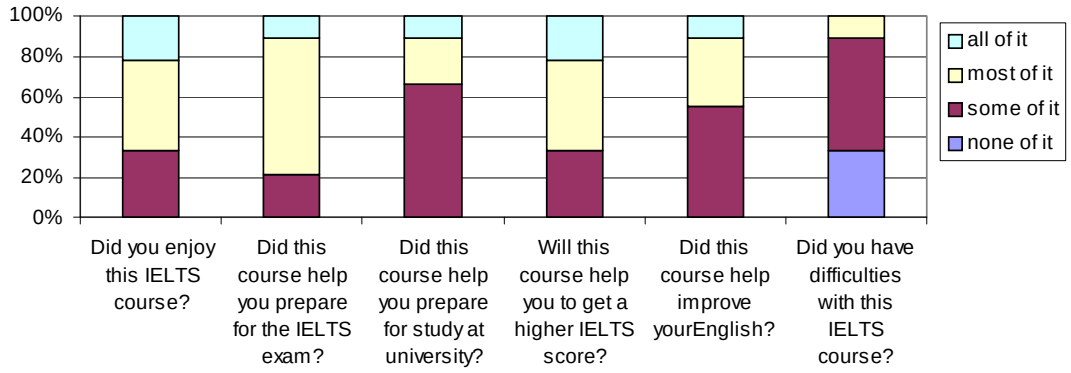

Figure 3 - Class A: Student perceptions

Figure 3 shows that students were generally happy with the most, if not all of the course they had taken, with a similar response to the question of whether the course had helped them improve their chances of gaining a higher band score on IELTS. The students felt that while the course had prepared them well for the test, it had been less supportive of their future university studies. A number admitted having problems with some aspects of the course. Although the data was returned anonymously, it seemed that it was the students with a lower level of proficiency who were more likely to encounter difficulties. In response to how much they had enjoyed the class, the students reported that they were happy with the majority of the course.

7.3 School B

The 8 students who attended the month long course at School B ranged in age from 17 to 45 but most were between 18 and 25. Six Asian nationalities were represented and Chinese was, as in School A, the main first language of the learners. Most of the students had already graduated from university in their home country, a point of difference from the students at School A.

Three students stated that they had been learning English for less than a year but between 4 and 9 years was typical. Half the class had already taken IELTS once before. All students on this course studied General English for 3 hours every morning for the duration of the IELTS course, a total of 60 hours. In the pre-observation questionnaire, all students planned to take the IELTS exam. One planned to sit during the month of the observation, 3 the following month but half of the class intended to take the Academic version of the exam after 4 – 6 months. By the end of the course one student had decided not to take the exam. The majority of the students were interested in getting a good IELTS band score in order to enter university. Students needed to achieve an overall band score of between 6 and 7. As in School A, all the students saw the exam results as very important. In terms of difficulty, on a five-point scale 2 scored it a ‘5’half the students rated it ‘4’, and 2 gave it ‘3’.

The same set of 8 questions designed to assess the students’ knowledge of the IELTS test was given to the students at the start and end of the course to determine whether their awareness of the IELTS requirements had changed after the course.

Correct answers were as follows:

		Pre Correct	Post Correct	(Post) – (Pre)
a.	The IELTS test includes a section testing grammar	6 Ss	7 Ss	+ 1 S
b.	In the speaking module candidates have to both ask and answer questions	8 Ss	8 Ss	no change
c.	Reading and writing together carry more than half of the marks	3 S	3 Ss	no change
d.	Candidates have two opportunities to hear the cassette in the listening module	7 Ss	8 Ss	+ 1 S
e.	Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module	8 Ss	8 Ss	no change
f.	In the listening and reading modules, candidates are given extra time to write their answers on the answer sheet	3 Ss	4 Ss	+ 1 S
g.	The reading module has three sections	1 S	0 Ss	- 1 S
h.	In the listening module, candidates may have to label a diagram	2 S	3 Ss	+ 1 S

Table 38 - Class B: Comparison of pre- and post questionnaire responses

The correct answers of the 9 students that completed the relevant section of both the pre- and the post-questionnaire were compared. The t-test (paired two sample for means) showed that the slight increase in the correct answers in the post-questionnaire was not significant. The results were not significant for School B either when analysed per question or per student. It should be noted however that on average, the students at School B gave more correct answers than those at the other two schools even at the beginning of the course, possibly as a result of most of them having taken previously other IELTS courses.

The students were asked to consider which of the following activities were **useful** to them. The differences in their responses are recorded here:

	Pre	Post	
	Preferred by	Preferred by	(Post) – (Pre)
Doing practice IELTS tests	6 Ss	8 Ss	+ 2 Ss
Practising writing skills	7 Ss	5 Ss	- 2 Ss
Practising speaking skills	5 Ss	5 Ss	no change
Practising reading skills	5 Ss	8 Ss	+ 3 Ss
Practising listening skills	5 Ss	4 Ss	- 1 S
Learning exam tips or ways to do better on the test	3 Ss	5 Ss	+ 2 Ss
Learning the different types of questions in IELTS	2 Ss	5 Ss	+ 3 Ss
Studying vocabulary	4 Ss	4 Ss	no change
Reading newspapers and magazines	3 Ss	5 Ss	+ 2 Ss
Watching TV programs	3 Ss	5 Ss	+ 2 Ss
Learning about different topics	3 Ss	6 Ss	+ 3 Ss
Talking with classmates	3 Ss	4 Ss	+ 1 S
Studying grammar	3 Ss	2 Ss	- 1 S
Listening to the news on the radio	2 Ss	6 Ss	+ 4 Ss

Table 39 - Class B: Pre- and post perceptions of 'useful' activities

There was a notably increased preference in ‘listening to the news on the radio’. The most preferred activities were ‘doing practice IELTS tests’, and ‘practising reading skills’.

The students at Class B were asked what were the 3 most important reasons (1st 2nd & 3rd) they were taking this IELTS preparation course. Responses appear in Table 40.

	Importance			
Reason	1 most important	2	3	0 not important at all
Find out more about structure of test	2	0	0	6
Find out better ways to answer questions	0	1	2	5
Improve General English level	2	3	0	3
Practise exam under exam conditions	0	1	2	5
Learn study skills to help me at Uni	1	2	2	3
Get a higher band score	3	1	2	2
Other	0	0	0	8

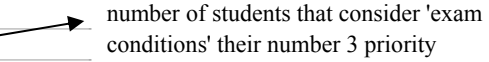

Table 40: Ranking of reasons for which students take class B

In the pre-observation questionnaire all students stated that they were planning to study English for 3 hours every morning for the duration of the IELTS course – a total of 60 hours additional tuition. This was confirmed in the post-observation questionnaire. Most students (7 of 8) re-affirmed that they were going to take the IELTS test. The number of students that planned to take the test between September and October 2000 increased to 5. All 7 students who were going to take the test were planning to take the Academic module and 6 wanted IELTS for entry to a tertiary institution.

The most common band score needed was 6.0 or 6.5 (4 of 8 students needed 6.5) and one student needed a 7.

Students at School B indicated that they enjoyed the majority of the course. In terms of whether or not the course helped them prepare for the exam they were even more positive, with four saying that all of it helped and three saying 'most'. The data indicated that the course was pitched at an acceptable level, with only one student responding that they had problems with all of the course. The students were confident the course had helped them prepare for the test and to get a higher IELTS score and, with the exception of one response, were equally sure that it had improved their English. The question about how well the course assisted in preparing students for university study, four answered that either 'all' or 'some' had been useful.

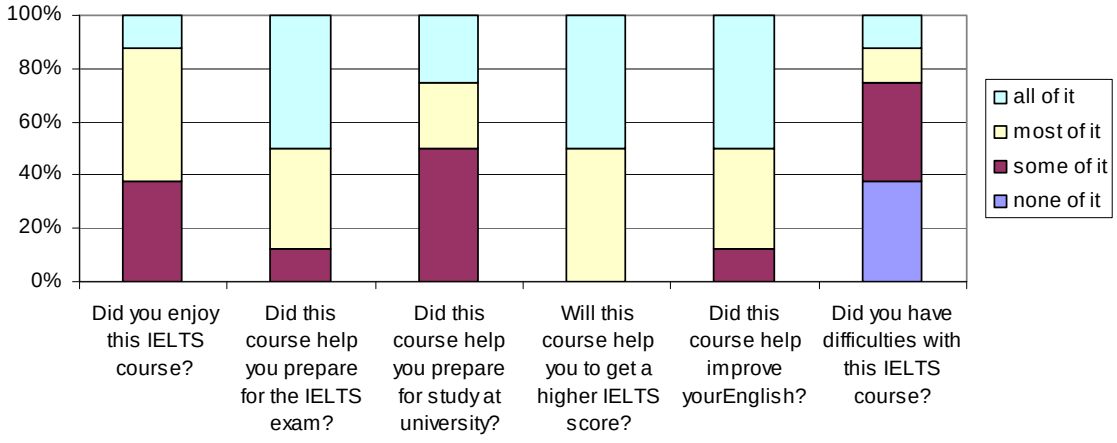

Figure 4 - Class B: Student perceptions

According to Figure 4, the students in Class B generally enjoyed their course and thought that it had improved their English. They felt it prepared them both for the test, and for their tertiary studies. In terms of whether or not it had helped them gain a higher test score, the consensus was that most, if not all of it had.

7.4 School C

The class at School C began with 28 students but most days there were approximately 25 students present. Of these, 22 were present for the pre and post-listening and reading tests, and 15 for the pre and post-writing tests. Most of the students attending the course at School C were aged between 18 and 35 (12 students between 18-25 years of age and 10 students between 26-35). Almost all students were Asian (26 of 28) and Chinese was the main language of just over half the class (17 of the 28 students).

Most students (12 of 28) had studied English for more than 10 years before taking the course offered at School C. They were followed by 5 students between 7 and 9 years and 6 students between 1 to 3 years.

The majority of the students (21 of 28) had not taken IELTS before, nor had they done an IELTS preparation course. Seven students had taken the test previously. Half the students intended to take the test. Most students (17 of 28) were University graduates.

Most students (15 of 28) primarily wanted IELTS for entry to a tertiary institution; 9 needed it for immigration; 8 for entry into a professional organisation; 6 to assess their level of English and 2 as a general language qualification. Some students stated more than one reason. The majority (19 of 28) planned to take the Academic module. As in Schools A and B, all the students saw the exam results as very important. In terms of difficulty, on a five-point scale, 6 students rated it '5' (very difficult), 9 rated it '4', and 11 gave it a '3'.

As with the other classes, a set of 8 questions designed to assess the students' knowledge of the IELTS test was given to the students. The same questions were again given to the students in the post-observation questionnaire to determine whether their awareness of the IELTS requirements had changed after the course. In the pre-observation questionnaire correct answers were as follows:

		Pre Correct	Post Correct	(Post) – (Pre)
a.	The IELTS test includes a section testing grammar	7 Ss	7 Ss	no change
b.	In the speaking module candidates have to both ask and answer questions	15 Ss	19 Ss	+ 4 Ss
c.	Reading and writing together carry more than half of the marks	5 Ss	9 Ss	+ 4 Ss
d.	Candidates have two opportunities to hear the cassette in the listening module	16 Ss	17 Ss	+ 1 S
e.	Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module	10 Ss	18 Ss	+ 8 Ss
f.	In the listening and reading modules, candidates are given extra time to write their answers on the answer sheet	9 Ss	13 Ss	+ 4 Ss
g.	The reading module has three sections	3 Ss	2 Ss	- 1 S
h.	In the listening module, candidates may have to label a diagram	10 Ss	15 Ss	+ 5 Ss

Table 41 - Class C: Comparison of pre- and post questionnaire responses

To determine whether the students that dropped out of the course altered the outcome, the correct answers of the 19 students that completed the relevant section of both the pre- and the post-questionnaire were compared.

At School C t-tests indicated that at the 0.05 level, the results were not statistically significant when run by question. However when the responses of the pre and post questionnaires were compared by student, the results were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. In this respect School C was the only school which showed any significant result. Perhaps relevant here is the section of the UCOS analysis which showed that 5.2% of total class time at School C was spent on information about the test, compared to 1.6% and 1% respectively at Schools A and B.

The students were again asked to consider which of the following activities were **useful** to them:

	Pre	Post	
	Preferred by	Preferred by	(Post) – (Pre)
Doing practice IELTS tests	13 Ss	18 Ss	+ 5 Ss
Practising writing skills	15 Ss	16 Ss	+ 1 S
Practising speaking skills	15 Ss	13 Ss	- 2 Ss
Practising reading skills	14 Ss	15 Ss	+1 S
Practising listening skills	15 Ss	14 Ss	- 1 S
Learning exam tips or ways to do better on the test	13 Ss	13 Ss	no change
Learning the different types of questions in IELTS	13 Ss	15 Ss	+ 2 Ss
Studying vocabulary	8 Ss	11 Ss	+ 3 Ss
Reading newspapers and magazines	8 Ss	10 Ss	+ 2 Ss
Watching TV programs	7 Ss	10 Ss	+ 3 Ss
Learning about different topics	8 Ss	9 Ss	+ 1 S
Talking with classmates	7 Ss	7 Ss	no change
Studying grammar	7 Ss	10 Ss	+ 3 Ss
Listening to the news on the radio	6 Ss	11 Ss	+ 5 Ss

Table 42 - Class C: Pre- and post perceptions of 'useful' activities

There was a notably increased preference for ‘doing practice IELTS tests’, and ‘listening to news on the radio’. The most preferred activity was ‘doing practice IELTS tests’.

The students at Class C were asked what were the 3 most important reasons (1st 2nd & 3rd) they were taking this IELTS preparation course. Responses appear in Table 14.

	Importance			
Reason	1 most important	2	3	0 not important at all
Find out more about structure of test	1	5	1	22
Find out better ways to answer questions	3	8	5	13
Improve General English level	3	3	10	13
Practise exam under exam conditions	6	3	3	17
Learn study skills to help me at Uni	3	6	3	17
Get a higher band score	12	3	5	9
Other	0	0	0	29

number of students that consider 'exam conditions' their number 3 priority

Table 43: Ranking of reasons for which students take class C

About half the students (15 of 28) were not going to be studying any other English course during the time of the IELTS preparation course. Of the other 13 students, 10 were going to attend a General English course full-time.

7.4.1 Weekly Feedback

At the end of each of the 5 weeks of the course at School C, to evaluate which were the most useful lessons/ activities, the students were asked the following questions:

- How useful was each individual lesson? (a 1 to 5 scale was provided with 1 meaning 'not very useful' and 5 'very useful')
- What was the most useful part? (the main features of each lesson were to be ordered from most to least useful)
- Did you have any comments about the lesson?

a. Perceived usefulness of individual lessons

The number of students that responded varied from 19 (Day 1) to 10 (Day 20). On average (Day 1 to 20) in terms of usefulness, 38% of the students rated the lessons as '5' considering them 'most useful', 36% rated them '4', 19% rated them '3' and 5% '1'. However, when the results are sorted by skill, it can be seen that students were more satisfied with the Reading and Listening lessons, followed by Writing and Speaking.

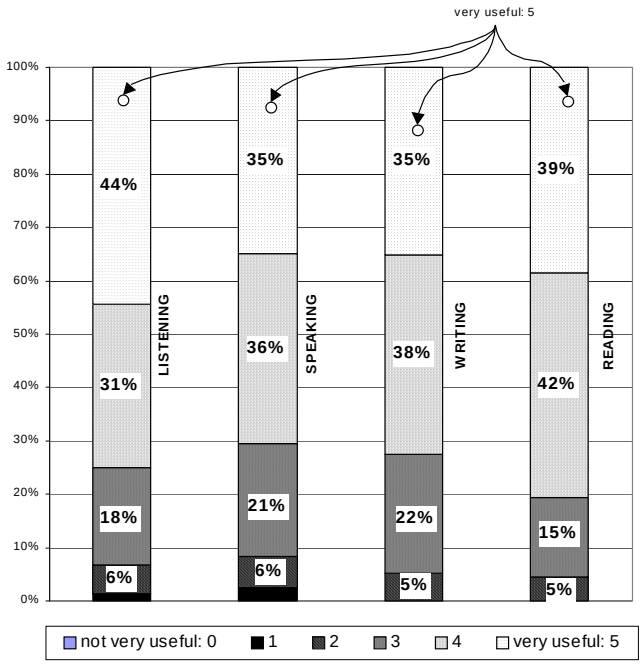

Figure 5: Usefulness of individual lessons sorted per skill

b. Ranking of main features of each lesson

On the weekly questionnaire, the key activities of each lesson were identified, up to a maximum of five, and listed in the order they occurred in the class. Students were asked to rate the activities by selecting the three most useful and ranking them in from 1(most useful) to 3 (least useful). Due to fluctuating attendance, the number of students responding to this questionnaire each week varied, and so the information on their preference was recorded as percentages. As each lesson focused on one of the four skills they were analysed separately by skill. The reference numbers indicate the day that the activity occurred and the Roman numerals refer to the order they occurred in the class and therefore the order they were listed on the questionnaire. The results from each week were compiled to create an overall list for the whole course. The results of this analysis should be viewed as an indication of the students' perception of the usefulness of the activities. While it would have been preferable from a statistical point of view to survey the class about the activities at the end of the course, it was felt that the students were unlikely to be able to have any reliable recollection of lessons they had attended several weeks previously.

The table lists the listening activities, with the ones considered most useful by the greatest number of students at the top. These figures represent a weighted average with the item rated 'most important' represented by 3; 2 for the second choice; 1 for the third choice.

		Importance			
Day	Options	1 most important	2 .	3 least important	weighted average
13-iii	Practice and strategies for sentence completion questions	68.8%	6.3%	25.0%	2.44
1-iii	Learning to predict answers	42.1%	42.1%	10.5%	2.21
17-iv	Listening exam practice (full test)	41.2%	17.6%	5.9%	1.65
1-iv	Listening practice - numbers and similar sounding words	26.3%	26.3%	26.3%	1.58
13-ii	Practice and strategies for short answer questions	6.3%	50.0%	37.5%	1.56
1-ii	Introduction to the IELTS Listening test	31.6%	10.5%	31.6%	1.47
17-i	Hints for the listening test	29%	17.6%	23.5%	1.47
17-ii	Ideas for practicing listening outside the class	17.6%	35.3%	23.5%	1.47
9-iii	Listening for specific information	16.7%	27.8%	33.3%	1.39
5-i	Listening to numbers and letters	22%	22.2%	27.8%	1.39
9-iv	Listening for specific vocabulary	33.3%	5.6%	22.2%	1.33
5-ii	Listening for differences between charts and graphs	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	1.33
9-v	Predicting the content of a listening	22%	27.8%	11.1%	1.33
5-iii	Listening for differences in descriptions of people	22.2%	22.2%	16.7%	1.28
9-ii	Listening skills practice:features, accuracy, predicting vocab	16.7%	22.2%	22.2%	1.17
13-i	Practice and strategies for multi-choice questions	19%	25.0%	12.5%	1.19
5-iv	Practising filling out forms	22.2%	11.1%	16.7%	1.06
5-v	Listening for exact meaning	11%	22.2%	16.7%	0.94
17-v	Review of the practice test	5.9%	11.8%	41.2%	0.82
13-iv	Practice and strategies for diagram completion questions	6.3%	18.8%	25.0%	0.81
9-i	Listening strategies	11%	16.7%	11.1%	0.78
17-iii	How to fill in the listening answer sheet	5.9%	17.6%	5.9%	0.59
1-i	General introduction to the course and IELTS test	0%	15.8%	15.8%	0.47
1-v	Writing about why you want to do IELTS	0%	5.3%	15.8%	0.26

Table 44: School C - Listening activities ranked by students in order of preference

Speaking activities were ranked in order preference by descending priority (most popular at the top, i.e. an average of 3 means that all the Ss ranked the activity as the most important). The data suggests that students were aware of a weakness in their ability to ask questions accurately as the first two speaking activities listed relate to forming questions. The third item on the list is also related to language analysis – exploring different ways to speak about future time. Activities specifically related to the format or test-taking strategies appear third and fourth in the ranking.

Day	Options	Importance 1 most important	2	3 least important	weighted average
2-ii	Practicing asking questions	42.1%	26.3%	21.1%	2.00
11-ii	Different types of questions (grammar)	46.7%	20.0%	13.3%	1.93
15-iii	Vocabulary for talking about future plans	26.7%	40.0%	26.7%	1.87
6-ii	Identifying possible difficult parts of the test	36.8%	26.3%	15.8%	1.79
6-iii	Strategies and language to help with difficult parts	26.3%	36.8%	21.1%	1.74
19-iii	Stage 3 - question practice	23.5%	29.4%	35.3%	1.65
19-i	Review of the speaking test	35%	17.6%	23.5%	1.65
19-ii	Stage 5 - dos and don'ts	23.5%	23.5%	35.3%	1.53
11-iii	Understanding the prompt card	20.0%	26.7%	26.7%	1.40
2-iv	Strategies for the Speaking test (dos and don'ts)	21.1%	21.1%	31.6%	1.37
15-iv	Sample answers to Stage 4 - making longer answers	26.7%	0.0%	46.7%	1.27
15-ii	Grammar for talking about future plans	20.0%	33.3%	6.7%	1.33
19-iv	IELTS video	17.6%	29.4%	5.9%	1.18
6-i	Revision of the 5 Stages of the speaking test	16%	21.1%	15.8%	1.05
15-i	Practice of Stage 4	20%	20.0%	6.7%	1.07
2-i	General introduction to the course and IELTS Speaking Test	16%	15.8%	21.1%	1.00
11-v	Practice of Stage 3	20%	6.7%	20.0%	0.93
11-i	Summary of Stage 3 of the interview	13%	26.7%	6.7%	1.00
2-v	Practicing Phase 2 questions with a partner	16%	21.1%	5.3%	0.95
6-iv	Practising Phase 2 questions with a partner	10.5%	10.5%	26.3%	0.79
11-iv	Pronunciation of question structures	0.0%	20.0%	33.3%	0.73
2-iii	Filling out a CV form	5.3%	15.8%	21.1%	0.68
6-v	List of dos and don'ts for the speaking test	11%	5.3%	21.1%	0.63
15-v	Tips for Stage 4	7%	6.7%	13.3%	0.47

Table 45: School C - Speaking activities ranked by students in order of preference

Each of the writing activities was ranked in order preference by descending priority (most popular at the top). As with the speaking activities, the first item on the list was language rather than test focused, with students preferring grammar exercises. Learning how to brainstorm ideas to write about was also seen as a useful exercise, followed by a task in which the students explored ways to better understand and explain the key elements of graphs.

.	.	Importance			.
.	.	1	2	3	.
Day	Options	most important	.	least important	weighted average
20-iv	Grammar exercises	70.0%	0.0%	20.0%	2.30
12-ii	Finding ideas to write about	38.5%	46.2%	15.4%	2.23
3-iii	Understanding and describing visual data	41.7%	25.0%	16.7%	1.92
7-ii	Language to describe changes in trends	45.5%	27.3%	0.0%	1.91
3-iv	Planning and organising your Task 1 answer	25.0%	50.0%	16.7%	1.92
12-iii	The topic and the focus	30.8%	23.1%	30.8%	1.69
16-v	Language for linking and sequencing	36%	9.1%	36.4%	1.64
3-v	Language to describe data	25%	16.7%	41.7%	1.50
7-iii	Paragraphing and ordering sentences	18.2%	36.4%	27.3%	1.55
16-ii	Paragraphs - analysing examples	27.3%	9.1%	36.4%	1.36
16-iii	The writing process	27.3%	27.3%	9.1%	1.45
16-i	Writing simple and complex sentences	9%	54.5%	9.1%	1.45
20-i	Identifying features in Task 1	30%	10.0%	20.0%	1.30
7-iv	Making comparisons	18.2%	18.2%	36.4%	1.27
20-ii	Gapfill - intro & body	0.0%	50.0%	30.0%	1.30
12-i	Comparing Tasks 1 and 2	15%	30.8%	15.4%	1.23
7-i	Revision of Lesson 1 - analysing and organising information	18%	9.1%	9.1%	0.82
20-iii	Vocan gapfill	0.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.60
12-iv	Parts of an essay	7.7%	0.0%	30.8%	0.54
7-v	Language of comparisons	0%	9.1%	27.3%	0.45
20-v	Practise writing tests	0%	20.0%	10.0%	0.50
3-ii	Learning about how Task 1 is marked	0.0%	8.3%	16.7%	0.33
3-i	General introduction to the course and IELTS Writing Test	8%	0.0%	8.3%	0.33
12-v	Practise turning statements into a focus question	8%	0.0%	7.7%	0.31
16-iv	Writing practice	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	0.09

Table 46: School C - Writing activities ranked by students in order of preference

In the same way, reading activities ranked in order of student preference by descending priority (most popular at the top). This table highlights the high value that students placed on completing practice reading tests and sections of test, and on reviewing the answers to these tasks. The importance of skills related to the practice of strategies for specific task types was the next most important followed by more general reading strategies such as skimming and scanning.

Day	Options	Importance 1 most important	2	3 least important	weighted average
18-ii	Reading exam practice (full test)	76.5%	17.6%	5.9%	2.71
14-iii	Practice and strategies for T/F/NG questions	37.5%	31.3%	12.5%	1.88
18-iii	Revision of the practice exam	11.8%	58.8%	29.4%	1.82
4-iii	Skimming and scanning skills	31.6%	31.6%	10.5%	1.68
10-ii	How to complete multi-choice questions	33.3%	16.7%	22.2%	1.56
18-i	Revision of the reading homework	12%	23.5%	64.7%	1.47
4-iv	Pre-reading strategies	21.1%	36.8%	15.8%	1.53
8-iii	Understanding relationships	27.8%	16.7%	27.8%	1.44
8-v	Scanning practice	22%	27.8%	22.2%	1.44
4-ii	Learning about diagrams, tables, titles and headings	15.8%	31.6%	31.6%	1.42
10-iii	How to complete short answer questions	11.1%	44.4%	22.2%	1.44
8-ii	Identifying important info in a text	22.2%	33.3%	11.1%	1.44
14-ii	Practice and strategies for heading bank questions	18.8%	18.8%	31.3%	1.25
10-iv	How to compete sentence completion questions	22.2%	16.7%	16.7%	1.17
14-iv	Practice and strategies for classification questions	25.0%	6.3%	25.0%	1.13
8-iv	Linking words	16.7%	16.7%	22.2%	1.06
14-v	Practice and strategies for matching questions	13%	25.0%	12.5%	1.00
10-i	Question types in the reading	17%	11.1%	22.2%	0.94
10-v	How to complete notes/summary completion questions	17%	11.1%	16.7%	0.89
4-i	General introduction to the course and IELTS Reading Test	21%	0.0%	15.8%	0.79
14-i	Revision of the reading homework	6%	18.8%	18.8%	0.75
8-i	Homework check	11%	5.6%	16.7%	0.61
4-v	Vocabulary strategies	11%	0.0%	26.3%	0.58

Table 47: School C - Reading activities ranked by students in order of preference

c. Other comments

Each week the students were asked whether the amount of homework had been appropriate. The majority felt that they had been given the right amount. Detailed results are shown in Table 48.

Options	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	avg.
Yes	78.9%	78.9%	50.0%	85.7%	82.4%	75.2%
Too much	10.5%	7.0%	5.6%	0.0%	5.9%	5.8%
Too little	10.5%	14.0%	44.4%	14.3%	11.8%	19.0%

Table 48: Amount of homework

As the course progressed, an increasing number of students felt that the language level was appropriate. This may have indicated that the students were becoming more comfortable with the class structure and content. However, the numbers of students who responded to these questionnaires was not consistent and these figures may have been influenced by the number of weaker students who dropped out of the course before it ended. Detailed results are shown in Table 49.

Options	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	avg.
Yes	73.7%	78.9%	88.9%	92.9%	88.2%	84.5%
Too easy	5.3%	5.3%	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%
Too difficult	21.1%	15.8%	5.6%	7.1%	11.8%	12.3%

Table 49: Language level

At the end of the first week students were asked what skills they needed most help with. Most students identified writing, followed by reading, listening and speaking.

7.4.2 Post-observation Questionnaire

In the pre-observation questionnaire just under half the students (15 of 28) stated that they were not going to be studying any other English course during the time of the IELTS preparation course. Out of 13 students who were going to be attending another course at the same time, 10 were going to attend a General English course full-time. This was not quite the same as in the post-observation questionnaire, where 15 of 20 students stated that they did not receive any other form of formal language training while doing the IELTS preparation course.

All 20 students that answered the post-observation questionnaire re-affirmed that they were going to take the IELTS test. The number of students that planned to take the test within March 2001 increased during the course (11 of 28 in the pre-questionnaire, 15 in the post questionnaire). Most (14 of 20) were still planning to take the Academic module and 9 of 20 primarily wanted IELTS for entry to a tertiary institution. The most common band score needed was 6.5 (5 of 20 students) followed by 5 (4 students), 7 (3 students), 7.5 and 6 (2 students in each case) and 5.5 (1 student). Of the 11 students who did not want IELTS for university study; 4 needed it for immigration; 4 for entry to a professional organisation; 2 to assess their level of English and 1 for work purposes. Most students (10 of 20) were not certain whether they would get their desired IELTS score this time; 7 thought they would not get it and 3 that they would.

The standard questionnaires were given to this group of students at the beginning and end of the course. The section looking at any change in the students' knowledge of the test showed the following:

		Pre Correct	Post Correct	(Post) – (Pre)
a.	The IELTS test includes a section testing grammar	7 Ss	7 Ss	no change
b.	In the speaking module candidates have to both ask and answer questions	15 Ss	19 Ss	+ 4 Ss
c.	Reading and writing together carry more than half of the marks	5 Ss	9 Ss	+ 4 Ss
d.	Candidates have two opportunities to hear the cassette in the listening module	16 Ss	17 Ss	+ 1 S
e.	Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module	10 Ss	18 Ss	+ 8 Ss
f.	In the listening and reading modules, candidates are given extra time to write their answers on the answer sheet	9 Ss	13 Ss	+ 4 Ss
g.	The reading module has three sections	3 Ss	2 Ss	- 1 S
h.	In the listening module, candidates may have to label a diagram	10 Ss	15 Ss	+ 5 Ss

Table 50 - Class C: Comparison of pre- and post questionnaire responses

This section of the questionnaire indicated that during the course the majority of the students gained some knowledge about the structure of the IELTS test. Results of interest include the comparatively small number of correct responses to the question about how grammar is tested in IELTS. Many students were unsure whether or not there was a separate grammar section in the test and this result did not change with the post-test. The question which proved most difficult for the students was the number of sections in the reading test, with only three students in the pre-test answering correctly that there are three parts.

The mean pre- and post-test correct answers for each class were compared using a paired t-test. The difference for Class C was significant at the 0.05 level ($t = 2.10$ (two-tailed); $df = 18$; $p = 0.001 < 0.05$). The Further Analysis in Chapter 5 indicated that Students in Class C received up to 5 times more information on IELTS compared to students in Classes A and B. Thus, the large amount of class time devoted to IELTS information seemed to pay off for the students in Course C. In Classes A and B the comparison of the means proved not significant at the 0.05 level.

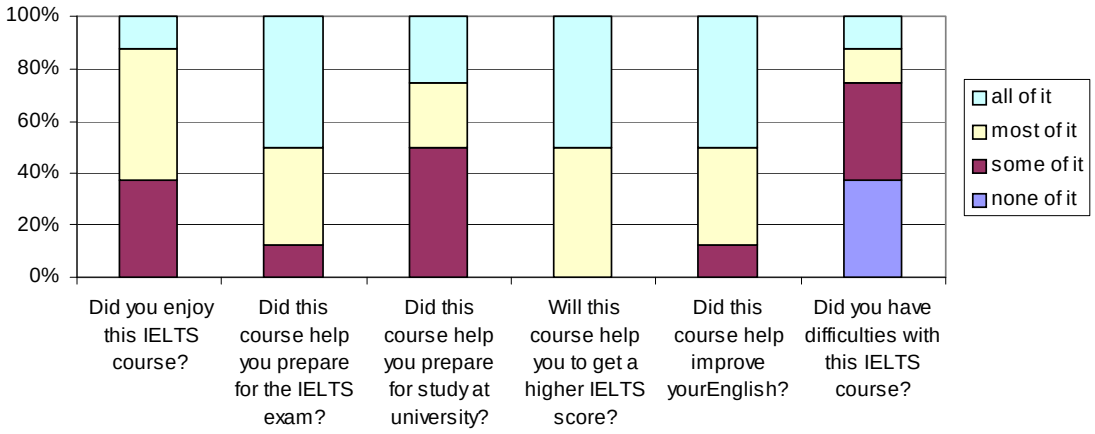

Figure 6 - Class C: Student perceptions

In a result similar to the other two schools, the students at School C enjoyed most of the course. Around half of the responding students thought that 'most' of the course helped them prepare for and gain a higher score on the IELTS exam while at the same time helping them to improve their English, but in general they did not consider that the course prepared them as well for university. The majority of students had few problems with the course, however three of the twenty respondents said they could not understand what the teacher was talking about.

One of the questions asked if there was anything extra that they wanted to study that had not been included in this course. Three quarters of the students said that the course was 'too short', indicating that 8 to 12 weeks would have been preferable. This was the only identifiable pattern to the responses.

	Importance		
Ss' suggestions	1 most important	2	3 least important
more IELTS info	2	0	0
more IELTS strategies	0	2	7
more exam practice	11	2	2
more vocab & grammar practice	2	8	0
other	0	0	2

number of Ss that think the course was 'too short' and consider 'more exam practice' their no. 2 priority

Table 51: Additional topics (Students' suggestions)

In terms of difficulty, on a five-point scale, nine students thought the exam was a 4, eight gave it a 3, two a 5 and one student gave it 1. Comparatively, the students' perception of how

difficult IELTS was seemed to change very little during the course (more students thought in the post questionnaire that it was a 4 rather than 5).

There was no obvious consensus as to the best parts of this course. Similarly, there was a range of responses regarding things the students disliked, ranging from classmates talking on mobiles in class, to too much (or too little) speaking, too much info about IELTS and the short duration of the course. Suggestions for improvement included increased duration, some emphasis on improving English level – not just IELTS info/strategies, more practice needed, and increased student participation ("Teachers speak mostly, Students should be more involved").

7.4.3 School C Feedback

In addition to the post-observation questionnaire for this study, the students filled in a feedback form designed by School C. This form was administered at the conclusion of each course. The results were made available for this study and are presented in Table 21. They show that in general the students were satisfied with the course. Responses to questions three and six show that they were particularly satisfied with the amount of information which they had received about the test. These results were consistent with the findings of the instruments used in the study.

#	Question	Completely agree **(5)**	Strongly agree **(4)**	Agree **(3)**	Disagree **(2)**	Strongly disagree **(1)**
		# of Ss				
1	All necessary information about the course was clearly communicated to me.	9	9	1		
2	The content of this course follows logical steps of learning.	5	7	7		
3	Clear information on the IELTS examination was given to me.	12	6	1		
4	The course has covered the Skills and Strategies that are useful to me in taking the IELTS examination.	9	8	2		
5	The course has been challenging for me.	7	6	6		
6	The course has extended my previous understanding of the IELTS examination.	11	4	3	1	
7	There was a good balance between new information and practice.	4	7	7	1	
8	The resources were accessible and helpful.	8	7	3	1	
9	I am satisfied with the quality of this course.	6	9	4		

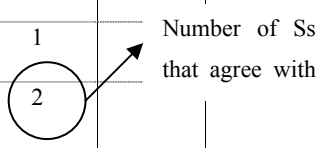

Table 52: Feedback form – School C

The statements by all the teachers on Course C on shortness of course duration are partly supported by student comments as recorded in the feedback forms supplied by the school: six out of 19 students thought that the course should be extended (suggestions: 8-10 weeks or 4 hrs/day or 3 hrs/day). Only one student out of 19 asked for more grammar. However, in the Post-Questionnaire forms given to students to fill as part of this study, 'more grammar and vocabulary practice' was one of the most prominent priorities. It was the impression of 15 students out of 20 that the course was too short and should be extended by including additional features; more grammar and vocabulary was the first priority for 2 and second priority for 8 students.

As a way of gaining a more objective measure of the effectiveness of the course, the students were given pre-and post-test, the results of which are discussed below.

7.5 Test Results

The IELTS Handbook (2000, 17) estimates that students could require "up to 200 hours of language tuition to improve by one IELTS band", and that there is a tendency for more rapid progress at lower levels. None of the schools promised students that completion of the IELTS

preparation course would result in an increased band score. However, responses from the students indicated that they expected that the course would boost their results. In questionnaires administered to teachers before and after the observation, Teachers A and B indicated that they thought one month of an IELTS preparation course was unlikely to give any of the students in their class a higher score (mostly because of their entry language level). All the teachers at School C thought that the course would have contributed to an increased score 'to some extent'. This raises the issue of the aims of test preparation classes and their potential impact on test validity. Robb and Ercanbrack (1999) summarise some of the key concerns:

> … despite the great popularity of test preparation courses and programs, relatively little research has been done to document whether special preparation can have a markedly positive effect on test scores. A resolution of this issue is obviously crucial for the creators of standardized tests, as well as for the test-takers themselves. … if preparation via coaching in test-taking techniques and strategies is found to be effective, it would indicate that test scores are not reliable indicators of academic ability or language proficiency, but rather reflect, at least to some degree, an ability to take tests. If such a situation exists, the validity of the tests is called into question. (1999: 2)

In order to assess whether the courses had a measurable effect on the students' IELTS performance, pre- and post-tests were administered. Students at all schools were given the same retired versions of IELTS Listening, Reading and Writing tests. The Speaking sub-test was not administered as doing so would have significantly disrupted classes and because this skill was outside the main focus of the study.

Although the classes at School A and C had a starting roll of 22 and 28 respectively, not all students were present for all parts of both the pre-and post-testing. Consequently the sample size was comparatively small. The fact that in the case of Schools A and C only such a relatively small proportion of the class sat all three sections of the pre and post-tests must be considered as having a skewing effect on the results. All students except 1 at School B completed all the testing. All data reported in this chapter refer to the students in each class who completed all sections of both pre- and post-tests.

An additional factor that must be taken into consideration when viewing the results of the testing is that the 'overall band score' referred to in this study was calculated by averaging the results of the three modules administered. Therefore this final band score must not be

considered an equivalent to the overall score of an actual test as it does not include the speaking sub-test.

7.5.1 Pre- and post-tests

For the nine students in Class A, eight in Class B and fifteen in Class C who completed both the pre- and post-tests, we obtained individual band scores for Listening, Reading and Writing, plus an 'overall' score which was the average of the three. The overall pre- and post-test band scores are presented in Table 53.

Class A			
Ss	Pre overall	Post overall	Change
1	4.5	4	-0.5
2	6	6	0
3	5	5.5	0.5
4	6	5.5	-0.5
5	6	5	-1
6	5	5	0
7	5	4.5	-0.5
8	6	5.5	-0.5
9	6.5	6.5	0

Class B			
Ss	Pre overall	Post overall	Change
1	6	4.5	-1.5
2	6	6.5	0.5
3	6.5	5	-1.5
4	5.5	5	-0.5
5	6	5.5	-0.5
6	5	5	0
7	6	6	0
8	6	6	0

Class C			
Ss	Pre overall	Post overall	Change
1	4	5	1
2	6	6	0
3	5	5	0
4	4	4	0
5	5	5	0
6	6	5	-1
7	5	5	0
8	5	6	1
9	6	6	0
10	4	4	0
11	6	6	0
12	5	5	0
13	5	5	0
14	6	5	-1
15	5	5	0

Table 53: Overall band scores from pre- and post-tests

Five students in Class A, four in Class B and one in Class C did increase their overall scores by between 0.5 and 1.5. The others remained the same, except for one student in each Class A and B whose score was 0.5 lower and two students in Class C whose score was 1 lower.

The results of the word count of each of the writing scripts showed no significant increase in the length in either of the writing tasks at any of the schools.

The overall pre- and post-test mean scores for each class were compared using a paired t-test. The difference was not significant at the 0.05 level. Among the three test modules, the one interesting result was for Listening in Classes A and C (see Table 54). In Class A all nine students tested increased their listening score in the post-test and the class mean went from 5.33 to 6.11, which was a statistically significant difference (t= -6.42 (two-tailed); df = 8; p <.05). Thus, the large amount of class time devoted to listening tests and exercises seemed to pay off for the students in Course A. In Class C among 22 students that took both the pre- and post-listening tests, 3 showed no change, 14 increased their listening score between 0.5 and 2.5, and 5 students decreased by 0.5 to 1.5. The class mean went from 4.90 in the pre-test to 5.34 in the post-test, a statistically significant difference (t= -2.2 (two-tailed); df = 21; p < .05). The analysis with COLT (see Student Modality) indicated that students in Class C spent even more time on listening than students in Class A[4].

[4] The analysis with UCOS indicates that students in Class A spent 11% of the total class time on listening tasks; students in Class C: 9.1% and in Class B: 7.8%. Note that this takes into account only listening tasks and not listening tests as well (as is the case with COLT).

Listening test Class A

Ss	Pre_listening	Post_listening	Module
1	4	4.5	AM
2	6	6.5	AM
3	5	5.5	AM
4	6	7	AM
5	5.5	7	AM
6	5.5	6	AM
7	4.5	5	AM
8	5	6	AM
9	6.5	7.5	AM

Listening Test Class C

Ss	Pre_listening	Post_listening	Module
1	6.5	6.5	AM
2	5.0	7.5	AM
3	4.5	5.5	AM
5	5.0	5.5	AM
6	6.0	5.5	AM
7	4.5	5.5	AM
9	5.5	5.0	AM
10	6.0	4.5	AM
11	6.0	6.5	AM
12	4.5	4.5	AM
13	6.0	7.0	AM
15	3.0	4.5	AM
16	4.5	6.0	AM
18	5.0	5.5	AM
20	4.0	4.5	AM
22	3.0	2.0	AM
23	4.5	4.0	GT
24	4.0	4.0	GT
26	7.0	7.5	GT
27	6.0	6.5	GT
28	4.5	5.0	GT
29	3.0	4.5	GT

Table 54: Listening Test - Classes A and C scores

None of the other modules showed a consistent pattern of increase in individual scores for any of the classes, although the post-test mean score for the class was slightly higher than the pre-test one in each case, apart from Reading in Class A. The post-test mean score was equal to the pre-test one in the case of Writing and Overall Score in Class C. The overall pre- and post-test number of words in Writing Tasks 1 and 2 for all classes were compared using a paired t-test. The difference was not significant at the 0.05 level.

7.6 Conclusion

The questionnaire results reinforce the degree of importance that IELTS holds for these international students. The fact that they chose to attend a preparation course is in itself an example of the effect of a high stakes test such as this. The study highlighted the fact that their expectation was that the course would provide them with tips on how to do well on the test and give them chances to practise their test-taking skills, in other words, the course would be similar to the type of traditional exam preparation that they were used to. Questionnaire responses showed the popularity of test practice activities. The students had a perception that attending a preparation course would lead to a better result in the real test. However, the results of the pre-and post-testing showed that in most cases it had little significant effect on their test scores. The most likely explanation for this is that their language ability had not improved over the period of the course. Neither did it seem that they had gained a significant amount of knowledge about the test – as indicated in the non-significant result of the questionnaire section which tested the students' awareness of the test procedures and format.

Student feedback provided several insights into what they expected of such a course and their comments after the final class showed that they were, in general, happy with the tuition they had received. When students are preparing for a high stakes test such as IELTS, they are typically under enormous pressure to succeed and to do so as quickly as possible. Courses which go even some way to alleviating this affective pressure can be seen as helping students to perform in the test to the best of their ability.

Informal comments made to the observer after the courses had ended showed that the students were in reality still greatly concerned about their language ability and how well they would do on the actual test. It seemed that for some students at least, participating in the course had illustrated to them first-hand how far they were from gaining the overall band score they required to be admitted onto a university course. Attending preparation courses was how they traditionally prepared for a test and they were unsure about how to proceed. Many of the weaker students, particularly at Schools A and C, had become more aware of the gaps in their knowledge of the language as a result of the course but were unsure what else they could do to quickly improve their chances of getting the score they required before their individual deadlines. Such comments indicate that the schools could perhaps have performed a counselling role to give students feedback on their performance, and to offer advice and guidance on the options available to them for improving their English to meet the demands of academic study.

CHAPTER 8: TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

8.1 Introduction

In many contexts, language teachers are heavily reliant on available textbooks and this is perhaps even more evident in the testing context where teachers may feel that following a test preparation book is the safest way to ensure all the crucial points are covered. As with other proficiency tests, IELTS aims to assess a student's general level of language ability and is therefore not linked to any particular materials or programme of instruction. Nevertheless, Read and Hayes (2003) found that the majority of schools in New Zealand depended to a large extent on texts focusing specifically on IELTS preparation.

Bailey (1999: 30) refers to 'textbook washback' as a possible result of test use. She points out that according to Pierce (1992: 687), test preparation materials are "… indirect evidence of washback". The appropriacy of a textbook, and therefore any consideration of the possible existence of washback must be considered within the specific context in which it is being used as it might be assumed that ESL textbook content and layout will vary to some extent and may be more noticeable when there is the introduction of a new test or a change to an existing one. Bailey (1999:30) introduces three distinct processes through which publishers of test preparation materials are participating in language testing washback:

- they produce or publish practice tests written by people in the language teaching field;
- they produce subject matter course-books that may influence or be influenced by exams;
- they publish textbooks that are designed explicitly as test preparation materials.

Cheng (1997) spoke of the interface between the processes and products involved in language testing washback and from this Bailey drew two key questions: 'Do the texts correctly embody the constructs underlying the exam?', and 'Do the teachers understand and convey that information to students?' (1999: 32).

Andrews (1994: 79-80) acknowledged the importance commercial considerations have by mentioning that "… the final product will not be moulded according to the innovators' view of what is desirable in terms of teaching, but rather according to the publishers' view of what will sell". He mentions that examination-specific materials end up limiting the focus of

teachers and learners, resulting in what is referred to as “narrowing of the curriculum”. This term is also used by Shohamy (1992: 514) who stated that “… negative washback to programs can result in the narrowing of the curriculum in ways inconsistent with real learning and the real needs of … students”. The opinion that there is the potential for texts to narrow the curriculum and encourage negative washback is also reported by Cheng (1997), Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt and Ferman (1996) and Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996).

The literature provides many references of textbooks being linked to negative washback both in terms of their content and their classroom use. Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, and Ferman (1996: 300) described one of the reasons for discontinuing a test for middle school children in Israel, as follows: The “… mass preparation for the test in the form of texts and tasks identical to those used on the test became the sole teaching material in classes". Obviously the use of these kinds of materials in classrooms has an effect on how the students view test preparation and how they ready themselves for the test. Fullilove observed that texts which were “little more than clones of past exam papers” resulted in some students spending time memorising model answers at the expense of learning how to create answers to similar questions (1992: 139).

With so much written about the potential of textbooks to have a negative effect on teaching and learning, the question is what features would be desirable in a test preparation text for it to have a positive effect. Several authors have indicated what such books should address. Referring specifically to TOEFL preparation texts Hamp-Lyons (1998: 330) makes the statement that such books should “…support teachers in their principal task of helping learners increase their knowledge of and ability to use English.” She identifies the characteristics a textbook having positive washback might require:

> …the inclusion of appropriate content carefully designed to match learning needs and sequence and planned to support good classroom pedagogic practices; it also requires keeping close sight of what is appropriate in test preparation practices and what the demands of the test itself are (ibid: 330).

There has been a limited number of papers which have looked at materials specifically created for students preparing to take English language examinations and have questioned their usefulness and appropriacy. Although referring to a slightly different context to the focus of this study, comments made by Mehrens and Kaminski (1989, 21) are relevant here. Referring to the effectiveness of commercial test-preparation materials used by way of preparation for standardised tests in local schools in the U.S., they state that it “… is not widely researched

but appears to be limited at best. Such materials may be appropriate depending on how closely they match the test and the inference one wishes to make from the test scores".

Both Mehrens and Kaminski (1989) and Popham (1991) described scales of ethical test preparation practices. Popham (1991) suggested two standard requirements of appropriate test preparation: that test preparation practices must neither violate the ethical standards of the education profession, nor increase students' test scores without simultaneously increasing the students' mastery of the content domain being tested. Mehrens and Kaminski (1989: 15) refer to two extreme points of view. They quote Wrightstone (1967) as an example of the 'old' perspective – "It is unethical to administer or discuss with pupils a parallel form or the specific form of the test to be used". According to Mehrens and Kaminski (ibid), the 'new' viewpoint was that proposed by Cohen (1987), who advocated Criterion Referenced Instruction (CRI) as a near perfect instructional process which "… insured the precise match among what is taught, what is measured, and what is intended to be learned".

Investigating washback in the context of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, Cheng made the comment that

> We believe teaching and learning should include more varied activities than the examination formats alone. However, it would be natural for teachers to employ activities similar to those activities required in the examination (1999: 49).

Authenticity is also important. Bailey (1996: 276) referring to a test promoting positive washback states that "… a test will yield positive washback to the learner and to the programme to the extent that it utilises authentic tasks and authentic texts". For example Lam, (1994) quoted in Bailey (1999: 31) and referring to the Revised Use of English (RUE) test in Hong Kong, mentions that "… about 50% of the teachers appear to be "textbook slaves" in teaching the sections of the test related to listening, reading, and language systems, and practical skills for work and study". She goes on to observe that "… this reliance on textbooks in this context is evidence of negative washback because instead of introducing more authentic materials [the teachers] prefer to use commercial textbooks, most of which are basically modified copies of the exam paper" (ibid). Cheng (1997: 50) also notes the existence of workbooks specifically designed to prepare students for examination papers in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and the heavy reliance of teachers on these workbooks.

On the topic of textbook evaluation, Williams (1983: 254) highlighted the importance of considering the context within which a textbook is used, writing that

> The textbook is a tool, and the teacher must know not only how to use it, but how useful it can be. Finding out will involve distinguishing between method in the use of printed materials, and method in face-to-face teaching. It will involve using discretion in adapting textual materials to the needs and interests of pupils, choosing only those materials and methods which are based on sound linguistic and pedagogical principles.

The fact that test preparation books for IELTS exist can be considered part of the impact of the test. An analysis of such materials is therefore an appropriate area of investigation in this study. Three aspects related to these textbooks must be considered: the types of books that publishers have chosen to market, which books are in classrooms and how they are used. The development of textbooks which claim to prepare students for an exam can be seen as a kind of evidence of washback. The type of materials they contain and the approach they take can be used as an indication of whether the washback of the exam is positive or not.

At the time of writing over twenty published textbooks with the IELTS name in their titles were readily available in New Zealand. It is the classroom practitioners who ultimately decide what to use from any book, and when and how to use it. Hence the materials from each IELTS text used in the preparation classes observed were analysed, both those which were adapted in some way and those simply copied straight from the books. The data collected from the teacher interviews during the course were also analysed for evidence of the selection process and the criteria they utilised when planning the classes.

In 1992, Hogan (1992: 13) wrote of the paucity of IELTS preparation materials. This situation has changed considerably in recent years. From 1995, when the test was revised, to 2002 14 books were published, bringing the number of publications on the market in New Zealand in June 2002 to around 20. An analysis of these materials was considered an important part of this study for two reasons. Firstly, these books were readily available and anecdotal reports indicate they are popular with students studying independently. Secondly, the Read and Hayes study (2003) had found they were a common basis for many of the IELTS preparation courses run in New Zealand schools, including the three courses observed for this study.

The analysis of IELTS preparation books had three main aims:

1. to identify and broadly categorise the main types of preparation books available and identify any trends
2. to analyse the features of textbooks considered useful by IELTS teachers, and finally,
3. to link this analysis to the materials used in the IELTS classes observed and compare the types of materials used.

8.1.1 Criteria for evaluating the IELTS textbooks

Several evaluations have been made of TOEFL materials (Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Herbert and Reppen, 1999). In interviews with teachers as part of a study TOEFL preparation classes in the United States, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) found that teachers gave little serious consideration to "… what might be an appropriate or successful way to teach TOEFL; most teachers just seemed to do what the book says and what they claim the students want" (1999, 286). But Alderson and Hamp-Lyons also acknowledge that teachers are not necessarily to be held entirely to blame for this attitude as they are "merely part of a huge test preparation industry fuelled by students' anxiety to succeed on the high-stakes test" (ibid: 293).

Extending her investigation into washback in TOEFL preparation referred to earlier, Hamp-Lyons (1998) analysed a random sample of 5 TOEFL text-books in order to assess the role textbooks play in TOEFL test preparation practice. She concluded that the books had tremendous potential washback effect on teaching and learning but that the effect of the test had been negative rather than positive. Most books she critiqued consisted of test-taking strategies and exercises aimed at practising material from previous exams. Hamp-Lyons observed that they "promote skills that relate quite exactly to the item types and item content found on the actual test rather than to any EFL/ESL curriculum or syllabus or to any model of language in use" (1998: 332).

Herbert and Reppen's 1999 study used a taxonomy of the specific content and question types found in the TOEFL test to evaluate ten TOEFL-preparation texts. This study focused on how closely preparation texts mirrored the test. The authors found considerable variation in the degree to which the texts accurately reflected the exam. Their perspective is that a preparation text should reflect the test as closely as possible even to the extent of copying the format and typeface. Herbert and Reppen's (1999: 43) conclude their article by stating:

> … the more practice students receive taking faithfully simulated TOEFL tests under exam conditions, the greater their improvement on the actual TOEFL is likely to be;

therefore, it is essential that the text include an adequate number of model tests for the student to practise on.

There is no record of such a link between practice on simulated IELTS tests and improved performance.

There has been one comparative evaluation of IELTS preparation books. Reporting on part of a study undertaken in 1999, Colman (2000) evaluated the appropriateness of the content, organisation, learning approaches and presentation of practice materials for IELTS listening and reading sub-tests in six IELTS publications. Experienced teachers of IELTS preparation were interviewed over the telephone and asked to discuss their experience and views on IELTS preparation materials. Colman found that teachers selected materials which were of an appropriate level and of interest to the class. Some teachers chose texts which specifically developed certain strategies. It was also important that the tests were manageable and similar in level of difficulty to the real test. Commenting on suggestions for future IELTS publications, most teachers indicated a need for materials which included the specific strategies required for each item type and assisted with the development of language skills. Most importantly, the teachers wanted to be able to prepare for IELTS "without jeopardising the coherency and pedagogic rationale of the English language teaching program" (2000: 35).

Colman saw the IELTS Specimen Materials as models of the test items, texts and format and as such did not set out to be a pedagogical tool whereas practice materials were more clearly seen as learning tools by teachers and students. Colman stated that such practice materials were positive educational models when used effectively, but added that students often use them ineffectively for repetitive, rote-learning. She also made the distinction between test 'practice' materials and 'preparation' materials which included additional pedagogical guidance and explicit strategy guidance (2000: 35).

As a literature search did not produce any studies which involved the use of frameworks for the analysis of IELTS preparation books, one was developed for this study. Although most of the criteria could be seen as common to other high stakes tests, some were seen as being specific to IELTS. Criteria were defined by selecting relevant aspects from several sources:

- studies of texts for TOEFL preparation
- reviews of IELTS texts
- literature on test preparation

IELTS preparation materials are often reviewed and these reviews were analysed for common trends in what features the reviewers identified as important. The following authors have commented on what they feel is desirable in a preparation text.

In 1995b Thomas observed the lack of "a course book for IELTS" and the large number of self-study books, and commented on the lack of guidelines for teachers who might wish to adopt a textbook for use in their IELTS preparation class, which was particularly necessary for novice teachers (1995b: 109). Thomas explicitly makes the point, which is perhaps obvious, that the meta-language used in texts should be comprehensible to the students. This issue of the language levels for which materials are appropriate has also been raised by others such as Ellis (2001: 20).

Thomas, an IELTS senior examiner based in Australia, is a frequent reviewer of IELTS preparation books (1995, 1996 and 2000). His reviews were assessed for features that he considered desirable and those he thought of as shortcomings. His comments are in keeping with what others, particularly Bailey (1996), consider indications of positive washback. Many of the criteria he used referred to the need for preparation books to provide accurate and detailed information about the test including task and text types, answers to frequently asked questions and assessment criteria. They should suggest strategies and exam techniques as well as realistic test practice and scoring guides to give students feedback on their performance. In addition to having an attractive layout that is easily accessible and user friendly, Thomas often commented on the desirability of annotated answer keys and tape-scripts including explanations (explanatory notes) for answers. He was critical of books that did not provide model answers for essays and in general commented on the need for authentic materials taken from a range of contexts. He also mentioned the need for sections including useful language and such things as spelling exercises.

Inverarity (2000) reviewed two IELTS texts and indicated a number of features as being advantageous, for example the need for test preparation books to be student focused, 'active' and to encourage a 'discovery approach'. A sequential, systematic approach which provided supplementary materials for extension activities and included a broader range of language skills than required by the exam was also identified as a plus.

Cameron, the author of two IELTS preparation texts, suggests that in addition to the fact that students perceive them to be a useful form of test preparation, practice test materials predominate in the marketplace because they are more straightforward to create - "Writing test materials is easier than developing a whole course because one has a clearly defined task.

The creativity comes in thinking beyond the test to the needs of the students and in combining the two threads" (1999).

In 1996, a project was set up to begin looking at ways in which the impact of IELTS could be investigated more effectively. This IELTS Impact Study (IIS) was co-ordinated by Saville and Milanovic at UCLES working in conjunction with Charles Alderson at Lancaster University, who was commissioned to help develop the Impact Study. The most relevant to this part of the current study is Phase 2 – the impact of the IELTS on the content and nature of IELTS-related teaching materials. In this part of the IIS, a pilot instrument for the analysis of textbook materials (IATM) was further trialled and refined – a process described in Saville and Hawkey (in press). An initial draft of the instruments developed as part of Phase 2 of the IIS project was used to guide the analysis. Some additional criteria were drawn from Mehrens and Kaminsky (1989) and Popham (1991).

As has been previously discussed, commercially published materials are one of the most common sources of information available to IELTS stakeholders such as prospective candidates. Few of the teachers interviewed by Read and Hayes (2003) made direct reference to the official descriptions of the test. Consequently, it is crucial that IELTS preparation texts take into consideration the official information made available to the public by IELTS and give a full and accurate picture of the test.

8.2 Methodology

The textbook analysis was conducted in four stages. In the initial stage the basic features of each book (see Appendix 7) were assessed. Features were identified that could be seen as evidence of whether or not the influence of the test on the preparation materials was apparent and to determine if this influence has produced 'good', language learning materials thereby encouraging positive washback. Drawing on the previously cited literature, a framework was developed which included some features that are specific to IELTS, but which could easily be adapted to analyse books designed for other tests. The first stage was designed to give a broad overview of the external features and basic contents of the books. The analysis drew on the work of McDonough and Shaw (1993), who provided guidelines on evaluating ELT materials. Although the aim was not to evaluate IELTS preparation texts per se, their criteria were nevertheless valuable in that they divide their analysis into external and internal sections and systematically identify features to consider.

The first stage of the analysis consisted of noting both external and internal features of the materials. Initially, basic information was gathered from an external evaluation. Features such as the date of publication, the module on which the book focused and the skills included were noted, as books referring to older versions of IELTS or specifically catering for students preparing for the GTM were to be excluded. Also of interest was whether the book was intended for class or self-study and whether or not the authors had specified a language level for which the materials were suitable or estimated a time period for completion of the materials. The books were also analysed internally. Firstly, notes were made on the weighting given to each skill and whether the material was predominantly practice test exercises or also included exercises to build specific skills. The presence and type of information about the test and of tasks such as those aiming to familiarise students with test tasks or the mention of test-tips or test-taking strategies, were recorded, as was information regarding the meaning and interpretation of band scores. How the books dealt with feedback on exercises is of particular relevance when looking for evidence of washback. It was therefore of interest whether the author/s simply listed correct answers to tasks or gave the reader explanations of how the answers could be reached – the latter being more supportive of language learning and evidence of positive washback Likewise, the inclusion of authentic materials, the presence of model essays and the analysis of the language they contained was an indication that the texts went beyond simple test familiarisation Another feature that was considered interesting was the amount of space devoted to language development work. The books were also assessed for the presence of any EAP skills broader than those tested in IELTS.

The materials used during the classroom observations were further analysed in the second stage of the analysis which identified the sources of the materials and which classroom activities they were used for. Data was collected by referencing each of the published materials used in the classes. This then allowed the information pertaining to the various classroom activities investigated with COLT and UCOS as well as with the Additional Analysis to be cross-referenced to the text they were sourced from. The amount of total class time spent using individual task types from each text was calculated and comparisons were made between the three different classes. The criteria used have been detailed in earlier chapters.

In the third stage of the analysis, teachers' comments about the texts were investigated. Each of the schools included in this study dealt with the development of their courses in different ways; however, the one thing they had in common was access to a range of IELTS preparation books. Teacher A made her selection freely on a daily or weekly basis or course by course. The course at School B was also reliant on commercial materials in the first

instance. While Teacher B was not the teacher responsible for the selection and development of the lesson materials, choices had been made by the course development team who were drawing from the same resources that were available to the other schools. Although the teachers at School C were encouraged to use the text selected as most appropriate for the students by senior staff, they still had access to the other textbooks. Analysis of the data collected from the classroom study had identified the source of all of the materials used in each of the classes and what types of exercises each was used for. As access to all the IELTS books was common to all three schools, a comparison of which books were used for what purpose was made between the schools.

A case study of the two most frequently used textbooks was also made. This study allowed a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of these books. Finally, patterns observed in the textbook analysis were discussed and conclusions were drawn as to the possible evidence of washback in the textbooks.

8.3 Stage 1: Features of the textbooks

Nineteen IELTS preparation books were available on the market in New Zealand in January 2002 when the analysis was carried out (see Appendix 7). Only books published after the major revisions to IELTS in 1995 and focusing on either the AM or a combination of the AM and GTM were considered. One video, the only IELTS video on the market, *The IELTS Tutor*, was included in the textbook analysis as it was used during Course C.

The IELTS preparation books readily available on the New Zealand market were broadly classified into four basic types:

A Books containing practice tests + task familiarisation
B Books containing practice tests + task familiarisation + additional skills work
C Books containing practice tests + additional skills work + language development
D Books containing language development

The data was sorted according to 3 main characteristics: date of publication, type of publication and finally by both type and date.

Materials which had the same structure as complete IELTS tests were considered ‘practice tests’ i.e. a writing test that consisted of rubrics for both Task 1 and Task 2, or all three

sections of a reading test. Activities which set out to familiarise students with the format and content of the test were labelled 'task familiarisation'. These activities included a range of tasks including texts explaining different aspects of the test and explanations of test tips or test-taking strategies. In some instances sections of different parts of the test were used to illustrate specific task types and to provide practice with the task and these exercises too were included in this category of task familiarisation. Some books provided activities to help students develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. These features were recorded as 'additional skills work'. The presence of exercises that built vocabulary and/ or grammar skills was noted under the category of 'language development'.

Year	Total Number	A	B	C	D
1995	**2**		1		
1996	**5**	3		2	
1997	**2**	1		1	
1998	**1**	1			
1999	**3**		1	2	
2000	**2**	1		1	
2001	**4**		2	1	1
	Total Number	**6**	**4**	**7**	**1**

Legend

A practice tests + task familiarisation

B practice tests + additional skills work

C practice tests + additional skills work + language development

D language development

Table 55: Number and type of IELTS textbooks published

This table shows an increase in the number of books published following the revisions to the test format in 1995. Of note is that all except one of the books contained materials to give students practice on test-like items. Books which contained practice tests and tests with some additional skills and language development, made up the majority of the books. Fewer books with practice tests alone were published after 1996, with only one coming out between 1996 and 2001. In 2001 the first book which focused solely on helping students develop their language skills was produced.

One of the roles played by preparation books is to familiarise students with the format of the test. This is particularly relevant in the case of IELTS as, unlike some other high stakes tests,

past versions of IELTS test materials are not available to the public. Other than the sample tests published in the IELTS Handbook and Specimen Materials, two books of practice test materials have been published by Cambridge University Press (*Cambridge Practice Tests for IELTS 1* and *Cambridge IELTS 2.*) and endorsed by IELTS as accurately reflecting the structure and content of the actual test.

Considering the amount of discussion arising from the issue of appropriate level of proficiency required by students wishing to study IELTS preparation, any reference to the suitable level of the audience for the books was noted. In terms of level, most did not specify for which level of language proficiency the texts were written. Of the three that did, the proficiency level was intended to be "…Upper Intermediate or Intermediate level" (*Language Passport: Preparing for the IELTS Interview*), "…very high Intermediate or Advanced" (*Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course*), and "…from lower levels to approximately Band 6" (*Insight into IELTS*).

Another feature which was identified from the external analysis was whether books were aimed at students wishing to study independently or were designed for classroom use. The most consistent description of the type of context within which the authors thought the books could be used equally well was in the classroom or for individual use. Of the 19 books examined, 14 were labelled as being suitable for both independent or classroom study – this figure included two books which stated they were for students working partly or completely alone. One of these, *Prepare for IELTS: The Preparation Course*, claimed to be a 'comprehensive course-book'. Five books were vague about the context in which they were intended to be used. Two books gave no indication at all. One was a workbook and could therefore be argued as being suitable for self or classroom study as it was for 'extensive and guided practice'; and the other was for 'students to prepare and better understand IELTS'.

Of the books labelled as suitable for classroom use, only ~~3~~ two contained a section of information for the teacher: *Prepare for IELTS: The Preparation Course* and *IELTS Practice Now*. This information was in the form of brief notes rather than a 'Teachers Guide' or 'Teachers Book' as typically expected to accompany General English course-books. Similarly, none were accompanied by any form of Teacher's Resource Book, or indeed a Student's Workbook, which again is typically provided for an EFL coursebook.

Several other books gave little specific information about how they should be used. *Language Passport: Preparing for the IELTS Interview*, which prepares students for the speaking test, was described as being suitable for use with groups of between 6 and 12 students. Some, such

as *101 Helpful Hints for IELTS* and *202 Useful Exercises for IELTS* stated simply that they were for students to "… prepare and better understand IELTS" and to give ".. . extensive and guided practice". The external examination found that the remaining three books did not indicate how the book was intended to be used, although one was clearly signalled as a 'workbook' and could be assumed to be used for more individual study (*Check Your Vocabulary for English for the IELTS Examination – a workbook for students*).

The data was analysed to see if there were any patterns in the types of books published over time. In the short period considered there did seem to be a move away from books which focused solely on providing practice tests, with a trend towards books which included task familiarisation and test practice as well as some input designed to assist with language acquisition. This can be seen most clearly in more comprehensive books such as *Prepare for IELTS: The Preparation Course* and *IELTS Practice Tests Plus* which claim to teach and not just test. The publication in 2001 of a workbook aimed at helping students check their IELTS vocabulary may be the sign of things to come: of books specialising in specific areas.

The largest group of books, 14 in total, covered all four skills. Two included both reading and writing and there was one each devoted to listening and speaking, or writing and speaking respectively. It should be noted that several publishers had put out a series of books, each focussing on specific skills, for example *IELTS Preparation and Practice*. As has been mentioned, one book focused only on vocabulary building exercises.

Next, the texts were scanned in an internal evaluation. This was done to see if the authors clams were indeed borne out by the content of the books, but also to make a subjective evaluation of the approach used in each case.

Not all the books contained detailed information about the test. Most described the format but the band descriptors and guidance regarding the assessment of tasks were less common. While the Specimen Materials (2000) provide details of the test, not all students are aware of their existence.

The books were evaluated/scanned for the presence of 'test tips' or 'exam strategies' and the majority, 13, did to varying degrees. There was also a difference noted in how the books provided feedback on the exercises. All books included keys, but in 7 cases the answers were not explained or described. More detailed feedback which might assist students to review and assess their performance and identify areas which they needed to address could be seen as encouraging autonomy and therefore contribute to positive washback.

All those texts with audiotapes had tape-scripts but only 4 of the 15 annotated the tape-scripts to give students additional information such as where the answers could be found. The video workbook did not have transcripts of any part of the videotape. Only one of the texts, *IELTS Strategies for Study,* included any form of diagnostic test to allow students to assess their level or any specific areas of weakness.

8.4 Stage 2: Use of the textbooks in the classes

In the second stage of the analysis the materials used in the classes were looked at in two ways. Firstly the data collected from the classroom observations at each school was analysed to see from which texts the tasks originated. This analysis followed the same criteria from the UCOS as used in the earlier part of the investigation. Tables were compiled to indicate the percentage of the total class time dedicated to class activities while a certain textbook was used. The tables accordingly indicated what the textbooks were used for in class.

Next, the information gathered from the teachers' interviews is presented. Copies of the class materials were brought to the interviews to help the teachers recall the lessons. The interviews were not structured; rather teachers were asked why they chose the materials they did and how they felt they had worked with the class.

8.4.1 Source of Materials

The sources of the materials used on the preparation courses and the extent to which the teacher adapted the materials to suit the specific needs of the class were both recorded. All materials used in class, with the exception of work written on the board, were classified as originating from one of the following sources: IELTS Preparation/ Practice Texts; non IELTS Preparation Texts; prepared by the school; prepared by the teacher for this specific class; or prepared by the students.

In Class A IELTS preparation texts were the predominant source of the materials used in activities, representing almost 46% of the total class time. They were used directly from the book without adaptation. The second largest amount of class time, 6.5% overall, was spent on activities with materials made by the teacher.

In comparison, in Class B activities with materials developed by the school comprised the largest category at almost 43% of the total class time. These materials consisted of adaptations of authentic texts and of IELTS, academic and general English textbooks, as well as supplementary exercises. Activities using ESOL texts, both in their original form and adapted, took up over 18% of the class time followed by IELTS preparation texts at around 13%. Teacher B used his own materials for 4% of the total class time.

School C had chosen a specific textbook as the 'set text' for the course and had a class set of the book available for the students to use while in class. The course co-ordinator indicated that the reasons for this were several – that it reduced the amount of photocopying and that it respected copyright. The analysis showed that almost half of the materials used over the course came from other IELTS preparation texts. Differences were found between which materials each teacher used. The effect of the teachers' responsibility for teaching specific skills must be considered. Teacher C used the set textbook extensively in her reading and listening classes although the other teachers were less reliant on it.

Table 56 presents the sources of texts on which activities were based in the three classes expressed as a percentage of each total class time.

	TEXT SOURCES (Sources of texts used in class)	School A	School B	School C
	Text Sources	Average	Average	Average
TS1	IELTS Preparation Text - original	46.06	5.07	46.09
TS1A	IELTS Preparation Text - adapted	0.00	8.31	0.81
TS2	ESOL Text - original	3.37	10.16	0.00
TS2A	ESOL Text - adapted	0.00	8.37	0.00
TS3	IDP/BC/Cambridge - original	1.16	3.73	0.00
TS5	Teacher Made	6.43	4.05	2.36
TS6	School Made	0.00	42.88	1.06
TS7	Student Made	1.93	1.76	0.49
	Total % of text sources	58.95	84.31	50.80

Table 56: Text sources

In sum, what this part of the study showed was that each course drew on different types of texts for their materials. Next, we examine the reasons behind the teachers' choices.

8.5 Stage 3: Factors influencing the teachers' choice of materials

The differences in the structure of each of the three courses are a crucial consideration when investigating the materials used by each of the teachers. Courses A and C were organised on a skills basis and this resulted in the students encountering a greater range of topics during the course, a figure greatly increased by the number of practice tests included. Taking a topic based approach, Course B focused on a limited number of subjects and included revision and recycling exercises. The effect of a course which includes many different topic areas, particularly on students of lower levels of proficiency is the heavy learning load of introducing such a range of issues and language – students have little time to come to grips with one before moving onto the next. Students who were independent learners and those with a higher level of English were therefore likely to benefit more from the course as they had the tools to assess what they could be doing to supplement what the teacher provided in class. They were also more able and likely to ask for help.

The materials used on each of the courses were selected according to different constraints. Teacher A was responsible for deciding the content of the course she taught and was, in principle, able to choose exercises from a range of texts available to her. She aimed to include a number of skills in each lesson and over the course wanted to cover as many of the IELTS task and text types as possible. Another factor she considered when deciding on what to present in each class was how interesting the materials were. When she noted students having difficulty with a particular task type or exercise she attempted to search out further examples to use in class. Teacher A's experience with previous groups had shown that some books contained exercises and test materials that were not of a similar level of difficulty to IELTS and these she tried to avoid. Useful exercises which were perhaps more difficult, she included later in the course. Another consideration was to select from several sources to give students a range of different exercises. The majority of the materials used in Course A were taken directly from IELTS preparation texts. Students were given photocopies to work on and keep. With a large number of students in a classroom that did not have any flexibility in the way the desks were placed, Teacher A also had to consider the practicalities of the materials and tasks she set the class. This meant taking into account both the layout of the room, which made group work difficult, and the time constraints which made it more time efficient for her to address the students as a group and for the students to work individually rather than in groups or pairs.

With a topic based approach, the materials used in Course B had a different focus to the other courses. The aims of the course were also broader and included a focus on language

development and aspects of EAP. All the lessons had been developed by senior teachers at the school and had been used extensively with previous classes. The texts had been taken from a variety of sources, both authentic ones and IELTS preparation texts. Most had been adapted or developed in some way to exploit the topic or to focus on some language point and students were given photocopies of all materials. The course materials complete with lesson plans were available for Teacher B to photocopy and use or adapt as he felt appropriate. Therefore, Teacher B was somewhat removed from the necessity of creating materials on a daily basis. As he was not responsible for sourcing and developing materials, he was not familiar with the commercial resources. Having a ready-made course meant Teacher B had more time to concentrate on how he could use the resources with his class. Another difference with the other two courses was that, although he was expected to cover all four skills and give his students a good understanding of what the test required, he was not trying to prepare them for the test within the month he had the class. Teacher B knew his students were all attending language classes in the morning. His students were all of a similar language level – mid intermediate. His class was small compared to the other two and this, coupled with the flexibility afforded by the seating arrangements in the room, made it easier for him to vary the methodology he used in the classroom. He was able, for example to include pair and group work and vary his methodology. These additional factors also contributed to the difference in the materials used on Course B.

The four skills were taught on different nights and, with the exception of reading and listening, by different teachers at School C. As at School A, the materials were selected to introduce students to the range of IELTS texts and tasks and to give them practice. Texts taken directly from IELTS preparation books were the most common. The feature that distinguished the materials used at School C from the other schools was the use of a set text for the course. Although the school provided a range of other preparation texts and gave teachers access to worksheets that had been collected by previous teachers on the course, teachers were encouraged to use the set text. The school provided a set of *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* which the students could use in class. They were not able to take a copy of the exercises home although they did get photocopies of materials from other sources. The move to a set text had been made in an attempt to make the course more consistent and to reduce the amount of photocopying that was being done when the teachers 'sampled' exercises from various texts. *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* had been chosen for several reasons. Firstly, it was a new publication which meant that for a short time at least, the students were less likely to have used the book either on other IELTS courses or for self-study. Secondly, the book was considered to be the best available. It contained a range of useful exercises that met the needs of the course and had generally been found to be a good

alternative to the previous materials. Teachers were not required to use the set text and in fact Teacher D preferred not to do so, choosing instead materials from the resources that had been collected in folders kept by the school. When it came to the practice test materials given at the end of the course as mock exams, Teachers C and E selected a book of tests produced by IELTS – entitled: *Cambridge IELTS 2*. The criteria for this selection were also the newness of the publication and the assumed suitability of the level of difficulty of the tests due to the fact that it was an official IELTS publication.

8.5.1 School A – Teacher Interviews

The interviews with Teacher A showed that the reasons behind her choices were often pragmatic For example, *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* was the source of more grammar and vocabulary related activities in Class A than any other single textbook used during the course (1.1% of the total class time was dedicated to grammar and vocabulary related activities based on *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course*). Teacher A took grammar and vocabulary activities from this book as it was the only one that contained the types of exercises she was looking for. When deciding on which practice tests to use with the class, the criteria she mentioned that she chose materials which had 'worked well' with previous classes, were test-like and neither easier nor more difficult than the real test. Teacher A used *IELTS to Success* as the source of more exam-related activities in Class A than any other single textbook used during the course - 14.5% of the total class time was dedicated to exam-related activities, especially reading, listening and speaking tasks, based on this book. When it came to writing tasks however, Teacher A took most of the ones she used from *IELTS Practice Now*.

In general Teacher A reported that students had fed back to her that the level of the materials used in the class was 'OK' - sometimes a little easier than the test and sometimes more difficult. She was aware that the materials in practice tests were not prepared as stringently or trialed as the actual IELTS test materials were and that was a difficulty. When she spoke of some of the factors which influenced her choice of materials, she mentioned considering how interesting the readings were for both herself and her students and their usefulness in meeting the aims of the class. She took materials from different textbooks "… just to get a different approach to things perhaps. I don't want to stick with one book too long in case it gives them a false sense of security or something."

The question of teaching grammar and vocabulary was also raised in the interviews:

> This is always a dilemma because it's such a short course and it's so intensive and it's focusing on their exam skills and exam technique but there are always some who have a rather wobbly foundation in grammar.

She acknowledged that there were always some people in the class who expected a grammar component within the course, one which she could not satisfy. Teacher A would have liked to do more grammar than the small amount she had time for and described this as a conflict. She felt even less able to deal intensively with vocabulary and coped by trying to relate things the students are reading to what they are writing so there was some form of overlap. When planning a writing task she also encouraged students to work out the kind of vocabulary they might need. Her general feeling about the amount of language teaching she did in IELTS preparation courses was summed up in this quote: "In a way it always feels like there is not enough teaching especially towards the end. It's just practice, practice, practice."

The existence of an appropriate IELTS course-book incorporating relevant vocabulary and grammar work, would have been a valuable resource for Teacher A, who expressed her frustration at being unable to provide students with sufficient opportunities for language development within class time.

8.5.2 School B – Teacher Interviews

The course at School B was topic based and it is therefore not surprising that the materials were taken from a bigger range of books as the course designers sought texts which fitted the theme. However, some patterns existed in the choice of sources of texts across the topic based units. As in Class A, *IELTS to Success* was the source of more exam-related activities in Class B than any other single textbook used during the course (3% of the total class time). Listening and speaking tasks were taken from this text. *Insight into IELTS* was the main source of more grammar and vocabulary related activities but *The ABC of IELTS* was the source of most reading and writing tasks.

Teacher B had not had that much direct contact with the books as the material had all been adapted slightly and put into the course. When discussing the materials on the course he made specific reference to those which he felt worked well such as the speed reading exercises which gave the students 'tangible results'. The texts used for these exercises were not taken from an IELTS preparation book. Teacher B also found that the standard task used in the school's IELTS course which involved analysing model answers of writing tasks and building towards the students writing an essay themselves worked well. The models and the exercises used to analyse them were written by the course designers as the ones included in the

preparation books were too difficult for the students and did not break down the task to an appropriate micro level.

The course was, according to Teacher B, lacking in the area of full practice tests. When students asked for more exam practice he gave them extra examples to do at home. However, he did give whole or part tasks, especially reading tasks, to do under exam conditions in class, both to give them experience and also to help them realise how difficult the test. This then provided a justification, to some extent, for spending time doing vocabulary and other text work if they had actually seen that they were not doing it properly. Teacher B found this was more successful in motivating the students, rather than just being told that they were not ready for the test: "I try to show rather than just tell that they need the vocabulary and text work."

Speaking about the role of grammar in the course Teacher B made the following comment: "Grammar is tested in many ways in the IELTS exam. Just because it is a reading paper it doesn't mean reading is the only relevant skill. Question forming and the role playing in the interview and so on. I draw their attention to the fact that grammar is a part of it but I don't think I ever do any kind of presentation particularly. Error correction, a lot of the grammar would come from error correction."

He also used error correction in other parts of the class, often collecting and using errors made by the students, "Partly because I think it makes the speaking exercises seem … focused, a language focus as well as fluency focus. Secondly, as a way of introducing a little bit of language work and grammar into an IELTS class or any other class using their authentic errors rather than studying perhaps more artificial stuff in a book."

During the weekly interviews Teacher B often referred to the large amount of vocabulary input and recycling throughout the course. "…the revision is slowly moving around to them producing a sentence and using the vocabulary." The lexical approach appealed to him and his students never complained that it was inappropriate to study it: "I've ever heard a student complain about learning vocabulary, how can they? They've got to learn it."

The course at School B had been created several years before the classroom observation took place. Consequently, the more recent textbooks, including the popular *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course,* published in 1999, were not used as a source of materials in the course. This factor should be borne in mind when considering the analysis of the textbooks used in the three courses. While *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* was not used in the class observed, it was used as the basis for much of the second course developed by the

course development team at School B when creating the IELTS preparation course for lower level students.

This point illustrates the potential for courses to become dated if they are not reorganised to include newly published materials. However, it also highlights the fact that when the course at School B was written, there was a more limited range of materials on the market. This meant that the course designers had to develop the existing materials to which they had access at the time.

8.5.3 School C – Teacher Interviews

With *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* as the set text at School C, it was not surprising that it was a key source of most texts used in the classes although exercises from other books such as *202 Useful Exercises for IELTS* and *101 Helpful Hints for IELTS* were included. For the final practice tests used in the last week of course *Cambridge IELTS 2* was used because at the time it was a new publication and consequently the teachers felt that there were fewer chances that students would have used it previously.

During the interview Teacher C made reference to the type of exercise she had selected and why it was appropriate for the specific class. She wanted to use the selected class text as much as possible because a class set was available and because it had been selected as the 'best'. When it came time to give the students practice tests at the end of the course she based her decision on her knowledge of which books were new and were therefore less likely to be familiar to the students. She chose tests from a book of tests that had been approved by IELTS. Teacher E used the same criteria and selected the same book for her final writing test for the same reasons.

Teacher D did not typically source classroom materials directly from the textbooks, preferring to use the materials that had already been selected by previous teachers and collected in the school folders. On the occasions when Teacher E used materials that he had not trialed before, he commented on how they would need to be changed for subsequent classes. One of the reasons he rejected materials was that he considered that they were more appropriate for individual study rather than for use in a class context.

One significant difference in how the materials were used at School C was observed. Because students used the set of textbooks provided by the school, they were not generally given a copies of these materials to take home. When the classroom materials originating from an

IELTS preparation text were analysed, it was found that students were given copies of 47% of the materials, meaning that 53% of the materials from this source were used only in class. In terms of total class time during the course, 25% of the time the students were working with the school copies of the chosen class text. For 20% of the class the students were handed copies of the materials to use during the class and to take home. During the remaining 50% of the class time students were using materials from other sources or were involved in activities that did not involve any materials. Several of the students indicated that they accessed the copies of the course-book that were available in the school library to all students but only one student bought his own copy. At the other two schools students were given their own copies of all the materials and consequently this differentiation did not occur.

Teacher E commented on this saying:

> Part of the choice [when selecting materials] is pragmatic. There is a class set and we are encouraged not to do too much extra photocopying. They would prefer if we used the book instead of using a lot of photocopies so that's the one they chose to do as the class set, but there are still some things I feel that I want them to take home anyway so I'll photocopy even out of the text we're using.

The course did not set out to teach vocabulary and grammar. There was an assumption, required because of the size of the class and the limited amount of time to get to know each student, that the students' grammar and vocabulary knowledge was adequate. Teacher C said the role of grammar and vocabulary was "light and mostly verbal", but that she did use one exercise that focused on connectors. Teacher E said she focused on words the students needed but that is was up to them to learn them. With grammar she typically focussed on some problems that she felt were important like tense errors and prepositions and took examples from the work done by the students. At the end of the course, Teacher E gave the students the option of studying grammar and vocabulary or writing an essay. The result was overwhelmingly in favor of the language work which surprised her and lead her to state that:

> Well obviously the next course that should be offered is 'Grammar help for IELTS' and I'm also realising that a lot of their problems - they do know the basics of writing essays, they do know about the exam, they've got fossilised faults in their grammar and it really does [show], especially the lack of use of the verbs. The same few faults come through again and again and again.

The texts presented to students during class time were not the only learning materials that were included in the courses. Some students had access to additional learning resources. At School C the Self Access Centre was promoted as a useful aid for the students on the course. They were questioned about their use of the resource. Most used the library during the course either daily (3 students of 20), once up to three times a week (7 students), or once to three times during the course (4 students). IELTS preparation books, grammar and vocabulary books were used by students who wanted to do practice tests (10 students), grammar and vocabulary practice (7 students) and for information on strategies (6 students). The books were mostly borrowed by students to take home although some used them in the library. Most students did not buy a copy of the book used on the course -'IELTS Preparation and Practice: The IELTS Preparation Course' because they could borrow it from the library of School C.

Students at School B had full access to the school's library and self access centre. Enrolment in the IELTS course at School A did not include any library privileges.

8.6 Stage 4: Case studies

The two most used books were chosen to be the focus of two cases studies. The two books were *IELTS to Success* and *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course.* Each of these books was analysed in turn starting with the one published first - *IELTS to Success*. In addition to the data from the quantitative analysis and feedback from the teachers, comments are also made on the overall appeal and usefulness as a teaching resource.

IELTS to Success was the second most popular source of texts for classes A and B. The quantitative analysis showed it to be the:

- source of most exam-related activities in Class A (14.5% of the total class time).
- source of most exam related activities in Class B (3% of the total class time).
- source of most reading tasks in Class A (1.7% of the total class time).
- second biggest source of reading tasks in Class B (1.8% of the total class time).
- source of most listening tasks in Class A (4.4% of the total class time).
- only source of listening tasks in Class B (0.7% of the total class time).
- source of most speaking tasks in Class A (3.7% of the total class time).
- source of most speaking tasks in Class B (2% of the total class time).

The aim of this preparation text as stated on the front cover was 'preparation tips and practice tests'. The back cover identifies the book as being suitable for both classroom and individual

use for students preparing for the AM. The texts and tasks are appropriate and generally reflect the level of difficulty of the actual test.

Compared with *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course*, *IELTS to Success* presents very little in the way of information about the use of the book, or its appropriacy in terms of language proficiency. The book starts with an overview of each of the Modules ending with explanation of the how the test results are presented and with brief answers to six frequently asked questions.

There is a section of skills and strategies in which there is a page containing the four main skills needed followed by exercises to practise the skills. The exercises are followed by explanations of the answers. In the case of reading there is a focus on common connective words and hints for working out unfamiliar vocabulary. These skills development exercises are typically one to two pages long. The writing module practice offers a number of phrases for describing graphs and models of Task 1 essays including basic analysis of the structure of one. For the Task 2 section structuring an essay is again outlined and a model analysed. Each phase of the speaking module is explained and examples given. The text also offers a limited number of key phrases which students could use in this module of the test. This section ends with half a page of hints (five) on how to study for IELTS, one page of advice on what to do before the test and half a page of 'examination technique'.

The largest part of *IELTS to Success* is dedicated to practice test papers – three listening, and six reading and writing tests. At the back of the book the answers to the listening texts and tape-scripts are provided; however, there is no linking of answers to the tape-script or explanation of the correct responses. Similarly, answers to the reading and listening practice tests are simply listed without further explanation or information. Model answers are provided for all writing tasks but no task or language analysis is included. Providing detailed feedback that can assist learners in understanding and correcting their errors is one way of encouraging positive washback but this opportunity is not taken here.

In terms of format, *IELTS to Success* is well laid out and easy to follow. The texts contain interesting topics likely to engage students and appropriate in terms of what is prescribed by IELTS. The tasks are IELTS-like and give students a general indication of the difficulty of the actual test.

The second book, *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* was the single most commonly used text at Schools A and C. As has been noted, this book did not feature at School B. *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* was the:

- source of most exam-related activities in Class C (7% of the total class time).
- source of most grammar and vocabulary related activities in Class A (1.1% of the total class time).
- source of most grammar and vocabulary related activities in Class C (7.5% of the total class time).
- second biggest source of reading tasks in Class A (2% of the total class time).
- source of most reading tasks in Class C (6.2% of the total class time).
- source of most writing tasks in Class C (2.3% of the total class time).
- source of most listening tasks in Class C (4.4% of the total class time).
- second biggest source of speaking tasks in Class A (2.2% of the total class time).
- source of most speaking tasks in Class C (4.6% of the total class time).

The front cover claims that this is a comprehensive course book for candidates in the final stages of preparing for the Academic and General Training Modules of IELTS. It sets out to develop the skills required for all four modules. Features include the promise of sample question types; including explanations, practice for typical question items and hints on how to comprehend test instructions; help for the students in terms of hints and suggestions for specific skills and strategies, detailed reminders and notes on specific points to remember; and sample answers.

The book offers help for teachers with four pages of introductory notes on how to use the course and its rationale, notes for the individual activities as well as a full answer key and tape-scripts. However, there is no separate Teacher's Book and consequently the amount of support for teachers is limited. The introduction does, however, contain general information about IELTS as well as about the:

- description of the book and its companion titles;
- organisation of the course and the development of the course;
- content focus;
- candidate profile;
- course duration; as well as
- guidance on student entry profile;

- lists of 'can do' type statements related to writing, reading, oral, listening and learning-how-to-learn skills.

The approach of the book is signalled not only on the cover, but also in the preface which mentions that:

> Courses that prepare students solely to 'get around' a placement test do them a great disservice, leaving them unable to cope with their university courses. The *IELTS Preparation Course* does much more than train students in test-taking strategies: it teaches language. Anyone satisfactorily completing this course must have gained knowledge of form and technique for the test by learning the language and skills that are required, not by learning the 'tricks of the trade' for taking a specific test. They will have the knowledge of the skills in the language which will be essential after they are enrolled.

The book claims to help students focus on learning and communication strategies, developing both productive and receptive skills Each skill is presented in a separate chapter, each starting with a description of the module and moving onto exercises which introduce different task types. There are sections of explanation of the tasks as well as language issues. In the margins of many pages are notes which are sometimes related to language points such as grammar or elements of discourse. At other points the notes are contain test tips or further explanations of the task.

The topics are said to be of general interest, in keeping with the test - a reasonable claim. In many preparation books, the model essays are written at a language level which is inaccessible to many students. The model essays in *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* are of a suitable level for its intended audience – very high Upper Intermediate or Advanced level students. As few if any of the students in the three classes involved in the study were at such an advanced level, the models were written for students of a far higher level of language ability.

Another feature related to language level which would indicate that this text was not necessarily of an appropriate level for the majority of the students in question, is the list of tasks set out on pages 3-4 which the author assumes the students should be able to demonstrate an ability to perform. The performance observed during the lessons was not indicative of students of a 'very high Upper Intermediate' level. The advanced level of the book while not precluding its use with lower level students, would necessitate significant

adaptation to make it accessible. In the case of both Schools A and C this was not the case as the materials were typically used in the original form as in the text.

Brief information on the organisation of the book and the language used appear in the students' part of the introduction together with a scale measurement conversion table. The IELTS test is mentioned to be difficult but students are told that the skills they learn while studying in an English-speaking environment will come in handy.

The duration of the course is stated to fit "… a minimum of 100 hours of instruction." However, many of the activities are said to be suitable for homework or self study. The book is organised according to the four skills areas of listening, reading (Academic and General Training Reading Modules), writing (Academic and General Training Writing Modules) and speaking. Each unit begins with a description of each part of the test and goes on to introduce task types and provide practice activities.

The last unit of the book contains listening tapescripts and provides an answer key for each exercise and explanatory notes to assist teachers. The answer keys to the reading give explanations of answers when appropriate but usually consist of a list. The key to the writing unit contains notes on possible answers. There is also reference to language issues such as appropriate use of verb tenses, phrases and vocabulary. Strategies are mentioned only under Unit 4 – The Listening Test. Skills are mentioned under Units 3 and 4 (Reading and Writing Test). Unit 5 – The Speaking Test mentions neither strategies nor skills.

The format of the book is user friendly – it is well laid out, clear and easy to read. Parts of the book have been identified as photocopyable, making it convenient for use as a class resource book. Listening tasks are clearly marked with the symbol of a cassette.

Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course is a companion volume to *Prepare for IELTS: Academic Modules* and *Prepare for IELTS: General Training Module*, which contain practice tests. Being part of a series means that this book can dedicate space to skills development, with practice tests being provided in the other volumes.

The two books in these case studies show different approaches to test preparation. *IELTS to Success* does as it states and presents test taking tips and test practice. Although not solely a book of practice tests, because the early sections introduce the test with examples and task analysis, it is typical of the older, more conventional approach, focusing primarily on giving intensive practice with IELTS-like tasks. There is little guidance for students other than basic

information about the test and lists of correct answers to the practice tests. Providing tape-scripts and model essays is a positive addition, but *IELTS to Success* falls short of exploiting these resources fully as there is no evaluation or explanation of the materials in the practice tests. The first sections of *IELTS to Success* provide students with helpful information about the test and its requirements. The inclusion of some sections of language input can be seen as an attempt to provide students with some of the tools required to complete the test tasks. However, this approach is not carried through the remainder of the book, meaning that overall the book helps students develop elements of testwiseness. The feedback on the practice tests is limited to lists of correct answers to the reading exercises, tapescripts of the listening tests and model essays for the writing tests. As the book is intended for self-study, tasks are not designed for student – student communication, though it could be argued that as the test tasks were designed to be as communicative, the practice exercises are themselves interactional in nature.

Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course, on the other hand, exemplifies a newer type of test preparation book and shares many features in common with more general textbooks than practice test books. In addition to information about the test, this book introduces each of the task types and gives students the opportunity to practice the same. The author also provides explanation about the tasks and appropriate ways to approach them. There is significant analysis of the writing tasks which students could use as a guide for structuring their own essays. Language input in the form of suggested words, expressions, phrases and analysis, is another feature of *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course,* and while not detailed, it is a reminder for higher level students who are the intended audience.

Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course is part of the 'Prepare for IELTS' series of books, the others being books of practice tests. This can be seen as affording the publisher and author the freedom of exploring another approach to test preparation and shows evidence of positive washback. *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* contains features which contribute to this. Throughout the book there are sections which focus on a range of language features which are linked to test tasks. There is acknowledgement of the authentic sources from which the texts are taken (2000: 216). The feedback provided from the practice exercises is reasonably detailed and gives explanation of the correct answers. When it comes to writing tasks the structure is broken down into the essential features.

There are several aspects of *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* which can be seen as contributing to the students' broader language development. For example, the author claims that the focus of this text is on "… learning and communication strategies which will assist

the student in developing both the productive skills of writing and speaking and the receptive skills of reading and listening". This shows an awareness of the importance of learning language for the purposes of communication. Furthermore, the author mentions that the book "… helps candidates to learn from their own errors and analyse their own errors and their own difficulties." These factors, considered along with the details of the student entry profile indicate a focus on language development and on helping students to become more independent learners. The reading texts used are taken from authentic sources and are on topics appropriate for IELTS.

8.7 Conclusion

How then did the textbooks influence the courses included in this study? The impact of IELTS was obvious in the use of IELTS preparation texts as the primary source of classroom materials. The study showed that there were four different types of IELTS preparation texts ranging from those consisting, at one end of the spectrum, of practice tests only, to books which focused exclusively on the kind of vocabulary that occurs in the test.

In terms of the procedure used in the analysis of the materials from the classroom study several observations can be made. The textbook analysis showed that simply identifying the source of a text used in class was insufficient to classify the type of exercise it was. It also highlighted the usefulness of recording whether or not the material was given in its original form or adapted, and whether students received a copy to keep or not. For example, practice tests were used in a very different way at School B compared to Schools A and C. Here they were often given as exam practice, but then they had been adapted to create a range of different types of exercises which extended the activity beyond a basic test familiarity and practice exercise.

Talking to the teachers showed that their choices of which materials to use were often based on factors such as the item type or skill they had to focus on in any particular phase of a lesson. Teachers had their own favourite books from which they tended to draw most materials of a specific type. In some cases the choice was dictated by the fact that only some books contained the exercise types they required, for example, not all books contained grammar and vocabulary exercises or lists of test 'dos and don'ts'. Other times decisions were based on the topics included or the appropriacy of the level of the text.

Reviewing the results of the IIS project, Saville and Hawkey (in press) observe that "a test may exert good washback although textbook materials dedicated to it may still be

unsuccessful". Surely the opposite too is possible – that materials of what may seem dubious value may be used in a constructive and communicative way. For example, this study shows some of the different ways that practice test materials can be used, while books which simply provide test materials for students to practice with simply mirror the test items and therefore show little other evidence of washback. At Schools A and C they were used as they were written – for practice. While they were also used in this way at School B, the texts were selected from various sources and reorganised according to topic. Additional exercises had been created that developed and extended the original tasks and incorporated many elements of language analysis, many of which had been turned into communicative tasks.

The decision by staff at School C to choose *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* as the set text is an acknowledgement of its perceived worth as a learning resource by this institution. The book which gradually and thoroughly introduces students to all aspects of the exam as well as providing language instruction and feedback on test. What must be kept in mind is that the freedom to choose such a text is afforded by its publication – a decision in the hands of the publishers. However, judging from the increasing numbers of such books being released, they are a welcome addition to the existing IELTS preparation texts.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

9.1 Introduction

The primary intent of this research was to investigate the washback effects of IELTS, by studying three classes taking preparation courses for the IELTS Academic Module. It compared three IELTS preparation courses using a number of different data collection methods and considered the following questions as previously outlined in Chapter 2:

1. What forms of data-gathering provide useful insights into what happens in an IELTS preparation course?
2. What differences are there between courses which focus specifically on IELTS preparation and those that also include learning objectives related to preparation for academic study?
3. How do the teacher's background and perceptions influence the way that the course is delivered?
4. Is there evidence of student progress during the course towards greater proficiency in English for academic study?
5. What are the features of IELTS preparation books and how were they used by the teachers in each course?
6. What evidence is there of washback from the test on the way that IELTS preparation classes are designed and delivered?

This chapter will summarise the findings with regard to these research questions and relate these to the relevant literature.

9.2 Forms of data-gathering providing useful insights into what happens in an IELTS preparation course (Q1)

The two main instruments used to analyse the data collected in the classroom observations were Part A of COLT and Part 2 of UCOS. These instruments revealed different but complementary aspects of the classroom activities. Using COLT provided a macroscopic description of the classrooms from a communicative teaching perspective. This information was complemented by the UCOS, which gave a more micro-level analysis and looked at particular text- and task types used in the classroom as well as test and skills-related activities.

The UCOS instrument was used to assess how the materials, both from texts and those created by teachers, were used by students in the classroom. The data collected with the UCOS instrument was also applied to the textbook analysis by cross-referencing the materials used with the book they were taken from. It thus allowed the calculation of how much of the total class time was spent working with each textbook.

However, both instruments had to be considerably adapted, including the introduction of new categories to classify a number of classroom activities that were actually observed in these three classrooms. Thus, individually and collectively, the two instruments had specific weaknesses when used for classroom observations of test preparation classes in search of evidence of washback. To gain a more complete picture of IELTS preparation in these three courses, it was also necessary to record in more detail the test information and strategies offered by the teachers, patterns of secondary teacher-student interaction, the types of materials used, and instances of laughter in class time.

As the people presenting the courses, the teachers' perspectives on the course, and on IELTS in general, were an important part of the study. Information was gathered from them in two ways: through questionnaires completed before and after the study and through interviews. The teachers were also asked about their process of materials selection and how the classes had responded to the lessons. In the case of Schools A and B, these interviews were carried out on a weekly basis. While teachers were generally able to recall the thinking behind each lesson, their recollection of the most recent class tended to be more detailed. At School C, where the teachers taught different skills, the interviews were carried out after each class, which gave more detailed descriptions. The immediacy of the review of the materials meant that the teachers were not only able to reflect on how they had selected the materials and planned the lesson, but were more likely to comment on whether or not the lesson had been a success and why. Thus, through the willingness of the teachers to cooperate with the research, good quality data could be obtained about the thinking behind the classroom activities and the use of specific materials.

Information regarding the perspective of the students was collected primarily through questionnaires that were administered at the beginning and end of the courses. Information about the students' background was collected. They were also asked to comment on various aspects of IELTS, why they needed to sit the test and what they expected of the course. In the case of Course C, students were also asked to report at the end of each class on how useful they felt classroom activities had been and whether or not the amount of homework was appropriate. The student perspective could have been better represented by taking a small

number of learners as case studies, but this was not possible because of the limited time and resources available for the data-gathering.

To assess any changes in their language proficiency, students completed pre- and post-tests with the listening, reading and writing sections of retired versions of IELTS. According to their questionnaire responses, the students expected that the course would provide them with tips on how to do well on the test and give them chances to practise their test-taking skills. The students were seen to have a perception that attending a preparation course would lead to a better result in the real test. The results of the pre-and post-testing were useful in this regard, as they showed that in most cases it had little significant effect on their test scores and the most likely explanation for this is that their language ability had not improved over the period of the course. Neither did it seem that they had gained a significant amount of additional knowledge about the test – as indicated in the non-significant result of the questionnaire section which tested the students' awareness of the test procedures and format.

Thus, this study has confirmed what previous researchers on washback have found, that a range of data-gathering procedures are required to give an adequate account of what happens in a test preparation classroom. In addition, existing instruments need to be adapted to fit what is observed in particular courses.

9.3 Differences between courses which focus specifically on IELTS preparation and those that also include learning objectives related to preparation for academic study (Q2)

Given that the majority of the students enrolled in each of the three preparation courses were aiming to take IELTS to gain entry into tertiary courses, the question arises of the extent to which preparation for the test also prepares students for the academic study they aim to embark on once they have gained entry.

Only one of the courses, at School B, signalled that it included academic study skills. When this course was first created, the aims had been very similar to the courses at Schools A and C. The focus was predominantly on teaching students about the test and giving them practice. However, this approach had not been successful and as a consequence a new course was designed. The new IELTS preparation course, the one in place at the time of the observations, was extended so that students could study for up to eight months. The approach was

broadened to include some language development as well as extending IELTS tasks and introducing students to some academic skills. The results of the classroom observations showed that, as anticipated, the focus of the courses at Schools A and C were almost exclusively on IELTS tasks whereas at School B the students also completed tasks which while building skills tested in the test, were not as directly linked to the test format. This broader focus was also seen in the materials used in Class B.

The teacher at School A aimed to familiarise students with the structure of the test and to teach them test-taking strategies. The course was organised around the practice of skills, particularly through test-related tasks. At School B, the goal was not only test familiarisation, but also language development. Here, the course was topic-based, with a substantial emphasis on language forms as well as skills. It was not surprising, then, that the distinct objectives led the teachers to deliver the courses in rather different ways.

The course at School B included an element of EAP, with more academic study skills being introduced as the course progressed. Although the course had originally focused solely on the test, over time it had developed to include skills and exposure to types of discourse that were outside the scope of IELTS. The course included elements of things such as note-taking, structuring written arguments and presenting seminars.

The teachers were asked if they perceived a mismatch between the IELTS test tasks and the students' academic study needs. Teacher A felt that her course differed in almost every way from an EAP course. It was shorter and totally test-focussed. She said the course did not prepare students for academic study, but only for the IELTS test. Similarly, all of the teachers at School C agreed that their course focused only on IELTS. This comment by Teacher C summarised their main concerns:

> It is just so focused on the exam. It is intense. You don't have to do it this way, but I tend to ask them "How many did you get right?" sort of thinking of scores I suppose. I think it prepared them to sit the IELTS exam. I don't think it does a great deal to prepare them [for university]. I think a longer preparation course is infinitely more valuable.

In contrast, Teacher B thought his course did help students prepare for university study. However, he acknowledged that, although there were many academic study skills included in the course at School B, a true EAP course should include skills such as referencing and extended academic assignments.

Teacher D commented that an EAP course set out to prepare students for three years of university study and arguably for life. It was more focused on strategies to create meaning in a range of situations. He made the point that while for the students passing IELTS was an important point for them but it was only that, a point, and that what went on after that needed a much broader range of skills.

9.4 Teacher's background and perceptions and their influence on the way that a course is delivered (Q3)

A teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning are likely to influence what happens in their classroom (Richards and Lockhart 1994). Likewise, their approach to test preparation will be affected by their beliefs about the specific exam and how familiar they are with what it aims to test (Hamp-Lyons, 1998). In their study of washback in TOEFL, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) found that the individual approach of teachers can have as much of an effect on the class as the type of class they teach. They suggested that "Tests will have different amounts and types of washback on some teachers and learners than on other teachers and learners" (1996: 296). Alderson argued the importance of encouraging teachers to reflect carefully on their test preparation practice because the existence of good tests does not necessarily mean that teachers will prepare students well (1998:1).

DeVincenzi (1995: 181) made the observation that "How the great majority of language teachers learn about standardized tests and draw conclusions about their content and purpose is ... a highly inferential and potentially flawed process". Deakin has commented that "English teachers have a responsibility to place IELTS preparation in a broader perspective and to educate students about the language demands of tertiary studies" (1996: 24). Simply changing the test does not give the teachers the necessary means to change their classroom methods for preparing students for the new test. If indeed the teachers are the final decision makers about the immediate content and structure of any IELTS preparation courses, this then makes the training and education of practitioners all the more important. While the IELTS partners have taken responsibility for making information about the test available to the public in the form of the official IELTS handbook, specimen materials, sample answers and the publication of much of the research carried out on their behalf, they have no control about how that knowledge is interpreted or used.

9.4.1 Evidence of how background & perceptions influenced delivery

The teachers on each of the courses were considered to be well qualified and experienced. All had the minimum qualification of the CTEFLA and were either working towards or had completed a course of further study in the field. Although they had differing numbers of years' teaching experience, they would, within the New Zealand context, have been considered 'experienced'.

Irrespective of their teaching background or their position on the validity of IELTS as a suitable benchmark test, comments made by the teachers indicated that it was factors outside their immediate control which had the most significant effect on how they delivered their classes. Individual teachers may have approached their classes in their own way, depending on their different teaching backgrounds, beliefs and personal teaching styles, but each had a certain amount of material that they were required or expected to get through in the allotted class time. This was particularly true of Courses A and C, which were stand alone classes, but even Teacher B needed to have covered all parts of the test during the month he taught the class.

Each of the courses was identified as providing some form of IELTS preparation and it was therefore not surprising to observe the presentation of information about the test, tips on test taking strategies and test practice. What differed between the classes was the amount of class time dedicated to test-like activities and the ways in which the tasks were used. The design of Course B allowed students more time to get ready for the test and therefore allowed more time for the students to focus on communicating and negotiating meaning. By contrast, the month long time-frame in which the teachers of Courses A and C had to cover the fundamentals of the test limited what they could do with the students. The aims of both courses - test information and test practice - were seen in the way the classes were delivered. The teacher imparting information to the students was a way of dealing with the time pressure and this type of teacher focus was common at Schools A and C. The practice element was seen in the amount of time students spent completing tests, both in class and for homework, and marking them.

IELTS task and text types formed the basis around which all three courses were structured. Here as in other areas of the study, Courses A and C showed more in common with each other than with Course B. The difference was that the materials at Schools A and C were taken almost exclusively from IELTS preparation texts. At School B, while IELTS tasks and sections of the test were the start or end of a section of the course, these materials were

typically expanded and developed to create a range of activities and were supplemented with texts from sources other than preparation texts.

The teachers at School A and C shared some views on the difficulties of delivering IELTS preparation courses. Teacher A, for example, was not completely comfortable with this teacher centred, exam focused type of approach and commented about teaching IELTS preparation classes that "In a way it always feels like there is not enough teaching especially towards the end. It's just practice, practice, practice." The teaching at School C was similarly focused on the teacher and there was a correspondingly limited amount of group work for the students. The teachers at Schools A and C were also somewhat circumspect in their opinions about how the classes were approached. The limitations placed on teachers were commonly acknowledged, particularly the way teachers had to give the students a full picture of the test within a limited time-frame. The consequences of this were that they had few opportunities to cover things outside providing basic information about the test and giving the students practice. The potential difficulties of having a mix of students preparing for different modules of the test as well as students with different language levels also impacted on the way Classes A and C were delivered. At both schools the number of students in test preparation classes was two to three times larger than regular language classes. Again, these were not factors at School B, where the class size was limited to a maximum of 12 and the students were given entry into the class based on a minimum language level.

9.5 Evidence of student progress during the course towards greater proficiency in English for academic study (Q4)

9.5.1 Pre- and post-test results

In this study students were given pre- and post- tests using retired versions of IELTS (listening, reading and writing modules). The results showed no significant improvement in scores except for the performance of students from Course A on the listening section of the tests. The cause of this improvement at School A can only be surmised but the classroom observation data indicated that the course involved a lot of listening practice.

The IELTS Handbook estimates that a candidate could expect a single band increase as the result of 200 hours of intensive language instruction (IELTS 2000). Neither the type of instruction, nor the initial band score of the candidate are specified.

Several studies have approached the question of the effect of instruction, either through IELTS preparation, EAP or intensive English programmes, on the IELTS scores of students. In 2000 Green and Weir were commissioned by IELTS to undertake a project aiming to monitor the band score gains in academic writing in EAP programmes of varying length for students of differing backgrounds preparing to study in the UK. They sought evidence of score gains in the IELTS Academic Writing Module for "student groups of varying proficiency and background, over given periods of time and under specific conditions of study" (forthcoming).

Their study identified several points of concern regarding the preparation of students for tertiary study in the UK – "In short, most learners do not appear to make gains of half a band on the IELTS Academic Writing Module (AWM) for each month of study" (forthcoming). Green and Weir found that best predictor of gain was not the length of the preparation course, but rather the AWM score the students had achieved at the beginning of the course. Greater gains were seen in those with the lowest entry scores. General candidates entering with scores of 5.5 were making gains, while those with a score above 5.5 were not.

Several students tested at a low level upon entry into the courses observed in the present study. Unfortunately, at Schools A and C, many of them subsequently withdrew from the course and their data is therefore not available. For the remaining students, however, comparisons of the correlation for each of the modules tested at each of the three schools showed that overall, the tendency was little correlation between the pre- and post-test scores at Schools A and C, but a significant negative correlation at School B indicating that students who tested low on the pre-tests tended to score higher on the post-test. This is consistent with the findings of Green and Weir (forthcoming) reported above.

It was also one of the results in a recent study by Elder and O'Loughlin (2003), who looked at what effect three months of intensive English study made to the IELTS scores. The 112 participants, taken from four different institutions in New Zealand and Australia, were given pre and post-tests, and questionnaires, and both students and teachers were interviewed. The authors found that on average after 10 –12 weeks of intensive study the students in their study made a gain of a half a band score overall and slightly more than half a band in the listening. There was evidence that students entering classes with lower initial scores were more likely to show an improvement after a period of study. Other possible influences were the age and educational level of the candidates. However, in their conclusion, Elder and O'Loughlin warn of a need for caution when generalising about the factors that contribute to success in English learning in general and IELTS test performance in particular (2003: 235). They also observe

that a score gain in IELTS is not always necessarily evidence of real gain in language proficiency and that results cannot be guaranteed (ibid:237).

The specific finding by Elder and O'Loughlin that the gain in the Listening Module was slightly more than the overall gain is interesting, in the light of the fact the only significant increase found in the present study was in listening at School A. This higher level of 'sensitivity' in the listening section of the test, in conjunction with the large amount of class time devoted to listening skills, could explain the significance of the test results at School A. However, such results should be viewed with caution considering the small size of the sample.

The study by Elder and O'Loughlin (2003) contributed significantly to the information we have regarding the effect, or lack of measurable effect, of intensive study findings to this area, however, there is still much we do not know. The issue of identifying potential factors influencing improvement of language proficiency and its effect on IELTS band score gains over time are issues that require significant further research. The conclusions drawn by Elder and O'Loughlin were based on a study of students intensively studying English for 10-12 weeks. Consequently, in this current study where the three courses observed were all less than 10-12 weeks of intensive study, (22, 28 and 40 hours respectively), little measurable improvement could be expected.

9.6 Features of IELTS preparation books (Q5)

The potential of textbooks to create washback is well documented in the literature. Key issues in 'textbook washback' include the role that publishers and authors play in influencing the types of preparation materials that come onto the market; and the role of teachers as the interpreters and presenters of the contents of the books. The features seen as promoting positive washback in textbooks follow on from the literature in general, with the importance of including not only information about the requirements of the test, but also tasks that support good classroom pedagogic practices, and follow guidelines of appropriate test preparation practices.

A number of studies of test preparation books have been carried out in a variety of contexts and it was from this research and literature on test preparation that criteria were selected for the analysis of the IELTS preparation books available in New Zealand in 2001. The use of IELTS preparation books in the three classes observed was assessed and teachers were

questioned about their choice of materials for use in their classes. A detailed case study was also made of two of the most commonly used books.

As textbooks were the primary source of classroom materials in Schools A and C, and a significant source in School B, their content and approach had a direct impact on what happened in the classrooms. Another factor to consider is the type of books published for the IELTS market. They were designed primarily for self-study or classroom use. However, none of the books claiming to be suitable for use in the classroom provided a teacher's book or a workbook to support and supplement the text, something which is the norm in course-books for General English and preparation books for examinations such as the Cambridge main-suite exams. In this respect, IELTS preparation texts are similar to those for TOEFL.

The different approach taken at School C was also seen in the class materials. The analysis of the materials used in the classes revealed similarities between Courses A and C which were taken almost exclusively from IELTS preparation books. These were used in their original form taken directly from the books. Course B by contrast included materials from a broader range of sources. IELTS preparation texts were represented but they had usually been adapted in some way. The majority of the texts had been developed by the school for use on the course. Students at Schools A and B were given copies of all of these materials to keep, whereas at School C, students only used the materials taken from the set text, the main source of materials, in the class.

One feature that one would expect in a language classroom is the inclusion of input and exercises that explore the components of the language. Exploring the extent to which these test preparation classes focussed on teaching grammar and vocabulary showed differences between the three schools. Acknowledging the fact that Courses A and C did not set out to improve the students' language proficiency, the question of whether or not familiarising them with the test and giving them practice is adequate preparation remains.

By looking at the materials the study showed not only distinct differences in the sources they came from but also the types of exercises the students were engaged in. UCOS broke down the focus of the grammar and vocabulary exercises the students worked on during the course and here there were significant differences which reflected the comments of the teachers regarding what they aimed to do. Four percent of the total class time at Course A was devoted to language work. Students on Course C were exposed to over three times more of this kind of study – 14.45% of class time. But by far the most significant amount of class time spent on language was found on Course B, where students were involved in grammar focus and

vocabulary activities for almost 24% of the time. This analysis allowed a further break down of the specific activity types represented by the total figures. At School A cohesion was the single largest topic of focus and a similar amount of time (2.8%) was spent on this at School C too. At School B the students received many explanations of words, phrases and idioms (9.25%) and this was also the biggest language focus at School C at 4.47%. Vocabulary revision, almost completely absent from the other schools, was the second most common language exercise (5.98%) and general vocabulary was a more common topic than grammar. This difference between the amount of time Courses devoted to teaching language was mirrored in the COLT analysis. It showed that at School B vocabulary and vocabulary plus grammar represented 14.08 and 15.20 % respectively compared to 1.95 and 0.27% at School A and 5.22 and 0.88% at School C. Obviously, these differences in the activities at the three schools were reflected in the types of material that each of the teachers chose.

A final difference that needs to be added to the picture of what learning opportunities the students had, is the access to study materials which students had outside the classroom. In terms of homework exercises students at Schools A and C regularly took home practice test exercises typically reading and writing tasks, which they corrected in class. Students at School B were not given regular homework but were expected to study vocabulary word lists and other work given during the course. Access to a well resourced library was possible for students at Schools B and C but not A. This access to IELTS preparation as well as General English texts could have been used to the advantage of motivated independent learners, particularly in light of the common goal of progressing to tertiary study where library and self-study skills would be crucial.

9.7 Evidence of washback in the IELTS preparation classes (Q6)

We now finally consider the question of how the phenomenon of test washback can be observed in the three IELTS preparation courses which have been the focus of this study. The first point to recognize is that the research context is somewhat different from that of earlier research. Previous washback studies have typically investigated the impact of tests in two main contexts. In the first there is a well-established but old-fashioned exam that is being reformed, or replaced by a more modern one. Here, the question is whether there will be the desired positive effects on teachers and learners as a result. In the second scenario there is a test which is seen as being somewhat out of step with current language teaching principles and the idea is to document ways in which the test acts as a constraint on, for example, teaching practice, course design and what and how students prepare for the test.

The situation with IELTS in New Zealand is somewhat different. It is a comparatively modern, communicative test. It was considered innovative at the time it was introduced and – allowing for the practical constraints of a three-hour proficiency test – it was compatible with communicative language teaching, which was already being implemented in ESOL classrooms to a large extent. Thus, we would expect a "good" preparation course to exemplify the principles of the communicative approach, including a learner-centred methodology which involves the promotion of learner autonomy.

On the other hand, IELTS preparation courses need to take account of the fact that most international students who come to New Zealand for tertiary study are from education systems in East and Southeast Asia. Traditionally, in these contexts, they prepare for tests with intensive study and memorising of language texts and structural elements. This kind of language knowledge by itself does not equip them for tertiary study in New Zealand and similarly, a traditional structure-oriented exam is not a good predictor of their ability to cope in this environment. Thus, the students need to recognise the importance of developing academic language skills, leading to more adequate preparation for their academic study. In this context, then, evidence of positive washback would be that:

- IELTS preparation courses are designed in such a way as to address the future academic needs of the students that take them

- Teachers are able to deliver the courses in ways that they know will help the students meet the language demands of their academic studies.

- Students accept the need to acquire relevant language skills, as well as just "passing the exam".

There are other factors at work as well. The students have the potential to play a significant role in influencing the kinds of courses which are offered. As previously noted, most of them come from education systems which are highly competitive in nature and where the key to success is performing well in high-stakes examinations. They are therefore well versed in exam strategies and used to an intensive form of preparation which is heavily reliant on the memorisation which is required to perform well in their local exams. Coming to New Zealand, many are also under considerable pressure, for financial reasons, to meet university entrance requirements and complete their studies in the shortest time possible.

In order to demonstrate that they have sufficient English language proficiency for undergraduate study, the students simply need to achieve an overall IELTS band score of 6.0. When they come to New Zealand for this purpose, they tend to look for courses that will give them intensive practice with IELTS tasks and tips on doing well in the test. This puts pressure on schools to admit them to IELTS courses even if they have not reached the upper intermediate level of general proficiency that teachers usually consider to be a prerequisite. It is not surprising, then, to find a lot of short courses that are designed to cater for this student demand but which do not address their wider academic study needs. From this perspective, it could be argued that IELTS is having a negative effect because the test tasks are inevitably limited in scope as compared to real academic study tasks and the course can be delivered in a non-communicative, teacher-centred way, as was observed to some extent at Schools A and C.

There are two conclusions, then, which we can draw from this overview of how the washback concept applies to the present study:

- It may be unrealistic to expect IELTS to have the kind of positive washback effect that was outlined in Chapter 1. Most earlier washback research has looked for effects on the teaching and learning of the second language (most commonly, English) in the classroom, but what has been proposed here is that the test should have the effect of reorienting the students' whole approach to academic study. This is probably an unreasonable goal for a three-hour proficiency test to achieve.
- Even if we find that the test is having an effect on the learning activity of the students who are preparing for it, it is not clear that the effect derives from the particular features of IELTS, or simply from the fact that New Zealand tertiary institutions have chosen to use IELTS as the proficiency test with which to assess the preparedness of international students for the language demands of academic study in this country.

Thus, the application of the washback concept to the three IELTS preparation courses included in this research turns out to be more complicated than was expected at the outset. The reality seems to be that, regardless of how "communicative" the design of the IELTS test was originally intended to be, its implementation as a required measure of English language proficiency has had the effect of encouraging the development of teaching and learning activities that are narrowly focused on test preparation. This means that, paradoxically, the features associated with a positive washback effect are found in a language course like the one at School B. The staff at this school have in a sense *resisted*, if not overcome, the

washback influences of the test by offering the students a programme of study under the banner of IELTS preparation which in fact offers them a broader foundation for undertaking academic study through the medium of English.

Let us explore this idea further from a communicative perspective by applying Bailey's (1996) criteria for judging whether a language teaching programme shows beneficial effects from a test. In her discussion of washback, Bailey (1996: 260) quotes Morrow (1991:111) as arguing that one of the characteristics of a "good" test is that it should "… reflect and encourage good classroom practice …". If indeed we support the belief that people learn languages through communicative activity, then it is, as Bailey put it, through "..attempting to understand and to make oneself understood that learners negotiate for meaning" (1996: 260). The amount of lesson time in which the students were actively involved in this type of communication, then, would be seen as an indication of good classroom practice which has not been inhibited but rather encouraged by the test for which the students are being prepared. In this part of the analysis, the use of COLT was crucial, designed as it was to examine the communicative orientation of classrooms.

Bailey (1996: 268) focused on three main characteristics of a language teaching programme that showed beneficial effects from a test:

1. Language learning goals
2. Building in authenticity
3. Learner autonomy and self assessment

With regard to the first characteristic, Bailey suggested that the key consideration was whether the language course developed the students' language proficiency. A conclusion that can be drawn from previous washback studies is that the presence of classroom practices which aim to enhance students' language proficiency are evidence of positive washback. The analysis using COLT indicated that, while there were elements of language instruction in all three courses, it played a significant role in only one of the classes: the one at School B. Activities focusing on both vocabulary and grammar were the most common category of classroom content and represented over 15% of the total class time. The learning of vocabulary was particularly important in this class. The teacher and students spent 14% of the time working on new words, collocations and phrases. This was further confirmed in the analysis with the UCOS, which indicated that Class B was the most grammar and vocabulary oriented one followed by Class C. Grammar and vocabulary were less prominent in Class A where such activities were rare. Although vocabulary and grammar are common components

of language classes, neither is explicitly tested in IELTS – there are no separate word usage or structure sections, as in some tests. This means that the emphasis on language study at School B cannot be explained as a direct effect of the IELTS test. At the most, there is an indirect washback effect, in the sense that the teaching of vocabulary and grammar was introduced into the course at School A as a result of the teachers' experience that students who simply practised IELTS test tasks did not improve their performance on the test. The students needed a better foundation of language development in order to be able to achieve their goal of passing the test.

Interviews with teachers at School A and C showed that, although they perceived that what the students really needed was to improve their test performance, a test preparation course was not conducive to dealing with teaching language. This created a dilemma for the teachers, as illustrated in this comment on the teaching of grammar made by Teacher A- "…it's such a short course and it's so intensive and it's focusing on their exam skills and exam technique but there are always some who have a rather wobbly foundation in grammar." There was also evidence that some students were aware of their need for additional language development - "There are always some people who expect a grammar module within the course which of course we cannot satisfy"

Similarly, Teacher A felt she was even less able to deal intensively with vocabulary:

> I try to relate things that they are reading to what they are writing or things they have been speaking about so there is some kind of cross over there. But apart from that there is very little that we do. I mean we look at topics for example that turn up in the writing and they try to work out what kind of vocab they might need but that's really all.

The following comment by Teacher A summed up her feelings about the language teaching aspect of the course "In a way it always feels like there is not enough teaching especially towards the end. It's just practice, practice, practice."

Grammar was taught in the morning classes at School B and Teacher B felt that that was enough input for most of the students to absorb in a day. Although he did not present new grammar points in the afternoon class, he did draw the students' attention to the role grammar plays in all the modules of the test and did a lot of error correction which was an intense language focus. Teacher B was a keen supporter of the lexical approach and felt that

vocabulary was something that all the students had to work on. When asked how much grammar he taught in the IELTS class, he said:

> Not a lot I have to admit. Partly because I think they've often had enough grammar instruction from the morning class. But I point out for example that often the answers, particularly to the reading and the listening paper, have a grammatical element in the three words or less. Grammar is tested in many ways in the IELTS exam. Just because it is a reading paper it doesn't mean reading is the only relevant skill. Question forming and the role-playing in the interview and so on. I draw their attention to the fact that grammar is a part of it but I don't think I ever do any kind of presentation particularly. Error correction, a lot of the grammar would come from error correction.

Teachers at School C had slightly different ideas about the place of grammar and vocabulary teaching in the class but in general they were covered 'lightly' but this was influenced to some extent by the skill they taught. For example, the focus on asking questions in the third section of the interviewed required some revision of question structures. Comments indicated that the students were coming to the course with a sound grammatical knowledge and a satisfactory range of vocabulary. "... in terms of their general knowledge of 2,000 words or what ever it is they are just left to their own devices and it is assumed that they will know it"(Teacher D). But as indicated by Teacher E, the teaching tended to be linked to the texts they were using in class rather than an independent focus.

The number of students in a language classroom can also have an effect on the number of opportunities for the development of communicative ability in a broader sense. The comparatively small class size at School B meant that there were more opportunities for students to speak with each other and with the class teacher. The decision to limit the number of students in the IELTS class to twelve, as in the General English classes at this school, meant that the potential for applying a communicative methodology was enhanced, and indeed, the students in Class B had more control over the content of the class time and spent more time working both with each other in groups and interacting with the teacher.

In terms of the kinds of activities which predominated in each class, one obvious difference was that the students in Class B focused on vocabulary and grammar more than either of the other classes, and spent comparatively less time on traditional test preparation activities such as discussing strategies which might enhance their test performance. Teachers at all three schools were aware that most of their students would benefit from further language

development but only Course A was able to accommodate that kind of work. By contrast, students at both Schools A and C were often reminded that the course was not designed to address any gaps in their language proficiency and that any remedial work was their responsibility. Course C did include some language work, but in Course A it represented only a very small percentage of the total class time. Thus, in a sense, there were two kinds of washback effect from the test here, depending on the scope of the particular kind of preparation course which each school had set up.

With regard to Bailey's (1996) second characteristic of communicative classrooms, the use of authentic materials is evidence of positive washback and these types of texts were rare at Schools A and C which were based primarily on IELTS preparation books. At School B, however, materials were taken from a larger range of sources and while they were by no means all authentic, they were of a more varied text type. This use of materials which were not based on IELTS-like texts and tasks can be interpreted as a positive feature of Course B, in the sense that the teacher and students were not narrowly focused on test preparation, but again it is arguable whether it represents direct washback from IELTS.

The classroom data collected in the study included information regarding the source of the materials used in each class. The analysis indicated that authentic texts were rare in Class A where IELTS preparation texts were the predominant source of the materials used in activities representing almost 46% of the total class time. The second largest amount of class time, 6.5% overall, was spent on activities with materials made by the teacher. In comparison, in Class B activities with materials developed by the school was the largest category at almost 43% of the total class time. These materials consisted of adaptations of authentic texts and of IELTS, academic and general English textbooks, as well as supplementary exercises. Activities using ESOL texts, both in their original form and adapted, took up over 18% of the class time followed by IELTS preparation texts at around 13%. Teachers A and B used their own materials for 6% and 4% of the total class time respectively. School C had chosen a specific textbook as the 'set text' for the course and had a class set of the book available for the students to use while in class. Analysis of the materials showed that almost half of the materials used over the course came from other IELTS preparation texts. Differences were found in the ways each of the teachers used the available materials and the effect of the teachers' responsibility for teaching specific skills must be considered in this respect. Teacher C used the set textbooks extensively in her reading and listening classes. Here it should also be noted that when the class sets were used in the class the students did not always receive copies of the materials to take home. This is discussed in the analysis of the textbooks.

Messick (1996: 241) connects authenticity to beneficial washback. IELTS recognises the importance of including authentic materials in tests and, for example, IELTS reading texts are all taken from authentic sources. Because it is a communicative test, IELTS tasks are also designed to be as authentic as practically possible in the context of a three-hour test. The study indicated that the students at School B were exposed to a broader range of materials and used more materials from authentic sources. This could be interpreted as an indication of positive washback, to the extent that the authenticity of texts and tasks in IELTS – although it is somewhat limited by the practical constraints of large-scale proficiency testing – was reflected in the greater use of authentic materials and activities at School B.

The third kind of evidence for beneficial washback was the use of self assessment procedures and activities which promote learner involvement and autonomy. Although Bailey (1996: 270) makes reference to more formal types of self-assessment mechanisms, students on each of the three courses received feedback on their performance in different ways - some of the type expected in a traditional test preparation environment, and some more easily seen as supporting language learning.

Students on these courses received feedback on their performance on practice tests in several ways. Teachers gave students lists of correct answers. This was most common at School A and was also present but to a far lesser extent at School C. Sometimes, these lists of correct answers was accompanied by some explanation and/ or discussion. This type was a common feature of both Classes A and C. The least common form of feedback, and the one that allowed the students more opportunities to interact with the text was when the students were given the opportunity to discuss and negotiate the correct answers between themselves with the assistance of the teacher. This, more detailed feedback was given regularly in Class B and to a lesser extent in Class C.

Several parts of the classroom data provided information about whether students were evaluating their performance and whether the activities led towards the development of independent learners. Firstly, there are four 'feedback' relevant categories under UCOS – Exam Related Activities: ER3 refers to the Teacher giving students feedback in the form of IELTS band scores. This was absent from classes A and B and happened only on one occasion at School C when students were given feedback in the form of approximate band range after a listening lesson. ER4 refers to the Teacher giving feedback on student performance item by item i.e. the Teacher giving the right answer without explanation of reasons why it was correct. This type of activity, which seems to do little to to assist student learning, was prominent in Class A (5% of the total class time), absent from Class B, and rare

in Class C (0.6 and 1.6% of the total class times respectively). ER5 refers to the Teacher identifying answers in a text (Reading or Listening) and explaining. This type of feedback is more easily seen as encouraging self-assessment and learner autonomy as students have the opportunity, if they choose, to review their own answers and identify where their errors were made. It should be noted that these figures on feedback correspond to the number of practice tests completed by the students – an activity more common in Classes A and C. This was equally present in Classes A and C (4 and 4.6% respectively) and less so in Class B (2.9% of the total class time). However, while the students in Class B did few practice test activities like those that featured at Schools A and B, they did receive a lot of feedback from the teacher on an individual and group basis as evidenced in the 'Additional Analysis". This group of students also spent significant amounts of class-time working in pairs and small groups discussing answers and negotiating meaning.

ER6 refers to the Teacher asking students to consider their strengths and weaknesses with respect to the test requirements. This seems to be related to both learner autonomy and self-assessment – it was the students' responsibility to follow up and learn from their errors. This was equally present in all three Classes (in the range of 1.4% of the total class time).

In summary, the analysis with the UCOS instrument showed that all teachers spent similar amounts of class time getting their students to analyse their performance on tasks and to identify the areas they needed to improve on.

However, the Additional Analysis pointed out that during Course B a secondary focus was a significant form of classroom interaction and these instances were recorded and calculated as a percentage of total class time. Teacher B often spent time assisting students while they were working on tasks, both individually, and in pairs or groups. This secondary interaction focused on issues relating to task and language. The assistance given to the students by the teacher varied each week, depending on the type of tasks the students were working on. Teacher B helped his students more often during writing exercises. While students wrote, he attempted to give each student individual attention. This kind of help accounted for 15% of the total class time. During discussion exercises, he clarified the task for the students, answered questions about language and corrected errors as they occurred, for another 12% of class time. It should also be pointed out that Teacher B did not give his students any tests to complete at home. He encouraged the students to discuss the answers to classroom tasks and tended to give answers only as a final stage of the answer feedback process. This was reflected in the small amount of time spent giving feedback on items one by one. This type of feedback where the onus was on the students to work through the tasks with the opportunity

to discuss and raise any questions with the teacher was also present to a lesser extent at School C (13 %versus 43 % of total class time at School B) This feedback encouraged students to assume greater responsibility for the assessment and development of their language proficiency.

Students at Schools A and C were encouraged to be autonomous in that they were assigned homework in the form of practice tests that it was their responsibility to complete. What they did with the feedback regarding the correct answers to this homework and the other practice exercises done in class, was up to the students. Those students who failed to hand in written assignments were not questioned as to why they had not done the work – a situation similar to that they could expect to encounter at university. Those that did the essays benefited from the written feedback from the teacher. At School B it was more or less assumed that students were studying independently at home and had homework from their General English classes to complete. Teacher B gave them vocabulary lists to study but homework assignments were not a regular feature.

Another consideration in the support of independent student learning was the possibility to use learning resources outside class time. Students at School C were given access to the library, as were the students at School B, the difference being that Teacher C encouraged the students to use the facilities and to read and listen to English outside the classroom, whereas Teacher B seemed to assume that students were aware of the library resources and only mentioned them in passing as a source of additional practice materials for those students who wanted more practice. Providing students with access to library resources is another activity which mirrors the student directed study opportunities provided to students at tertiary institutions. As in the tertiary environment, students can choose whether or not to take advantage of this opportunity to utilise these resources.

In summary, the most obvious difference between the three classes was the extent to which they were engaged in whole-class activities. In Class B this took less than a third of that time. Conversely, the students in Class B were working in groups around three times as much as those in Classes A and C. Current pedagogy reasons that providing opportunities for students to engage in meaningful communication is an important consideration when creating a classroom environment conducive to successful language learning. Hence, it could be argued that test preparation classes which incorporate a communicative approach to teaching and learning in the classroom show evidence of positive washback. Class B was the most communicative classroom in this sense. There are a range of factors which have the potential to contribute to this. There is firstly, the design of the course (which in turn was influenced by

the structure, subjects, text and task types of the test). Influential in the design and presentation of the course is the degree of familiarity both the course designers and teacher had with the test and its aims. Because they were often used as a starting point for the different sections of the course, the types of materials which were available also had an impact on how the course was designed. Finally, the beliefs and individual style of the teacher were bound to have had an influence on how he approached the tasks and the class itself.

The fact that a test preparation course enhances students' language proficiency is evidence of good teaching practice. The COLT analysis indicated that language instruction played a significant role in the classes at School B. The original course designers were aiming to create a course which helped students improve their language proficiency and the tasks and materials were selected accordingly. However, as previously explained, this is not necessarily evidence of a direct washback effect of the test itself.

If we see encouraging students to assess their own performance as one way to promote learner involvement and autonomy and evidence of positive washback, then the approach to feedback in the classroom is to be considered. Feedback of a detailed nature was given most regularly in Class B and this could be seen as contributing to a positive washback effect. However, as has been noted, the course at School B was aimed at improving language proficiency whereas at the other schools it was more focussed on attaining the correct answer or checking which answers were right or wrong leaving little time for further enquiry. The aims of the course at School B were somewhat different to the other schools and this was reflected in many aspects of the course. Additionally, the issue of the different approaches and styles of individual teachers must also be taken into account in any discussion on aspects of methodology such as error correction.

There is some evidence at School A and to a lesser extent School C that the washback effect of the test on a preparation course can be negative from the perspective of communicative methodology. Although IELTS was designed to be a communicative language test, these two preparation classes cannot be described as 'communicative'. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that the courses at Schools A and C were set up explicitly as test preparation classes, designed to give students information about the test and the opportunity to practice. While such preparation can be useful in giving students an idea of what to expect, it is questionable whether it helps them achieve a higher mark. The fact that such courses do not improve students' test scores is not in and of itself a negative outcome. However, if students enrol in test preparation courses expecting that the instruction will help them to perform better on the test, and this erroneous perception is not corrected at the start of the course, then even

the existence of such courses contribute to misinformation about IELTS. Anything which encourages students to think of IELTS as a traditional language test that can be swotted for and 'cracked' in a six-week part-time course, can be interpreted as a kind of negative washback. However, one can see that this kind of thinking on the part of the students is not necessarily the fault of the test itself; other elements can also be seen as contributing, such as the expectations of the students based on their previous encounters with language tests coupled with their cultural and education experiences; teacher knowledge, or lack of knowledge, about IELTS and testing in general; the structure and aims of the courses (which are often largely out of the control of the classroom teachers); and the purpose for which the students were taking the test.

Indeed, one would hope that students who sat the test without previous introduction to the format would not be seriously disadvantaged. However, it is when this type of test preparation is seen as synonymous with language learning that the washback effect of students being required to take the test becomes relevant. Such training may be all that is required for students who have a level of proficiency approaching the level needed for entry into tertiary study. This type of student however, was not in the majority in the classes observed. This is where the current definitions of washback perhaps oversimplify the mechanisms involved. Analysis of the comments made by the teachers at School C revealed the sense of frustration that they felt. Teachers were trying to teach to the best of their ability but ultimately had to work within the framework prescribed by the school and this meant acknowledging the impact that the administration, the test and the expectations of the student market had on their classrooms.

9.8 Concluding Comments

Thus, we return to the point that the conventional notions of washback – the ways that major tests or exams have an influence in language classrooms – turn out to be inadequate to explain the effects of IELTS on these three preparation classes. It is not so much the design of the test itself which influences the teaching and learning activities in the courses, but rather a variety of factors within the environment in which they operate.

We need to look beyond the classroom to understand to what extent the undesirable characteristics of some IELTS preparation courses are really attributable to the influence of the test itself. Other influences which must be taken into account include:

- the cultural and educational expectations of the students

- the commercialisation of education in New Zealand and the way that schools market their courses competitively to meet student demand
- the reliance of tertiary institutions on a single English test score, and the fact they set the passing standard at what is considered by many a rather low level
- the lack of incentive for students to continue with English language study, once they have passed the test

Research by Deakin (1996) and Read and Hayes (2003) showed that ordinary IELTS preparation teachers felt quite powerless in the face of these kind of constraints on what they can do to meet student needs and the present study reinforced this fact.

While the discussions regarding the ethics of offering test preparation courses seem likely to continue, the reality of their existence cannot be argued. Once those responsible for implementing, designing and presenting such courses accept this, then their responsibility is to ensure that such courses are productive learning activities for the students that choose to enrol in them. The ethical debate, while honourable, useful and interesting, must be tempered with the reality of the situation. As long as tertiary institutions in New Zealand require specific IELTS test scores as an entry requirement for international students and these students perceive, rightly or wrongly, that completing an IELTS preparation course will give them some form of benefit, there will be schools that will offer a course for commercial reasons. Stating that such courses are 'unethical' may gain one higher moral ground but does nothing for the quality of education that is offered to these consumers. By assessing how the profession can ensure some level of quality and consistency in these courses, we will be at least on the correct ethical track. This research shows how much responsibility for the content of IELTS preparation courses is left to the classroom teachers. The question is how well prepared these teachers are for such a task.

There is evidence of changes to the situation. Experience and research show that students who are at a proficiency level equivalent to, say, IELTS 5.5 or below often fail to make much progress towards a clear pass on the test if they rely simply on short, narrowly based IELTS preparation courses. After failed attempts at passing the test on that basis, students and their teachers come to realise that more is required such as grammar development, vocabulary learning and subject knowledge related to typical IELTS topics. Courses with adequate flexibility may then incorporate a broader range of academic study skills which are not necessarily assessed directly by IELTS tasks.

What results is the type of course which had been developed by School B, which represents a kind of indirect washback from IELTS. Another way of viewing the development of IELTS preparation courses is the fact that "IELTS" has become an attractive brand name for the marketing of courses. Promoting an EAP course as including and supporting preparation for the IELTS test is arguably a more comprehensive form of preparation for tertiary study, and is also an attractive course for prospective students.

Developments in IELTS preparation which have occurred since this study was undertaken will be discussed further in Chapter 10.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

10.1 Summary of the research

The primary intent of this study was to investigate washback within the context of IELTS preparation in New Zealand. The study began by surveying the literature to try and find a clear definition of washback. Considering previous discussions and research, a schedule for the research was designed to include the perspectives of both the teachers and their students, as well as detailed classroom observations. Having observed three complete IELTS preparation courses, the collected data was analysed and any patterns were allowed to emerge.

The study showed that Courses A and C had more in common with each other than with Course B. Despite differences in teachers, both in number, experience and approach, and materials used, these two courses shared similar aims and were largely defined by being self contained short courses. Course B, which was designed as a modular longer course, had a different approach, incorporating a wider range and amount of work focussing on language micro-skills and a lesser amounts of test practice.

The use of COLT and UCOS in combination with the specific further analysis enabled the examination of the communicative orientation of classrooms. This was an attempt not only to determine the range of activities that might occur in an IELTS preparation class, but also to identify the amount of lesson time in which the students in the three observed classes were actively communicating, as this would be an indication of good classroom practice which could in turn possibly be seen as a result of a 'good' test. Teachers' and students' perspectives were elicited and cross-referenced to the findings of the instruments, using a combination of purpose built questionnaires and interviews. The combination of the instruments used in the study allowed for a meaningful comparison between the three courses.

All three courses observed were found to consist predominantly of materials written for language students; contained a significant number of practice tests; included exam-related activities and incorporated few academic study skills. Two of the courses were found to be examples of a more traditional approach to test preparation, which focused on familiarising students with the test and providing opportunities for test practice both in and out of class. Course B, on the other hand, incorporated a communicative methodology, included elements

of language development and gave the students practice with a number of academic study skills. The teachers at Schools A and C thought that their courses were totally IELTS focused, i.e., not preparing students for academic study. In contrast, the teacher of School B thought his course could and did help students prepare for university study. This gives credibility to the belief that the teachers are the final decision makers about the immediate content and structure of any IELTS preparation courses, as the courses reflected to a great extent the expressed beliefs of the teachers that were delivering them and makes the training and education of practitioners all the more important. It should be noted, however, that, different teaching backgrounds, beliefs and personal teaching styles notwithstanding, each of the teachers had a certain amount of material that they were required or expected to get through in the limited time-frame of the course.

The two 'traditional' courses can be considered evidence that IELTS was having a negative effect because the test tasks they focused on were limited in scope as compared to real academic study tasks and they were delivered in a non-communicative, teacher-centred way. However, this may be a narrow perspective, since factors such as the cultural and educational expectations of the students, the commercialisation of education in New Zealand and the way that schools marketed their courses competitively to meet student demand were influencing the outcome. Also, the reliance of tertiary institutions on a single English test score, set at what is considered by many a rather low level must be taken into consideration, together with the lack of incentive for students to continue with English language study once they have passed the test. Failed attempts by students to reach the pass standard by relying largely on test strategies prompt students and teachers to realise that more is required, such as grammar development, vocabulary learning and subject knowledge related to typical IELTS topics. This has led to courses such as the one at School B practising a broader range of academic study skills which are not necessarily assessed directly by IELTS tasks.

The pre- and post test results of the students in the three classes observed should be viewed with caution, considering the small size of the sample. The only significant increase in scores was in the Listening module at School A. No significant correlation was found between the pre- and post-test scores in two of the classes but a significant negative correlation at Class B indicated that students who tested low on the pre-tests tended to score higher on the post-test, a finding similar to those of Elder and O'Loughlin (2003) and Green and Weir (forthcoming). When the classroom materials used in the classes were studied, similarities were again found between Courses A and C. This is perhaps not surprising, given the other similarities shared by these two courses. At both schools most materials were drawn from IELTS preparation books and they were typically used in their original form. Course B, however, included

materials were taken from a range of different sources including, but not limited to, IELTS preparation books. The materials at this school had been selected to form a topic based course and were often adapted specifically. The use of additional activities based on the core texts was also something present only within Course B.

10.2 Changes Over Time

This study provided a snapshot of a specific presentation of three IELTS preparation courses. How much can we generalise about these courses? What factors can we expect to influence these courses over time?

While broad statements can be made about the content of the courses and the differences between them, they must be considered as individual instances. It cannot be assumed that the same teachers would present a similar course again when teaching another group of students. Indeed, all the teachers indicated that they would make changes for future courses. Nor should the courses necessarily be seen as representative of those taught at the school. In the case of Schools A and C, the course content was almost completely in the hands of the individual teachers, which emphasises the importance of the knowledge and experience of the teachers of such classes. Read and Hayes (2003) showed that in general schools required only the minimum qualifications of their IELTS preparation teachers. In interviews with representatives of each of the schools in this study, the difficulty in finding appropriate teachers to take these courses was mentioned and teacher turnover can create changes in the types of courses offered by a school.

Since the data gathering for this study was completed, the number of IELTS preparation courses has grown at all three schools. Two years after the original observations Schools A, B and C were revisited and the people in charge of the IELTS courses were interviewed. Over time there were indications of significant changes to the courses at Schools A and B.

A new director was appointed at School A in 2001 who instituted several changes to the programme including the appointment of a senior staff member whose primary responsibility was to co-ordinate all aspects of the school's IELTS programme. School B made the most significant changes. After two years their programme had been expanded to include a second type of IELTS preparation course which was offered to students with lower language levels This acknowledged the demand from lower level students for an exam focused afternoon option. Structured differently from Course B, it was a three month long skills based course. Although the materials included some authentic texts, much of the course content was

developed using exercises from the book *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course*. As with the school's first course, students were admitted depending on their progress through the General English programme in the morning or from the placement test given to all new students. One year on from the observation, School C had not made any changes to the structure of their evening IELTS programme but had appointed a full time staff member responsible for the co-ordination of the growing programme.

Let us now review the changes in greater detail. The IELTS programme at School A had undergone several major changes in the interim. A new IELTS Co-ordinator, Teacher H, had been appointed four months prior to the second interview in 2002. The IELTS evening course had grown since the time of the classroom study in 2000. The first change brought about by Teacher H was streaming the classes so GTM and AM were separated and run as separate classes. She said the teachers had problems dealing with two completely different groups of students with different needs and motivations. The increase in the number of GTM students had made this a feasible option. The maximum number of students in each class had also been reduced to 15.

The structure and content of the IELTS programme was under review and was in a transition phase. Teacher H felt that the four week course was "ridiculously short" and was better described as an 'introductory course rather than a 'preparation course'. Consequently, soon after she took up her position she gradually increased the length of the next courses to 5 weeks and then to 6 weeks with the final goal to create a 10 week course. By eventually extending the course to 10 weeks, Teacher H felt that the teachers really could "...go into everything in some kind of depth without just floating over the surface of everything."

The students spent most of the course working on the core text *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course* which they had to buy. Teacher H commented that it was a good book but that "… it doesn't include everything that I think that's good in the books that are out there". It was supplemented with practice tests and materials from other IELTS preparation books and the eventual aim was to create a course of topic based units.

The approach to IELTS preparation at School B had also changed since the original interview and observations. The IELTS Co-ordinator and course designer at School B, Teacher I, noted while the IELTS/EAP course was still basically the same, the most significant change had been the development of a second IELTS preparation course. The new course was aimed at students of a low intermediate level. Demand from students who were not able to get onto the IELTS/EAP course had been so high that it became clear that the school should offer this

group of students a way of preparing for the test. A three-month course was developed using General Training materials as this was considered a more appropriate level than those for the AM. It was organised around skills and included more work on strategies than the IELTS/EAP course to meet the need the course designers had identified in this lower level group of students. The course was three months long, to be of sufficient length to be useful for the students while still fitting into the structure of the programme and allowing students to progress onto the IELTS/EAP course once they reached mid-intermediate level. The materials were taken from a range of sources. Some were authentic, others were GTM materials taken from IELTS preparation and practice test books after being adapted and developed. The Two Thousand Word List was also included as a simple form of vocabulary syllabus. A series of grammar exercises were developed into a grammar syllabus which ran parallel to the skills based one. As with the IELTS/EAP course, all lessons on the new IELTS course came with a set of materials and a detailed lesson plan including aims and suggested procedure. Teacher I said that the course allowed for some flexibility but that teachers found that it worked well and was presented in a logical order. Teachers were free to slot the grammar and vocabulary sections into the week's classes as they found appropriate to their class. Teacher I felt that providing complete lessons gave teachers an idea of how to approach the materials. The course designers had had extensive experience with IELTS courses and materials design and the lesson plans gave them the opportunity to explain and justify the activities. With large numbers of classes running at any one time, a structured course allowed for some consistency throughout the course. The idea of adopting a course book for the course had not been considered appropriate as the designers did not want students to focus solely on completing practice tests and the approach adopted allowed the flexibility to expose students to a range of authentic materials and text types while gradually building up to completing full length tests under exam conditions. She said that she did not feel that students at that low intermediate level were not ready to take the test, although many did. She was happy with the new course and felt that it met the needs of a large group of students focused on tertiary study and that there were similar numbers on both IELTS courses. Teacher I observed however that there were, and probably always would be, students of an even lower level wanting to get onto some form of IELTS preparation course.

In 2002, School C employed Teacher J as full-time IELTS administrator and co-ordinator. She was interviewed in March 2002, one year after the classroom observations, and questioned about any changes that had occurred in the IELTS programme at the school in the time since the observation in 2001.

With the growth in student numbers School C was typically running 2 evening preparation courses – twice as many as in 2002. The 60 students were divided into 2 classes for the listening, reading and speaking and 3 classes for the writing. Teacher J was not happy with having to accept such large numbers on the classes and described such large classes as "appalling". "It's bad enough with IELTS classes anyway, that there's not an awful lot of communication and interaction, but it just makes it absolutely impossible if you've got 30." The classes continued to have problems with lateness and absenteeism – a pattern noted in 2001. Teacher J described the way that they had tried to divide the students into classes depending on their module. When numbers did not allow this, attempts had been made to stream the students according to their language ability. To this end but in the absence of an entry test , Teacher J had tried collecting a short piece of writing from all the students but that had not proven a satisfactory way of judging level. As a result, the school was continuing to experiment with alternative ways of organising the classes.

Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course remained the set text, and consequently the main source of materials of the class, as it was a very "useable" and "sound" text and because it was easier to follow one book through and therefore ensure coverage of all the key points. Teacher J still felt that it reduced the problems inherent in the teachers "dipping into" the various course books, as was the case in 2001, which meant that there were gaps in what was covered. It also reduced photocopying. The folders which existed at the time of the observation in 2001 were still available for teachers if they wished to use them. The set text was the primary classroom material and although some of the other books such as *101 Helpful Hints* were teacher and student friendly, Teacher J did not think they were all "sound". She had found that in some cases the format, including colour and photographs for example, made photocopying impractical. While Teacher J felt that the 28-hour course was not long enough, she was not able to extend the length of the course at that time. She said that she continued to tell students on the first night of class that the course would not improve their English at all, that if they had doubts about their level they needed they should take a General English Course. Many students failed to appreciate the aims of the course – to show the students what is expected of them in the exam and to help them do the best they can.

Revisiting the Schools in this way illustrated the importance of including a longitudinal aspect to the design of washback research. It showed that the potential impact of a test is a dynamic one. Each of the courses had seen significant increases in numbers of students. The most substantial changes to the courses were seen at Schools A and B but the fact that two years had elapsed since the classroom observations there as opposed to only one year at School C could be a factor in this difference. The major change at School A was the adoption of a set

text for the class. The choice of the same textbook as the one that had been selected at School C, *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course,* would indicate acknowledgement of the need for a more structured approach which incorporated a systematic way of introducing students to the test and providing them with practice as well as some language input. School B, which already had a well developed course at the time of the observation, had chosen to address the issue of providing IELTS preparation for students with a lower intermediate language level. The new, three month part-time course was more structured than the IELTS/EAP course that had been designed for mid-intermediate students and was based largely on *Prepare for IELTS– The preparation course,* with the inclusion of materials from other IELTS preparation books and some authentic sources. One observation that could be made here, considering the findings of the study, is that School B is an example of the potential for IELTS preparation courses to 'evolve'. The first course at School B had been similar to that at School A – test familiarisation and practice. The second phase, the course observed in this study, recognised the need to provide students, in this case mid-intermediate students, with a course that met their language learning needs at the same time as meeting their need to prepare for the test. What could be seen as a third phase, was the structuring of the IELTS preparation programme to suit the needs of students according to their language level – an acknowledgement that one type of IELTS preparation is not suitable for all students.

It is reasonable to expect any effect a test might have as being a dynamic one. The effect of time on the type and degree of washback a test might create is one that must be considered (Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt and Ferman, 1996). As the stakeholders gain more experience with the test, it is reasonable to expect that their approach and attitudes might change. Consequently, classroom studies investigating washback should be seen as snapshots of the evolutionary nature of the effects of the test. Time will tell whether such evolution occurs in the other courses.

10.3 Limitations

When considering the finding of this study it is important to consider the limitations which have been identified. Firstly, similar constraints as found by Green and Weir (forthcoming) regarding sample selection and size applied to this study. Although not possible in this instance, including a larger number of classes would have provided a more representative sample. Secondly, the instruments used require further refinement. It was found that even with the use of two detailed and structured instruments, the information produced was not entirely satisfactory for the purpose and ideally a more comprehensive one would need to include information on: the test itself as the focus of classroom discussion; attention to test-

taking strategies; patterns of class organisation and teacher-student interaction; sources of teaching material and the extent to which they are modified; and relevant learning activities undertaken by the students outside of class during the course. Working towards the validation of such instruments is an obvious goal.

This study used IELTS as the only measure of change in language proficiency over the period of each of the courses. As Elder and O'Loughlin (2003) observe, a score gain in IELTS is not always necessarily evidence of real gain in language proficiency, as they put it "… it must always be borne in mind that with a SEM of .36 (for the overall IELTS band score) there is only a 68% probability that a candidate's score is accurate to within 0.36 of a band" (ibid: 237). This reliance on only one method of assessing language proficiency is a further limitation in this study where changes in student performance were quantified according to the results of pre- and post-testing with only the reading, writing and listening modules of the test, which could be expected to reduce the accuracy of the measure.

From a methodological perspective, the intensive classroom observations provided this study with rich data. However, the inclusion of several additional sources of data may have contributed to the observation. For example, although the notes taken during the observation were detailed and provided an adequate record of classroom events for the purposes of this study, audio or video recordings of the classes would have been desirable. Additionally, although interviewing the teachers before the study as well as on a weekly basis during the observations appeared to be adequate, a more structured form of weekly interview would have made comparisons between the classes and teachers easier. In all cases, the use of a second rater to confirm the classification of the classroom activities would have increased the reliability of the results.

10.4 Further research

This study has highlighted a number of areas where further research is needed. Firstly, we require an ongoing discussion of washback, in particular continued exploration into appropriate methodologies for washback research. The development, refinement and validation of research instruments are all crucial to such work. The evidence that IELTS preparation courses change over time supports the inclusion of a longitudinal dimension into future washback studies.

Secondly there is the matter of the types of classes observed. Studies which include preparation courses run in private language schools would provide a more complete cross-

section of the different types of language schools in New Zealand. Likewise, a significant amount of IELTS preparation is carried out in New Zealand secondary schools – another potentially rich area for washback research. While IELTS continues to be used as a gatekeeper for entry into academic institutions, comparisons between IELTS preparation and EAP courses need to be made. Likewise, the comparison between General English classes and test preparation would contribute to a broad description of practices particular to test preparation classrooms.

When considering other studies which focus on the perspective of the teacher, such as Watanabe (1996) and Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996), the benefit of observing teachers teaching both a test preparation and a non-test focused course with students at a similar language level is significant. This would help identify whether the methodology any one teacher employs is particular to teaching test preparation or is also the approach they apply to other teaching situations.

A comment by one of the designers of the course at School B summarises some of issues raised in the study, related to the need for a clearer definition of what an IELTS preparation course is and what it sets out to do, both for teachers and for students:

> Probably one important point in my opinion is that there needs to be very clear distinction for students and the teachers between different types of IELTS preparation courses. If students have a high level of English, short courses which familiarise them with the exam are sufficient but for those students who are low, 4.5 and they're aiming to get a 6 to enter university, the type of course we offer here is going to be a lot more beneficial to them than a lot of the other preparation courses out there which are simply getting them to do practice tests over and over. I think because there's such a demand for IELTS preparation courses in New Zealand a lot of schools are marketing their courses in such a way that they're going to attract students, which is fine, however, I don't think we should be misleading students into thinking that by spending 10 hours a week completing practice IELTS tests that it's going to assist them in any way with their language development or with their further studies. It's not and I think that institutions need to take a little bit more responsibility when it comes to marketing their courses and making clear to students what exactly they should be able to achieve within a given period of time.

A closer look at how teacher-training institutions address the area of test preparation with trainee teachers, if indeed they do, might reveal areas in which this aspect of professional

development could be improved. Such a change would surely contribute to what Davies (1997) argues as the ethical process of becoming more professional as test stakeholders and would serve to protect both the professional and their client.

Alderson 1998, summarises the need for future research:

> In an ideal world, …the way teachers prepare students for examinations would look no different from how they teach every day, and how they teach every day would match both the aims and the methods that the examinations intend to inculcate, and the methodology that the textbooks and the teacher education courses advocate. However, it is absolutely clear that teachers will indeed engage in special test preparation practices, and therefore it is important to consider what best practice in test preparation should look like.

The demand, or perhaps more correctly the market, for such courses also had an impact. While significant stakeholders consider IELTS to be a test that can be 'prepared for' in 40 hours, then such courses will continue to exist. As increasing numbers of international students come to New Zealand to study, an investigation of existing practices is a first step towards ensuring the quality of the instruction they receive.

The findings of this study have allowed various insights into test preparation classrooms and IELTS preparation classes in particular. It is my hope that future studies of test preparation classrooms will be carried out to further add to our current picture of the power of language tests to influence those most intimately affected by them.

APPENDIX 1

Part A of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT)

Start Time	Duration	Material Code	Activitiess/ Episodes	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES AND EPISODES	PARTICIPANT ORGANISATION							CONTENT										CONTENT CONTROL			STUDENT MODALITY					MATERIALS							
					Class			Group		Indiv.		Manag.		Language							Other									Type				Source			
																													Text							
					T ⊠ S/C	S ⊠ S/C	Choral	Same task	Different tasks	Same task	Different tasks	Procedure	Discipline	Form - Vocabulary	Form - Pronunciation	Form - Grammar	Form - Spelling	Function	Discourse	Socioling.	Narrow	Br	Teacher/Text	Teacher/Text/Stud.	Student	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Other	Mi	Ex	Audio	Visual	L2-NNS	L2-NS	L2-NSA	Student - made
1a	1b	2a	2b		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12a	12b	12c	12d	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33

APPENDIX 2

Modified University of Cambridge Observation Scheme (UCOS)

Start Time	Duration	Materials	Activities/ Episodes	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES AND EPISODES	Skill (W,R,L,S)	Strategy Description	Exam Related	TextTypes	Topic	Text Source	G&V	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking
1a	1b	2a	2b		F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	F12

MODIFIED UCOS

APPENDIX 3

Further Analysis Criteria

Start Time	Duration	Materials	Activities/ Episodes	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES AND EPISODES	IELTS			Homework	Interaction	Teacher gives answers	Teacher explains answers	Incidences-laughter
					IELTS information	IELTS strategy	IELTS task					
1a	1b	2a	2b		34	35	36	F13	F14	F15	F16	Ha

FURTHER ANALYSIS

APPENDIX 4

Teacher Pre- And Post-Questionnaires

TEACHER PRE-OBSERVATION QUESTIONNAIRE

A GENERAL INFORMATION

1 Name:

2 Institution:

3 Position:

4 Qualifications: ESL/EFL:
Others considered relevant:
IELTS examiner:

5 Years of experience teaching EFL/ESL:
Types of classes taught and length of time:
General
EAP
ESP
Exam (FCE,CAE,TOELF)
IELTS
Countries

6 How did you first become involved in IELTS?

B IELTS PREPARATION COURSE

7 How long have you been teaching on this IELTS course?

8 What is your level of involvement in the current course? (Teacher &/or materials writer)

9 What are the aims of your IELTS Preparation Course?

10 How many years has your school offered IELTS preparation in this form?

11 Has your school ever offered any other types of IELTS preparation course?

12 What proportion of the students on your IELTS preparation courses go on to take IELTS?

13 What are the most common reasons your students take IELTS?

14 What level of English is required for students entering your IELTS course?

15 Do you think this is an appropriate level?

16 Do you have an entry test for your IELTS course?

17 How do you advise students with a lower level of English who want to take the course?

18 What do your students think of the IELTS exam?

19 What subtests do your students have most problems with? Why?

20 How is your IELTS preparation structured?
GE+IELTS
EAP+IELTS
IELTS only

21 *CHECK DETAILS OF COURSE WITH INFORMATION ON QUESTIONNAIRE*
Proportion of GE or EAP course:
Length of course:

22 How do you organise a typical week? (e.g. Listening on Monday, Writing on Tuesday)

23 How often do your students complete IELTS practice tests (under exam-like conditions)?

C IELTS PREPARATION MATERIALS

24 Do you think IELTS preparation materials are an accurate reflection of the exam?

25 Do you use the IELTS Specimen Materials?

26 Do students buy their own copy of a text?

27 Which published texts do you find most useful and why?
SHOW THE TEXTS THEY MENTION TO ELICIT COMMENT
(What do you think is the best feature of this book?)
(What would make this book more useful?)

28 Do you create any of your own materials?
If so, why?

29 *Reading*
What task types and materials do you use to teach/practise reading?
How do these materials help your students?

30 *Writing*
What task types and materials do you use to teach/practise writing?

How do these materials help your students?

31 *Listening*
What task types and materials do you use to teach/practise listening?
How do these materials help your students?

32 *Speaking*
What task types and materials do you use to teach/practise speaking?
How do these materials help your students?

33 *Grammar*
What role does grammar instruction play in your course?
What kinds of activities do you find most useful?

34 *Vocabulary*
How do you deal with vocabulary in your course?
What kinds of activities do you find most useful?

D ACADEMIC STUDY

35 Do you consider IELTS a good indicator of a candidate's ability to cope with the language demandsof academic study in N.Z.?
Why?/ Why not?

36 Do you think IELTS preparation courses help prepare students for academic study?

37 Does your course focus on academic study skills which are not required for IELTS?
If so, what do you cover?

38 How does your IELTS course differ from a General English course?

39 How does your IELTS course differ from a/ your EAP course?

E TOEFL

40 Have you had any involvement in TOEFL?

41 Do you consider TOEFL a good indicator of a candidate's ability to cope with the languagedemands of academic study in N.Z.?
Why?/ Why not?

42 What do your students think of the TOEFL exam?

43 Has your school ever offered any form of TOEFL preparation?
Why?/ Why not?

44 If 'Yes', how does TOEFL preparation differ from IELTS preparation?
EAP?

F OVERALL COMMENTS

45 SHOW COMMENTS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE (if any)
Do you have any other comments you would like to make about IELTS preparation or academicpreparation in NZ?

or

Do you have any general comments to make about IELTS preparation or academic preparation inNZ?

TEACHER POST OBSERVATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____ **School:** _____

Date of Course: _____ **Date:** _____

Reflections on the course observed

1 Did you achieve the objectives you set for this course? **Y / N**

Please briefly explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2 How did you think this course went?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3 Do you think that this course was generally typical of the IELTS course you usually teach? **Y / N**

Please briefly explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4 Approximately what percentage of the overall course content was prescribed by the school?

_____ %

5 Approximately what percentage of the materials you used were prescribed by the school?

_____ %

6 To what degree is the methodology dictated by the school? (Please tick one box)

- ☐ completely (There is a prescribed methodology that must be followed)
- ☐ to a large degree
- ☐ there is considerable flexibility
- ☐ there is complete flexibility (I am completely responsible for choosing an appropriate teaching method)
- ☐ other (Please explain) _____

Reflections on Impact

7 Do you think the IELTS test influenced the **content** of this course (i.e. what you taught)? Please explain your answer. **Y / N**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8 Do you think the IELTS test influenced your choice of **methodology** for for this course (i.e. the way you taught)? Please explain your answer. **Y / N**

_____

9 Do you think that the IELTS test influenced the **feedback** you gave during your lesson or the way you gave it (i.e. the assessment criteria you used; your decision to give feedback immediately or to delay it)? Please explain your answer.

Y / N

10 If you were able to make any changes to the content of the course you have just taught, what would you change and why?

11 If you were able to make any changes to the methodology used in the course you have just taught, what would you change and why?

12 If you were able to make any changes to the administration of the course (e.g. length, timetabling, entrance requirements), what would you change and why?

Reflections on IELTS (in general)

13 Are the following statements about the IELTS test correct?

(Please tick the most appropriate box)

Y	N	Not sure

01	The IELTS Test includes a section testing grammar				01
02	In the speaking module candidates have to both ask and answer questions				02
03	Reading and Writing together carry more than half of the marks				03
04	Candidates have two opportunities to hear the cassette in the listening module				04
05	Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module				05
06	In the listening and reading modules, candidates are given extra time to write their answers on the answer sheet.				06
07	The reading module has three sections				07
08	In the listening module, candidates may have to label a diagram				08

Reflections on IELTS Teaching (in general)

14 Have you used any of the following in your lessons with this class? If the answer is 'yes' to any particular item, please indicate how often they are used by ticking the appropriate column.

				How often?			
	Source of Materials	**Y**	**N**	**every lesson**	**many lessons**	**few lessons**	
01	Commercial IELTS textbooks						01
02	Other commercial textbooks						02
03	Personally (or school) designed materials						03
04	School designed materials						04
05	Integrated language course textbooks						05
06	Skills focused textbooks						06
07	Listening materials similar to the IELTS test						07
08	Reading materials similar to the IELTS test						08
09	Writing tasks similar to the IELTS test						09
10	Speaking tasks similar to the IELTS test						10
11	Authentic listening						11
12	Authentic reading materials						12
13	Authentic writing tasks						13
14	Authentic speaking tasks						14
15	Commercial IELTS practice tests						15
16	School designed IELTS practice tests						16
17	Personally designed IELTS practice tests						17

15 Which of the following have you done with your students? At what point of the course might you do them? (Please tick more than one box if appropriate)

	IELTS Preparation Task	**when during the course**					
		start	**middle**	**end**	**throughout**	**never**	
01	Give the students tasks under exam conditions						01
02	Give the students the test to do at home (self-timed)						02
03	Give students feedback in the form of IELTS band scores						03
04	Give feedback on student performance item by item						04
05	Give students information about what the test might contain (i.e. task or text types)						05
06	Explain the rubric that is likely to be used in the test						06
07	Discuss the requirements of the test with the students						07
08	Ask students to consider their strengths and weaknesses with respect to the test requirements						08

The Learners

16 What was your overall impression of the group of students in terms of language level and motivation?

17 Was this group typical of the students you teach IELTS to?

18 How would you describe the classroom dynamics of this group?

19 In your opinion, did the course you have just taught meet the needs of the learners in terms of:

		Yes	No	To some extent	
01	knowledge of the structure of the IELTS exam?				*01*
02	knowledge of test taking strategies?				*02*
03	knowledge of the language requirements of the IELTS exam?				*03*
04	improvement in General English proficiency				*04*
05	providing practice under exam conditions				*05*
06	developing study skills appropriate for university study				*06*
07	an improvement in band score				*07*
08	other (Please explain)				*08*

20 Please complete the following statements:

a. What **I like** most about teaching IELTS is …

b. What **I dislike** most about teaching IELTS is …

21 Do you have any other comments about this IELTS course that you would like to add?

Thank you.

APPENDIX 5

Student Pre- And Post-Questionnaires

STUDENT PRE-OBSERVATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How old are you? (Please tick one box)

under 18 ☐ 18 - 25 ☐ 26 - 35 ☐
36 - 45 ☐ 46 - 55 ☐ over 55 ☐

2 What is your nationality? _____

3 What is your first language? _____

4 How many years have you been studying English? (Please tick one box)

less than 1 ☐ 1 to 3 ☐
4 to 6 ☐ 7 to 9 ☐
over 10 ☐

5 Have you ever taken the IELTS test? (Please circle 'Yes' or 'No') **Yes / No**

a *If your answer to question 5 was 'Yes', when did you take the test?* *(Please write month and year)*

month ☐ *year* ☐

b *If your answer to question 5 was 'Yes', which module did you take?* *(Please tick one)*

Academic ☐
General Training ☐

6 Are you planning to take the IELTS test? (Please circle 'Yes' or 'No')

Yes / No

a *If your answer to question 6 was 'Yes', when will you take the test? (Please tick one box)*

this month ☐ next month ☐
after 2-3 months ☐ after 4-6 months ☐
after 6-12 months ☐ not sure ☐

e *If your answer to question 6 was 'No', why not?*

_____
_____
_____
_____

(Now, please go on to question 7)

b *Why is IELTS most useful for you?*
(Please tick one or more boxes)

* *For immigration* ☐
* *For entry into university or polytechnic* ☐
* *To get an idea of my level of English* ☐
* *For entry into a professional organisation (e.g. Medicine, Dentistry)* ☐
* *As an English language qualification* ☐
* *Other (Please give your reason)* ☐

_____

c *Which module of IELTS will you take?*
(Please tick one)

Academic ☐
General Training ☐

d *How important is it for you to get a good IELTS result?* *(Please circle one number)*

0 1 2 3 4 5

not very important *very important*

7 How difficult do you think IELTS is? (Please circle one number)

0 1 2 3 4 5

very easy very difficult

8 Have you ever taken an IELTS preparation course before? (Please circle 'Yes' or 'No') **Yes / No**

a *If your answer to question 8 was 'Yes', how long did you study?*

days ____ *weeks* ____ *months* ____

9 Have you ever studied English for Academic Purposes or English for Further Studies? **Yes / No**
(Please circle 'Yes' or 'No')

a *If your answer to question 9 was 'Yes', how long did you study?*

days ____ *weeks* ____ *months* ____

10 Have you graduated from university in your country? (Please circle 'Yes' or 'No') **Yes / No**

11 Are the following statements about the IELTS test correct?
(Please tick one box - 'Yes', 'No' or 'Not sure')

	Yes	No	Not sure
* The IELTS test includes a section testing grammar.			
* In the speaking module candidates have to both ask and answer questions.			
* Reading and writing together carry more than half of the marks			
* Candidates have two opportunities to hear the cassette in the listening module.			
* Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module.			
* In the listening and reading modules, candidates are given extra time to write their answers on the answer sheet.			
* The reading module has three sections.			
* In the listening module, candidates may have to label a diagram.			

12 Which of the following activities do you consider <u>most</u> helpful for studying IELTS in class?
(Please tick one or more boxes)

* Doing practice IELTS tests ☐
* Studying grammar ☐
* Studying vocabulary ☐
* Reading newspapers and magazines ☐
* Watching TV programes ☐
* Listening to radio programmes ☐
* Learning about different topics ☐
* Talking with classmates ☐
* Practicing speaking skills ☐
* Practicing reading skills ☐
* Practicing writing skills ☐
* Practicing listening skills ☐
* Learning the different types of questions in IELTS ☐
* Learning exam tips or ways to do better on the test ☐
* Other/s (Please describe)

_____

_____

13 Which of the following activities do you think are <u>not</u> helpful for studying IELTS in class?
(Please tick one or more boxes)

* Doing practice IELTS tests ☐
* Studying grammar ☐
* Studying vocabulary ☐
* Reading newspapers and magazines ☐
* Watching TV programs ☐
* Listening to the news on the radio ☐
* Learning about different topics ☐
* Talking with classmates ☐
* Practicing speaking skills ☐
* Practicing reading skills ☐
* Practicing writing skills ☐
* Practicing listening skills ☐
* Learning the different types of questions in IELTS ☐
* Learning exam tips or ways to do better on the test ☐
* Other/s (Please describe)

_____

_____

14 What are the 3 most important reasons (1st 2nd & 3rd) you are taking this IELTS preparation course?

Please write only3 numbers:
1=most important
2=second most important
3=third most important

*	to find out more about the structure of the test	
*	to find out better ways to answer test questions	
*	to improve my General English level	
*	to practise doing the exam under exam conditions	
*	to learn study skills that will help me at university	
*	to get a higher band score/result	
*	other (Please explain)	

STUDENT POST-OBSERVATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Date: _____

1 Did you take any General English lessons in the past month while you were studying in this IELTS course? (Please circle 'Yes' or 'No') **Yes / No**

a *If your answer to question 1 was 'Yes', how many hours did you study?*

Total number of hours of General English study while studying IELTS ☐

2 Are you planning to take the IELTS test? (Please circle 'Yes' or 'No') **Yes / No**

a If your answer to question 2 was 'No', why not?

_____

_____

b If your answer to question 2 was 'Yes', when are you planning to take the test? (Please tick one box)

this month ☐ next month ☐ after 2-3 months ☐

after 4-6 months ☐ after 6-12 months ☐ not sure ☐

c If your answer to question 2 was 'Yes', which module of IELTS will you take? (Please tick one)

Academic ☐

General Training ☐

3 Are you taking the IELTS test to enter university or some other tertiary institution? **Yes / No**

a If your answer to question 3 was 'Yes', which university do you plan to apply to?

_____

b What course do you plan to take?

_____

c What IELTS band score do you need?

_____

d Do you think you will get this IELTS band score now? (Please circle one) **Yes / No / Not sure**

(Please tick one box for each statement)

		none of it	some of it	most of it	all of it
4	Did you enjoy this IELTS course?				
5	Did this course help you prepare for the IELTS exam?				
6	Did this course help you prepare for study at university?				
7	Will this course help you to get a higher IELTS score?				
8	Did this course help improve your English?				
9	Did you have difficulties with this IELTS course?				

10 If you had any difficulties on the course, what were they? (Please explain)

_____

_____

_____

11 Is there anything extra that you wanted to study but wasn't included in this course?

_____

_____

_____

12 Are the following statements about the IELTS test correct?
(Please tick one box)

		Y	N	not sure
a	The IELTS test includes a section testing grammar			
b	In the speaking module candidates have to both ask and answer questions			
c	Reading and writing together carry more than half of the marks			
d	Candidates have two opportunities to hear the cassette in the listening module			
e	Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module			
f	In the listening and reading modules, candidates are given extra time to write their answers on the answer sheet.			
g	The reading module has three sections			
h	In the listening module, candidates may have to label a diagram			

13 How difficult do you think IELTS is? (Please circle one number)

0 1 2 3 4 5

very easy very difficult

14 Which of the following activities do you consider most helpful for studying IELTS in class?
(Please tick one or more boxes)

a	Doing practice IELTS tests		*i*	Practicing speaking skills	
b	Studying grammar		*j*	Practicing reading skills	
c	Studying vocabulary		*k*	Practicing writing skills	
d	Reading newspapers and magazines		*l*	Practicing listening skills	
e	Watching TV programs		*m*	Learning the different types of questions in IELTS	
f	Listening to the news on the radio		*n*	Learning exam tips or ways to do better on the test	
g	Learning about different topics		*o*	Other/s (Please describe)	
h	Talking with classmates				

15 *The **best** part of this course was …*

16 *Please write any comments you have about this course.*
This course …

STUDENT PRE TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____
Date: _____

I would like to know what you thought of the sections of the tests you have just taken.
Please show how easy or difficult you thought each section of this test was.

1 LISTENING

a. How difficult was the listening test? (Please circle your answer)

0 1 2 3 4 5
very easy very difficult

b. Why was this section easy or difficult?

2 READING

a. How difficult was the reading test?

0 1 2 3 4 5
very easy very difficult

b. Why was this section easy or difficult?

3 WRITING

a. Task 1

How difficult was this part of the writing test?

0 1 2 3 4 5
very easy very difficult

b. Why was this task easy or difficult?

c. Task 2

How difficult was this part of the writing test?

0 1 2 3 4 5
very easy very difficult

d. Why was this task easy or difficult?

4 OVERALL

a. In general, how difficult was the test (all 3 sections together)?

0 1 2 3 4 5
very easy very difficult

b. Any other comments?

STUDENT POST TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

I would like to know what you thought of the sections of the test you have just taken.
Please show how easy or difficult you thought each section of this test was.

1 LISTENING

a How difficult was this listening test? (Please circle one number)

0 1 2 3 4 5

very easy very difficult

b Why? _____

2 READING

a How difficult was this reading test?

0 1 2 3 4 5

very easy very difficult

b Why? _____

3 WRITING

a Task 1

How difficult was this part of the writing test?

0 1 2 3 4 5

very easy very difficult

b Why? _____

c Task 2

How difficult was this part of the writing test?

0 1 2 3 4 5

very easy very difficult

d Why? _____

4 OVERALL

a In general, how difficult was this test (all 3 sections together)?

0 1 2 3 4 5

very easy very difficult

b Why? _____

APPENDIX 6

Ethics – Consent Forms

RESEARCH PROJECT: An Investigation into the Washback Effect of IELTS Preparation Courses in New Zealand

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

Researcher: Belinda Hayes

m I have received a letter from the researcher about the project.

m I have been given the opportunity to seek answers to any questions I had and receive satisfactory answers.

m I understand that my participation in the project is voluntary and I can withdraw from the project (along with the data I have provided) at any time before the analysis is complete without giving a reason. In the event that I withdraw from the project, I understand that any information already provided will be destroyed by the researcher.

m I understand the information I provide will be kept confidential by the researcher, and my identity and that of my institution will not be revealed in the published results of the study. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the interview data.

m I understand that the information I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.

m I understand that the tape recordings of the interviews will be electronically wiped at the end of the project.

 I would like to receive a summary of the results of the study when it is completed (around September 2001).

I agree to take part in the research.

Signed:_____

Name: _____
[Please print clearly]

Date: ___/___/____

RESEARCH PROJECT: An Investigation into the Washback Effect of IELTS Preparation Courses in New Zealand

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Researcher: Belinda Hayes

- I have received the information sheet about this project.
- I have been able to ask questions about it and get satisfactory answers.
- I understand that I do not have to take part in the research and I can stop participating at any time before the end of the course without giving a reason and that any information already provided will be destroyed by the researcher.
- I understand that only the researcher and her supervisor will see the questionnaires and other research material. They will treat all the information about me as confidential.
- I understand that, when the researcher writes about the project, she will not give my name or identify me in any way.
- I understand that, when the project has finished, the researcher will destroy the questionnaires and research notes.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: _____

Please PRINT your name here:_____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 7

Analysed Text Books

SN	Title	Author(s)	Date of Publication	Publisher
1	Cambridge practice tests for IELTS 1	Jakeman, V. and C. McDowell	1996	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2	Cambridge IELTS 2 - examination papers.	University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. .	2000	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3	Prepare for IELTS: the preparation course.	P. Cameron.	1999	Sydney: Insearch Language Centre and International Programs.
4	IELTS preparation and practice - reading and writing academic modules.	Shahanaya, W., J. Lindeck and R. Stewart.	1998	Australia: Oxford University Press.
5	IELTS preparation & practice: listening and speaking.	Shahanaya, W.and J. Lindeck.	1997	Melbourne:Oxford Univeristy Press.
6	101 helpful hints for IELTS(2nd edition).	Adams, G. and T. Peck.	1995	Sydney: Adams and Austen Press.
7	202 useful exercises for IELTS.	Adams, G. and T. Peck.	1996	Sydney: Adams and Austen Press.
8	IELTS strategies for study - updated edition.	Garbutt, M and K. O'Sullivan.	1995	Sydney: Macquarie University.
9	IELTS practice now.	Gibson, C., W. Rusek and A. Swan.	1996	Adelaide: Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Southern Australia.
10	Language passport: preparing for the IELTS interview.	Catt, C.	1996	New Zealand: Longman.
11	Passport to IELTS.	Hopkins, D. and M. Nettle.	1993	London: Macmillan Publishers.
12	Insight into IELTS.	Jakeman, V. and C. McDowell.	1993	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
13	Prepare for IELTS academic module.	Todd, V. and P. Cameron.		Sydney: Insearch Language Centre.
14	IELTS to success.	Van Bemmel, E. and J. Tucker.	1997	Brisbane: Jacaranda Wiley Ltd
15	The IELTS tutor.	L. and R Jacklin	1999	Brisbane: Cross-Link Productions.
16	Focussing on IELTS reading and writing skills.	O'Sullivan, K. and J. Lindeck	2000	Sydney:NCELTR.
17	How to prepare for IELTS - New Edition.	de Witt, R.	2001	The British Council.
18	IELTS practice tests plus.	Jakeman V. and C. McDowell.	2001	Pearson Education Limited.
19	Check your vocabulary for English for the IELTS examination - a workbook for students.	Wyatt, R.	2001	Peter Collin Publishing.
20	Visuals writing about graphs, tables and diagrams - preparing for the IELTS academic writing Task 1.	Duigu, G.	2001	Academic English Press.

ANALYSED TEXTBOOKS

APPENDIX 8

The Modular Structure of the IELTS Test

The Modular Structure of the IELTS test
(source: http://www.ielts.org/format.htm)

APPENDIX 9

IELTS Band Descriptors

Description of IELTS Band Scores
(source: http://www.ielts.org/format.htm)

Each Band corresponds to a descriptive statement giving a summary of the English of a candidate classified at that level. Overall Band Scores can be reported in either whole or half Bands.

The nine bands and their descriptive statements are as follows:

9 Expert User
Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.

8 Very Good User
Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.

7 Good User
Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.

6 Competent User
Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.

5 Modest User
Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.

4 Limited User
Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.

3 Extremely Limited User
Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.

2 Intermittent User
No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.

1 Non User
Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.

0 Did not attempt the test
No assessable information provided.

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