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Test preparation pedagogy for international study: Relating teacher cognition, instructional models and academic writing skills

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Abstract
There now exists an established body of work outlining the challenges international students can face as part of the acculturation process, including a range of academic and non-academic pressures to overcome. For many students, writing essays in academic English for the first time is problematic. This article considers pedagogical approaches for IELTS writing test preparation prior to university admission, and the potential for introducing academic writing skills at an earlier stage of students' learning. Noting implications of test constructs, we investigate pedagogical support for candidates preparing for the writing section of IELTS. Conducted at a test preparation centre in China, observational data from courses across three proficiency levels provided the basis for inquiry, alongside interviews with teachers (*n* = 2), students (*n* = 20), and collating homework essays (*n* = 50).

Results indicate that teacher cognition highly influenced pedagogical practice for writing test preparation at the centre involved. It was also evident that (despite variations) overall test preparation objectives were broadly similar. Additionally, higher proficiency learners appeared to be more receptive to – and capable of – learning about early-stage academic writing skills. We suggest a series of tentative recommendations for instructors and areas for future research, including looking at other major university entrance tests, newer 'digital first' tests, and the implications of online test preparation.

Keywords
academic writing, IELTS, teacher cognition, test preparation

I Introduction

There is now an existing body of research on international student experiences suggesting that, for many, the transition and adjustment to meet local needs of an unfamiliar higher education course is a challenging and multifaceted endeavor (Andrade, 2009; Banerjee, 2003; Clark, 2018). Those entering higher education are expected to develop their academic English skills from the course outset – a significant undertaking in some cases, particularly for academic writing (Clark & Yu, 2020). Implications for the study experience of attempting to do this while improving English language proficiency, building peer networks, overcoming financial difficulties and managing cultural adjustment are not to be underestimated (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). Language support provided for international students does not always keep pace with recruitment drives, and the assistance provided to make these transitions is often insufficient (Jenkins & Wingate, 2015).

As these challenges are not straightforward to address after students have arrived in their chosen country and begun a course of higher education, it is necessary to reconsider an earlier part of their educational trajectory. Reconceptualizing the objective of the test preparation stage of students' learning may help ease the subsequent transition (Clark & Yu, forthcoming). Looking at pedagogical approaches to test preparation – and the influences of teacher beliefs on their chosen instructional model – is an important first step towards introducing the necessary academic skills before students begin university. Prior to investigating the viability of this proposition, existing findings on what is expected of international students (and what they struggle with) after starting university must be outlined.

II Literature review

1 International study, language proficiency and academic language skills

For large numbers of international learners, adjustments to manage an English language higher education course are difficult, wide-ranging, and complex. Several strands of adjustments run in parallel: including adapting to wider socio-cultural issues, language development and understanding a new educational system (Akanwa, 2015). Their implications for academic performance are problematic to disentangle, but treating them in

isolation risks oversimplifying a complex intersection of contributing contextual factors (Neumann et al., 2019). Although language proficiency alone is often not an accurate predictor of academic success (Banerjee, 2003; Neumann et al., 2019), developing the skills to cope with language-related challenges is an essential part of international study (Andrade, 2006; Clark & Yu, 2020). Nonetheless, academic skills development may fall between educational jurisdictions in the current model. High-stakes English language entrance tests aim to safeguard minimally acceptable language standards (as decided on an individual institutional basis) but test scores are not more than a 'tentative prediction of performance' (Pearson, 2020, p. 2). Pearson also notes that candidates who fall short of entrance scores receive EAP support, which performs the dual function of language proficiency development and introducing academic literacy. Higher scoring candidates enter directly, and though they may not require the former, some may then be deprived of the latter.

To investigate the feasibility of introducing academic skills development earlier, understanding the relationship between test design, washback and test preparation is key. Implications for instructional test preparation models – and the important role pedagogy may play in better aligning test preparation with academic study skills – can then be investigated.

2 Test preparation as an introduction to academic writing skills

Recent work has noted that test preparation pedagogy should look beyond score gains alone and expand in remit to introduce the foundations of academic skills (Clark & Yu, forthcoming). Score gains are necessarily a central part of test preparation, and in fact may define it, if we accept the earlier assertion that test preparation is intervening with the objective to increase scores (Messick, 1982). However, we (Clark & Yu, forthcoming) observe that a contemporary pedagogical focus must take a longer view. If students are to benefit beyond the test, the skills they develop at this early stage must involve more than the test itself.

An appropriate university entrance test should facilitate positive washback, encouraging teachers to incorporate the development of language skills (Taylor, 2005) as part of their pedagogical approach, avoiding 'superficial learning' (Xie & Andrews, 2013, p. 50) and encouraging impact by design (Saville, 2012; Saville & Khalifa, 2016). Without adequately reflecting the target language use (TLU) domain, particularly regarding the essential productive skills (Clark, Spiby & Tasviri, 2021) test constructs may not guide instructional models to furnish candidates with the skills required for subsequent study (Wagner, 2020). The test itself is a key element, and washback derived from its design is an essential subdivision of test impact (Saville & Khalifa, 2016; Tsagari, 2007). One example may involve instructing students on the purpose of the test preparation activities, highlighting links between scoring, rubrics and writing development (Baker, 2020). Involving learners in the process of writing acquisition from an early stage may help them realize the importance of learning language skills for subsequent academic use.

3 IELTS test preparation pedagogy: Teacher cognition and professional development

In addition to TOEFL, the university English entrance test of major global significance and supported by a body of independent research is IELTS, featured in this article. As with TOEFL iBT, IELTS may encourage teachers to introduce early academic skills at the test preparation stage to an extent (Clark & Yu, 2020). After observing IELTS preparation on an eight-week course, Mickan and Motteram (2008) found that test-focused instruction was the main pedagogical component, rather than language development, on that course.

One aspect to note is that test preparation courses are often short and intensive in nature, due to the pressures on students (and teachers) to improve and increase test scores. Classes may be several hours in length, based on a syllabus that aims to introduce students to what is expected of them and cover considerable pedagogical ground in a timely manner. This may risk an overload of information and create a potentially stressful situation in comparison to regular classes. It also becomes clear that test preparation is broad and diverse (Yu & Green, 2021) and that approaches can vary widely – even within one institution. Considering the importance of writing instruction for language pedagogy in particular, this variety (and the relationship with teacher cognition) should not be overlooked (Borg, 2003, 2006).

Broader studies on teacher cognition have observed that beliefs influence the instructional model used (O'Sullivan et al., 2021) rather than define it. O'Sullivan et al. noted that teaching approaches and student expectations were not vastly different throughout the world, there were basic foundational commonalities for test preparation practices.Specific aspects of test preparation have more importance according to local expectations (such as candidates from some regions preferring more test-focused classroom content). However, these nuances are contextualized within the similarities of material and strategy use found in different areas, and test-taker preferences are comparable across geographical lines. If the pedagogical approach to material and

strategy use is 'eclectic' (Mickan & Motteram, 2008, p. 20) therefore, one risk is that students may not receive the instruction they require.

Positive washback and appropriate pedagogical models often depend on individual teacher beliefs (Gebril & Eid, 2017) rather than established or standardized frameworks for instruction. Teacher preference can influence how course material is used, for example (Rathert & Cabaroglu, 2021). Similarly, some teachers focus on practising test items, whereas others opt for a broader academic skills approach (Hayes & Read, 2004). These marked differences between courses are a potential concern, further highlighting the lack of standardization and wide range of instructional models operating under the category of test preparation (Chappell et al., 2015). Increasing teacher knowledge about the purpose of test preparation and encouraging professional development may lessen the negative impact on students, Chappell et al. suggest. This is supported by recent findings identifying test preparation teachers as requiring a specific skillset, and that some instructors perceived a tension between test-oriented pedagogy and developing language proficiency (Shahrzad et al., 2021). If this tension is possible to overcome, training and support is required. In the same study, candidates reported expectations that the instructor is highly knowledgeable on the test in question and can provide useful feedback on key student difficulties; two important components of test preparation pedagogy that may form part of professional development.

4 The emerging need for a balanced instructional test preparation model

Beyond professional support for practitioners, instructional models may prove most beneficial if a suitable balance of pedagogical priorities can be obtained. As noted, an increased testing focus in the preparation classroom may discourage the development of important skills (Green, 2007). These may include those subsequently required for academic study. However, Green notes that some IELTS courses combine test preparation and EAP. Although this muddies the waters for defining a course objective, hybrid courses may benefit candidates, who receive dual instruction on how to improve test performance and academic study skills, covering existing gaps. For instance, IELTS may increase speaking confidence, but using sources effectively in writing can be underdeveloped (Yang & Badger, 2015). The opportunity for interaction that test preparation provides has been noted as useful, increasing motivation, developing test format knowledge, and encouraging self-learning (Gan, 2009). Some instructional models have attempted to create early links between reading and writing, although studies on this in an EMI context are limited in number (Liu, Brantmeier & Strube, 2019). Other research has documented language proficiency development and teaching of productive skills together (Allen, 2016). Allen's study supports earlier findings, also noting that test preparation instruction is often largely test-focused – but that language skills development and test-oriented pedagogy are not mutually exclusive. As with Green's (2007) study, several candidates involved also simultaneously undertook university English courses with a more academic focus, to complement IELTS preparation activities.

This may be an advisable approach if candidates are to be supported in the longer term. As Brown (1998) notes, emphasis on IELTS writing tasks, development of writing and planning skills and instruction on exam strategies may help students improve their band scores slightly, but it should not be assumed that they are necessarily more adequately prepared for academic study. Implications of IELTS test constructs for preparation are evidently of central importance to this. Similarities and differences between IELTS writing (Mickan & Motteram, 2009), IELTS reading (Moore et al., 2012; Weir et al., 2012) and real-world academic tasks have been cited. It may be that a more learning-oriented approach to test preparation is necessary to address this, incorporating ethical considerations into an appropriate instructional model (Yu & Green, 2021). Other pedagogical approaches designed to improve language skills may include the use of corpora (Smirnova, 2017). This can increase students' understanding of usage patterns and help reduce collocation errors, for example, in addition to improving learner autonomy and ability to self-correct (all of which may be useful beyond the test itself). We are reminded once again that a score gain does not necessarily mean an increase in language proficiency (Elder & O'Loughlin, 2003).

It should be clarified that a comprehensive account of what contemporary academic writing entails is neither straightforward to define (French, 2020) nor the focus of this article. As the objective is to investigate the link between test preparation and beginning international study, the assumption that early academic writing skills should at least include planning, structural awareness, and the ability to substantiate or support points made (Fitzmaurice & O'Farrell, 2013) appears reasonable. Structural awareness has been noted as a potentially useful aspect of writing for IELTS candidates to receive guidance on, to help them decide which would be considered most appropriate for the prompt they are expected to answer (Coffin, 2004). Coffin also suggests that rubrics and rater training would have to incorporate this more extensively than now but that doing so may

have positive implications for the connection between IELTS and academic writing. Fitzmaurice and O'Farrell also include reading critically, intertextuality, and finding voice as key academic writing skills, but these are not represented in current IELTS constructs and candidates are expected to develop these after the test.

5 Investigating test preparation pedagogy at the source

Understanding more about the feasibility of introducing academic skills requires investigating test preparation pedagogy at the 'source' (Clark & Yu, forthcoming, p. 7). At the Japanese school involved in that study, learner and teacher experiences of the test preparation process were explored in depth. Using a think-plan-write approach to essay writing and practice under timed simulated test conditions appeared beneficial to writing acquisition, supported by classroom exercises on lexical development and grammatical structure. Communicative teaching methodology introduced some of the necessary posttest academic writing skills, using rubrics and models to exemplify western style writing expectations on paragraphing or essay structure, for example. We concluded that (despite this) test preparation activities and subsequent academic writing acquisition could be better linked – if students were more fully supported to develop academic skills earlier on. Introducing these skills was observed to be a legitimate and viable proposition. This supports the assertion that contemporary test preparation should go beyond simply practising tasks and test items, to 'engage learners in developing their understanding of how to operate successfully in the settings that scores are intended to generalise to' (Clark & Yu, forthcoming, p. 7).

6 The Chinese test preparation context

In addition to Japan, and the cross-regional studies outlined earlier, the Chinese test preparation context is of particular research interest; initially selected for the current article due to the country's global significance for international education. Although somewhat early to understand the impact of Covid-19, by 2020 there were 141,870 Chinese students enrolled in UK higher education (HESA: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/27-01-2021/sb258-higher-education-student-statistics/location). Despite this, the extent to which test preparation readies Chinese students for UK study is debatable. Although test preparation in China operates on an industrial scale, some centres prioritise 'test-wiseness', memorization activities and the repeated practice of parallel test items (Matoush & Fu, 2012). Memorized chunks of lengthy text (for example) may obfuscate test-takers actual language ability, but not all memorization is to be discouraged, and can have an important function (Wray & Pegg, 2005). Negative over memorization may be problematic in the long term however, as international students arrive underprepared (Hu & Trenkic, 2019). Such practices are also not limited to one major test, but include TOEFL, IELTS and GRE (Lin, 2020) suggesting that pressures on Chinese students to achieve scores may be more culpable than a particular test design (Liu et al., 2019). Beyond investigating the Chinese context, narrowing the research scope necessitated focusing on writing acquisition, due to its importance to higher education and its particular difficulty as perceived by students themselves (Bai & Wang, 2020) – at all stages of their English language learning.

III Methodology

1 Study objective and methodological framework

The current study investigates pedagogical practice for test preparation, and the potential for introducing academic skills on a specialized IELTS writing course. Perspectives on the test preparation and writing acquisition process from instructors and students are central to understanding this. The following research question was addressed:

How are Chinese IELTS candidates aiming for overseas study supported to achieve their required writing section score in their own country?

A test preparation centre in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province was selected – accessed through local contacts. Data collection involved three IELTS writing cohorts at different proficiency levels (lower – approximately CEFR A2/B1, intermediate – B1, and advanced – B2/C1). As may be expected, the goals of these learners in terms of IELTS scores typically varied at each level. Those at the lower end (often new to IELTS preparation courses) had a significant amount of new information to process quickly. At the higher end, some students would be aiming for IELTS 6.5 or above overall. Classroom observations and participant interviews were the principal data collection methods; written homework tasks provided additional supporting data. An interpretivist theoretical framework helped accommodate the complexities of human interaction, particularly around the plurality of perspectives (Ansell, 2015) found in a classroom setting. To further narrow the scope of the research, IELTS Writing Task 2 was included only. All data was collected pre-pandemic. Consent was obtained

through the help of intermediary local staff due to the low English level of some participants, in accordance with the researchers' institutional guidelines.

2 Participants: Instructors and students

There were two course instructors for writing (Ms Zhang and Mr Li; pseudonyms). Both were Chinese nationals, and ordinarily taught all language skills, not just writing. Regarding qualifications and experience, the teachers varied considerably. Mr Li had a doctorate from a UK university. His professional qualifications included a local pedagogical diploma, but he had an interest in teaching methodology beyond the Chinese context, and was highly interested in western learning and assessment practices. He had been teaching for over 20 years, and his current class was the lower proficiency group. Ms Zhang was a relatively new teacher of a few years, having recently come into the profession. Her English language teaching qualifications were minimal, but she planned to take CELTA (Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults) in the near future. She taught the intermediate and the advanced class. In total, there were 30 students in the observed lessons, 20 of whom agreed to be interviewed. Participants were young (20–25 years) and approximately balanced in gender. They all aimed to study abroad, and most had decided on the UK for postgraduate courses. It was too early to know what IELTS scores they needed, but some estimated 6.5 overall and minimum of 6.0 for each component. Most students had little or no prior experience abroad, or of learning other languages.

3 Writing course description and instructional materials

Each lesson lasted 90 minutes (either morning or afternoon), twice a week, with two days between them. The overall writing course contained 18 lessons (approximately 27 hours in total, with up to three hours of extra course time if classes overran). This meant that each course lasted nine weeks, but total hours were nearer 30. Most lessons had between 5–15 students in attendance, with sometimes smaller numbers in the lower and more advanced classes. Regarding materials, teachers used course books provided. The centre was part of a large chain of English language schools, using IELTS-specific textbooks. There was some flexibility, and instructors often diverged from materials if necessary. Each course covered writing activities contained in three textbook modules, and there was a different textbook used for each proficiency level.

4 Classroom observations and interviews

One researcher observed a full course of writing at each of the proficiency levels, positioned in the corner of the classroom. He occasionally monitored during activities (to see class work) but did not participate. Documenting pedagogical approaches and the student and teacher experience was the overarching objective of these observations, and an observation sheet (Table 1) guided the focus (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Table 1: Observation Sheet: Categories and Purpose

Observation Category	Purpose of Inclusion and Key Areas Informed
1) Lesson Profile	Aims of lesson identified, how time is divided between pedagogical items, syllabus fit, any deviation from pre-planned content.
2) Class Profile	Students in attendance, seating positions, room layout and changes in each of these as the course progresses.
3) Teaching and Tasks (pedagogy)	Main body of observation notes – a thorough account of each task / exercise as it happens: timekeeping, student reaction, apparent difficulty level, mood, atmosphere and other contextual items of relevance.

4) Researcher Notes	Observations that did not match above categories about any aspect of data collection to contribute to holistic account.
5) Researcher Actions	This was a valuable category to remember necessary tasks as they emerged during observations, for example to organise X or print Y. A regularly updated list of such actions helped the data collection phase run smoothly.

Categories included lesson objectives, class profiles, pedagogy, contextual notes and researcher actions. Within those areas, as much data as possible was recorded for subsequent analysis, constituting a semi-structured approach to observations based on an existing framework (Brighton et al., 2017). Audio recordings of the lessons were made – for cases where notes were unclear. In practice, these recordings were not necessary to refer to often but acted as a useful backup.

Interviews were conducted with both teachers and students, gathering perspectives on the writing course. Some questions were chosen in response to particular aspects noted in the observations; flexibility of questioning was important if the data sources were to align. Students were invited to attend one interview each, for 30 – 40 minutes. Ten students (from n = 30 total) declined. For intermediate and advanced levels, these were conducted individually (n = 10, both levels in total). Lower levels (n = 10) were done in two groups of four students and one pair. This was at the teacher's request due to the student apprehension about using English, with an L1 speaker as the interviewer perhaps. Different variations of interview were not planned, but this was taken into account for analysis, and adaptation of methods to reach the research goal was required (Cohenmiller et al., 2020). Interviews were conducted in English for practical reasons, and the implications of not using participants' L1, particularly for straightforward expression and fostering trust (O'Neill et al., 2014) were considered. Using an interpreter may have affected rapport (Piekkari & Welch, 2006). English proficiency of the interviewees proved sufficient, and when language issues did arise, patient dialogue resolved them. Additionally, the Chinese instructors later checked unclear or ambiguous points of the interview transcripts. Timings of interviews allowed for one interview each around midcourse, for students and teachers. A sample of student interview questions are seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Student Interview Questions (developing writing skills, self-study)

Initial question	Follow-up prompt	Purpose / relation to **RQ**
Do you think the course has helped you improve your writing? Why? What skills have been most useful?	Which skills have been most difficult to learn?	-to explore student perspectives on writing skills acquisition and the challenges they face
Do you study and work on your writing development at home?	What do you do? How many hours? If not – why not?	-to find out about self-study practices, an important part of test preparation in most cases

Student exchanges began with a warm-up discussion about English learning history in general, an effective means of simultaneously obtaining contextual information and encouraging ease with the process (Spradley, 1979). As seen below, students were then asked about which aspects of writing were most difficult, and how (or if) they worked to develop these outside of class. Teacher interview questions (Table 3) followed a similar format, but were naturally more advanced discussions due to their proficient English ability and eagerness to explore more complex topics. The questions chosen focus on identifying which writing skills are most difficult to teach, to ascertain reasons for pedagogical models used. Informal discussions between teachers and the researcher also took place after lessons, on all aspects of pedagogy. A second (informal) interview occurred

with the more experienced instructor, Mr Li, as he requested to share further views on pedagogical approaches and test preparation. These extra discussions with both practitioners were unplanned but insightful.

Table 3: Teacher Interview Questions (writing preparation challenges)

What are the main challenges you have with teaching writing?	Is task one* or task two** the most challenging to teach students about? Why?	-to gather instructor perspectives on the perceived difficulties of instruction
Why is _____ difficult to teach? (this will be based on previous answers and prompts)	▪ paragraphing ▪ staying on topic ▪ lexis / grammar ▪ introductions and conclusions, ideas	- to understand the pedagogical challenges that teachers have, and why this might be

*IELTS Task 1 – 150 words, describing a graph or other form of data (20 minutes)

**IELTS Task 2 – 250 words, essay-style question (40 minutes)

5 Collecting written homework and piloting

Additionally, essays were collected from students (*n* = 10, students, *n* = 50 essays) who wished to share their homework. The purpose was to further understand writing struggles, and to observe any potential impact of the pedagogical approaches taken. Observing considerable progress in writing over a short time period is unrealistic, but to exclude written work from the dataset would risk omitting an insightful angle.

All methods were piloted using lessons and participants at the location prior to the start of the course, resulting in minor modifications. For example, a more strictly focused observation sheet was used after the initial pilot attempt captured data that was irrelevant to the research question. It also emerged that checking audio with local teachers during occasional communication breakdowns was helpful – particularly for lower level student interviews.

IV Data analysis process

To analyse the data a thematic approach was used for each of the sources (observations, interviews and written work), following the Braun and Clarke (2006) coding model. The first objective was immersion in the data, moving towards familiarization.

1 Immersion and early coding

For the classroom observation data, this involved a thorough examination of notes made, sampled in Figure 1. As seen, the notes described not only what was happening, but contextual factors, all of which required categorization (described below). For example, how particular students – anonymized in Figure 1 – were interacting during a task, or how they responded to an activity. This proved useful when interviewing participants later, for further probing. Each interview exchange was listened to three times and fully transcribed. Writing down all content aided the familiarization process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and transcriptions were used for further analysis.

Regarding written work, reading each of the essays revealed the thematic issues for candidates' writing. Sample compositions are used throughout Section V to demonstrate points made. 10 students submitted essays (*n* = 50) for analysis in total, largely from the intermediate and higher proficiency class. Other students' reluctance may have been due to incomplete homework essays, or some feeling less confident about their work.

Researcher Notes

12.30 – class begins, task 2 question is one the board in English. It's about news media, and asks the question whether it is positive or negative? Chinese explanations / translations given by the T.

model answer given, looks good. Intro sentence, then 2 main paragraphs that answer the question. Some highlighted good phrases, have access to, gain knowledge, better informed, newsworthy, curious about, satisfies our curiosity, interesting conversation topics.

Next page of the same answer focuses on the negative, good. Some more phrases, 2 clear paragraphs again. More expressions highlighted, popularity and influence, exaggerated, false news, widespread distrust, news outlets, political agendas, biased, manipulate the public

(this model answer is about structure, developing ideas and vocab). Great.

12.41 – next slide: Idea vs opinion

Some Chinese writing on board. Example given:

Some people think that living in big cities brings about a number of benefits.

(and adds in to begin with, in addition, last but not least and gives details on 3 further points that support this)

Now – 'ideas + support' (it also says develop your ideas with good details, and gives and example. Support your ideas. Use personal knowledge and experience. A new example is given about the positives of getting older.

Topic sentence is given, followed by examples and support. Chinese translation provided orally.

Note – Y said almost all s/s who come here are Chinese, not foreigners really.

10.12 – answers on board:

Compared with the number of ageing population of Finland, that of Japan is considerably higher.

10.15 – break

T is explaining something to girls in the corner though, noisy ones. Textbook has some vocab translated. Most are good English, but the odd one is unusual 'time-honored' is next to 'historical' for example. May explain some s/s strange word choices in essays.

10.33 – Break over, T says Chinese word and they write in English. Learner next to me is looking at vocab lists in his textbook for help. 10 words. T monitors and checks. I wonder if it's a spelling test.

Student to my left has at least half missing spaces, but she didn't copy. Student to my right has 9/10 correct, but he did. Only mistake was to write 'social welfar'.

10.40 – back to translations on the board. T monitors and helps one by one. Slow way to do it, no peer checks. Guy next to me asks s/s in front for help and they tell him 'follow close'.

Answer on board – The number of American athletes winning gold medals ranked at the top, which was followed by that of the Chinese athletes.

10.49 – another sentence on board to be translated now. T monitors. Answer:

The remaining 20% of the total spending is distributed to travelling and books, accounting for 125 and 34% respectively. (hmm). S/s losing interest now.

T moves on to a table on board, quite a big one, about metros (date opened, rote length, delivering capacity)

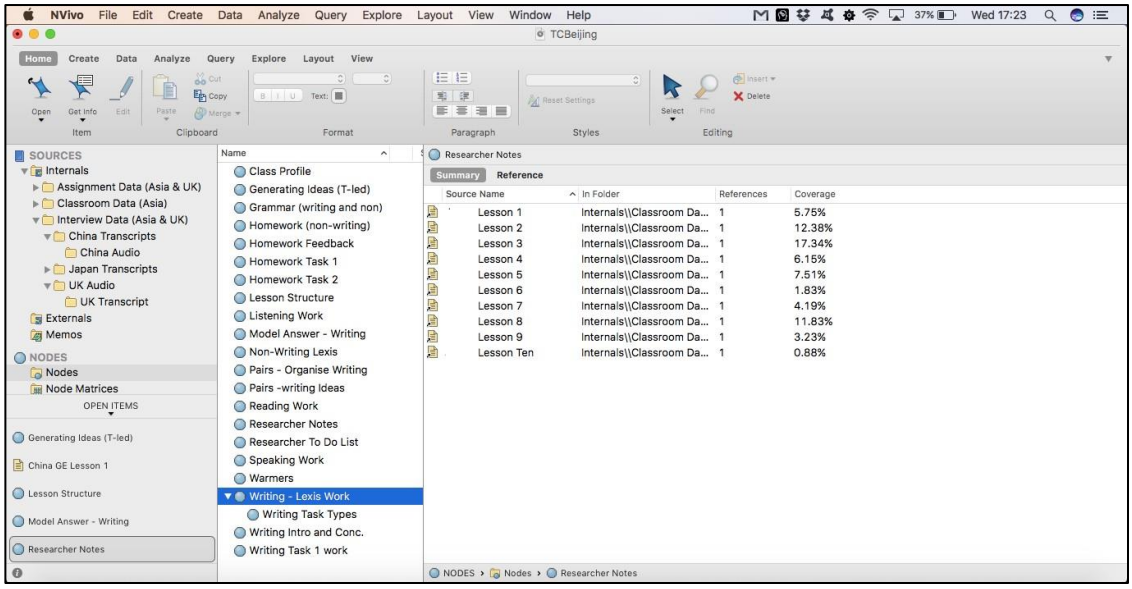
Note – all board work in English, some Chinese used to explain

Figure 1: Classroom observation notes

2 Identifying, reviewing and naming themes (and documentation)

Concept maps helped separate data according to relevance to the research question. After this initial immersive categorization activity, a series of nodes were created using NVivo (v.10.2.2). To explore thematic identification, NVivo software organized data and reduced manual operations required (AlYahmady & Alabri, 2013). Emerging themes were arranged categorically for observation notes and transcribed interview data. Analysis of written tasks involved a smaller, more manageable dataset. After data immersion and familiarization, an early overall picture of the test preparation process began to emerge. Initially, 21 nodes (or categories) were formed to house each piece of relevant data from each method for analysis. This can be seen in Figure 2, with each node listed (alongside blue circles). These included 'listening work' and 'speaking work' for example, when a teacher had briefly focused on another language skill.

Figure 2 – Initial 21 Nodes (broad categories)



Nodes were then refined by reducing their number (from 21 to 7; see Table 4), focusing on key data only. The seven nodes are illustrated in Table 4, including subdivisions of relevant data. A final category was added,

relating to the possibility of introduction to academic skills. This was to investigate the link between the pedagogical models used and writing skills for use beyond the test.

Table 4 – 7 Nodes and Subdivisions

Node	Subdivision 1	Subdivision 2	Introduction to Academic Skills?
Formulating ideas	Group work	Reading and lexis	Input texts, peer work
Structuring an essay	Individual paragraph work	Individual feedback on homework essays	Early structural work
Managing mixed ability and progress levels	Ability ranges in class and pedagogical strategies	Speed of progression and link to proficiency level	Peer interactions
Language of instruction	Activities featuring Chinese L1	Impact of L1 usage among students	Linguistic dependency
Class feedback sessions	Advantages of approach	Disadvantages	Authenticity
Teacher-led vs Communicative pedagogy	Two varied pedagogical models	Influences and implications	Suitability for post-test study

V Results

Results are presented across three principal categories drawn from the seven top-level nodes, collapsed into three final themes for ease of presentation. 'Teacher-led vs. communicative pedagogy' proved to be so closely connected to 'language of instruction' and dealing with 'mixed ability' groups, that these were subsumed into the final themes. Within these three themes (below), pedagogical models used, relation to teacher cognition and potential for introduction of academic writing skills are described.

Each has been renamed slightly since the node categorization stage, for clarity and precision:

- Formulating ideas for essays
- Structural work on students' writing
- Feedback and class sessions on homework essays

1 Overall summary

Table 5 provides an overview of the main findings, in relation to each of the pedagogical themes identified. Each theme may be considered a central aspect of course pedagogy, in reference to IELTS Task 2. To better understand how each of these was addressed, the table shows teacher beliefs (or cognition) and their chosen instructional model for each of the three areas. The column on the far right indicates how each pedagogical model may relate to early stage academic writing acquisition, as defined earlier (Fitzmaurice & O'Farrell, 2013). Results indicated that while the two teachers involved in the study recognized similar pedagogical issues to address, their beliefs about the underlying causes of students struggling with certain aspects of writing sometimes differed.

Both teachers agreed that lexical development was required to help facilitate idea generation and expression, but one teacher (Ms Zhang) coupled this with expanding topic knowledge through pre-reading. Instructors saw

structural work as highly important. Model answers were used extensively, which students responded well to. One teacher focused more on sentence level work (e.g. using topic sentences) and the other at paragraph level. Teacher-led pedagogy was viewed as important by both instructors (for different reasons), reflected in their instructional approach. In terms of academic writing development, some potentially useful skills were introduced. They included task-specific lexical development, imitating model essay structures and gauging appropriate formality. Perhaps the most academically-oriented activity was using reading to inform writing, but this was an ad-hoc teacher choice, rather than a typical classroom activity – and success was modest. The higher proficiency class appeared more able to develop early academic writing skills, especially involving reading in the writing process. Some students saw the benefit of such activities, but many were understandably more focused on the IELTS test itself than thinking beyond it.

Table 5: Pedagogical Themes

Pedagogical Themes	Teacher Beliefs	Instructional Model	Introduction to Academic Skills?
Formulating ideas for writing essays	Mr Li –lexis hampering expression Ms Zhang – Lexis *and* topic knowledge	Mr Li – lexical development Ms Zhang – lexical development & reading	Lexis necessary but not yet academic, expression key Reading to inform writing yes, but unusual and perhaps ad-hoc
Structural work on students' writing	Both agree – problem identified; model needed	Mr Li – model answers Ms Zhang – models and sentence-level work	Models useful, for formality too. Not academic models yet, but perhaps a building block.
Feedback and class sessions on homework essays	Mr Li – must come from the students Ms Zhang – teacher control required	Mr Li – timed output sessions, class feedback Ms Zhang – textbook use, phrases given	Test-focused, but feedback useful for general writing acquisition in both cases

2 Formulating ideas for writing essays

One of the main problems students had near the start of the course – especially at the lower and intermediate levels – was generating ideas with which to answer the essay question in a timely manner. Both teachers attributed this to a deficiency in lexis, at least in part. In each class, work to expand students' vocabulary by learning new words and placing them in sentences was regularly undertaken. Looking at dictionary definitions, quizzes on word meaning and useful set phrases for their essays formed a significant part of every writing class. Mr Li believed there to be a strong connection between ideas and lexis, explaining that without sufficient vocabulary, students would always struggle to express themselves. He referred to vocabulary as 'the mechanism' that would help transform ideas into written work. At the start of each lesson (and throughout), he provided learners with a variety of new terms, although he was less focused on how to use these in context than the other teacher.

Another pedagogical difference was that beyond expanding students' vocabulary, Ms Zhang felt that the inability of learners to think of ideas was also attributable to an unfamiliarity with writing in English about the kinds of topics that may appear in IELTS Task 2. She instructed learners who were struggling with idea generation to read specific texts in English at home. She believed that reading would help students develop basic knowledge of commonly occurring subjects (such as the environment, family, technology and communication). As Ms Zhang explains, the two skills could be seen as interconnected, and part of the receptive to productive skill relationship:

If you really want to improve writing skill you need to read many original articles related to these kind of topics. Like a newspaper or examples, example article answers. But most essays by the examiners are too hard to imitate, it's not useful (shows me one model answer in her textbook). Some easier article may be more helpful to improve their test skills. (Ms Zhang)

It is clear that Ms Zhang believed input will aid output, supporting the assertion that the reconstruction of information acquired through reading can help the writing process (Ahmed et al., 2014). The newspaper articles she used were not academic in nature, but they were authentic materials. She felt that without building some knowledge of the topics first, students would be unable to write essays comparable to the examples in her textbook. Some learners agreed with this, as Liqin (pseudonym) explains:

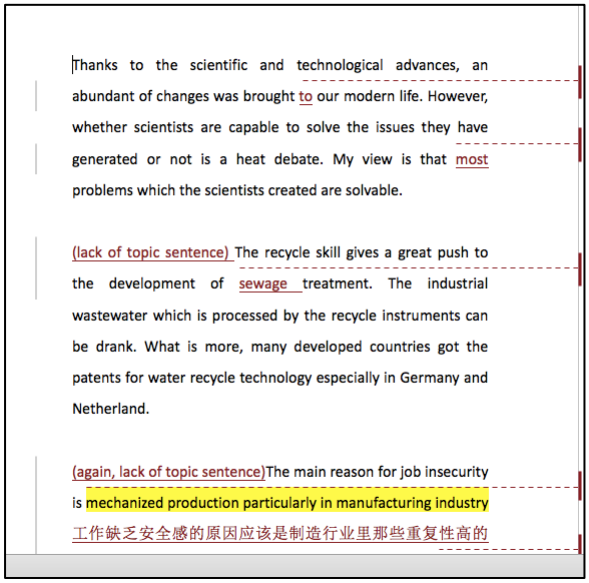
If you don't have a lot of knowledge or experience you can't touch the different types, you have to know the fields education, economic, or including other things that you need to know, and then you can . . . write it down. (Liqin)

Although perhaps logical (and good practice for writing beyond the test), one problem was that this approach relied on candidates reading set texts before they came to class. Most learners interviewed claimed that they did not have time (12, n = 20 interviewed). She explained that as many students were not willing or able to complete the extra reading, she asked them to do smaller amounts. Several students did read, and it appeared to boost their confidence somewhat. However, the magazine articles were challenging. As students were not particularly interested in the topics anyway, engagement was limited. The highest proficiency class were more receptive to this activity, as might be expected. Most students (7, n = 10) were able to attempt this reading at least, whereas in the intermediate class few made any significant progress with the homework reading tasks. Apart from lexical development and topic knowledge work, both teachers saw planning an essay as important. Class work on this included collectively thinking of ideas to answer the question set. This was new to lower proficiency learners or those who had joined recently, but with practice students appeared capable of learning to use a short time period (several minutes) to plan before each Task 2 essay. This was evident in the timed output sessions, discussed below.

3 Structural work on students' writing

In addition to lexis and topic knowledge development, work on essay structure was a significant component of each writing course – particularly at the lower and intermediate levels. Aforementioned planning activities were central to addressing this area; basic layout was evidently problematic in early homework essays. An example is seen in Figure 3, showing a homework task deemed unsatisfactory by Ms Zhang, and her comments. While the essay is not badly written (each part is separated by topic: introduction, benefits of recycling and job insecurity), failure to adequately signpost each section

Figure 3: Paragraphing (Chonglin's essay)


Thanks to the scientific and technological advances, an abundant of changes was brought to our modern life. However, whether scientists are capable to solve the issues they have generated or not is a heat debate. My view is that most problems which the scientists created are solvable.

(lack of topic sentence) The recycle skill gives a great push to the development of sewage treatment. The industrial wastewater which is processed by the recycle instruments can be drank. What is more, many developed countries got the patents for water recycle technology especially in Germany and Netherland.

(again, lack of topic sentence)The main reason for job insecurity is mechanized production particularly in manufacturing industry 工作缺乏安全感的原因应该是制造行业里那些重复性高的

makes the content difficult to follow. Ms Zhang and Mr Li agreed that – for work on essay structure – providing model answers with clearly organized paragraphs was essential. Without doing so, learners would struggle to comprehend requirements.

As one student observed, structure in L1 writing felt natural, but an IELTS essay still represented a highly unfamiliar set of expectations:

I did really well in Chinese writing, but I think that it's really a big difference from the IELTS test. Chinese writing we don't have structure, we only have to think about ideas and then express it clearly. But for the IELTS test it's really important for you to make a right structure. (Jiang)

Although both teachers used essay models and largely agreed on their purpose, they had a slightly different pedagogical focus. For Ms Zhang, the lack of topic sentences required attention, as without these, students' writing would be unclear, and the message lost. A proportion of her classroom time was spent on sentence-level structural work, using examples of topic sentences and how these can signpost content. This sentence-level approach and co-construction of examples with students was a recurring feature of her teaching, as is clear from her means of developing lexis described above.

Mr Li largely focused on the wider essay and paragraph-level organization when using models. He felt that although the objective was students learning to structure their own writing, this was an unrealistic aim without significant support. When asked about them, he explained that:

The ideal way is to start from the students. But just now you talk about the actual way, the real way. Our real way is to provide a certain kind of model. At the beginning they must follow my model, they have no idea of the formal standard of IELTS writing. (Mr Li)

Setting realistic expectations is an important point. Many candidates had a considerable improvement to make to meet the required writing standards set by IELTS constructs. The repeated use of model answers provided a highly important example for them to aim to reproduce, particularly near the beginning. The aim was that students would gradually become more independent as the course progressed – understanding structure rather than imitating it. Both teachers use model answers from the textbook, which varied in complexity according to proficiency level (in lower classes, language and grammar was less sophisticated). The same organizational structure was followed at each level, but from intermediate upwards, arguments were more developed. The habit of timely editing was taught and practised. By later course stages, most students (8, n = 10 in the advanced class) had learned to use paragraphs and separate ideas, even if lexis and other areas still required improvement.

Figure 4 shows Fan's essay, taken from the intermediate group, with some developed paragraphs, and using topic sentences. Evidently, the level is low, with rambling and disconnected points. However, the second paragraph shows Fan starting to support statements with evidence. It begins by stating that free healthcare is a basic right, and follows this with the importance of insurance, comparing other countries, quality of life and medical provisions. He then attempts to balance the cost of medical care with education.

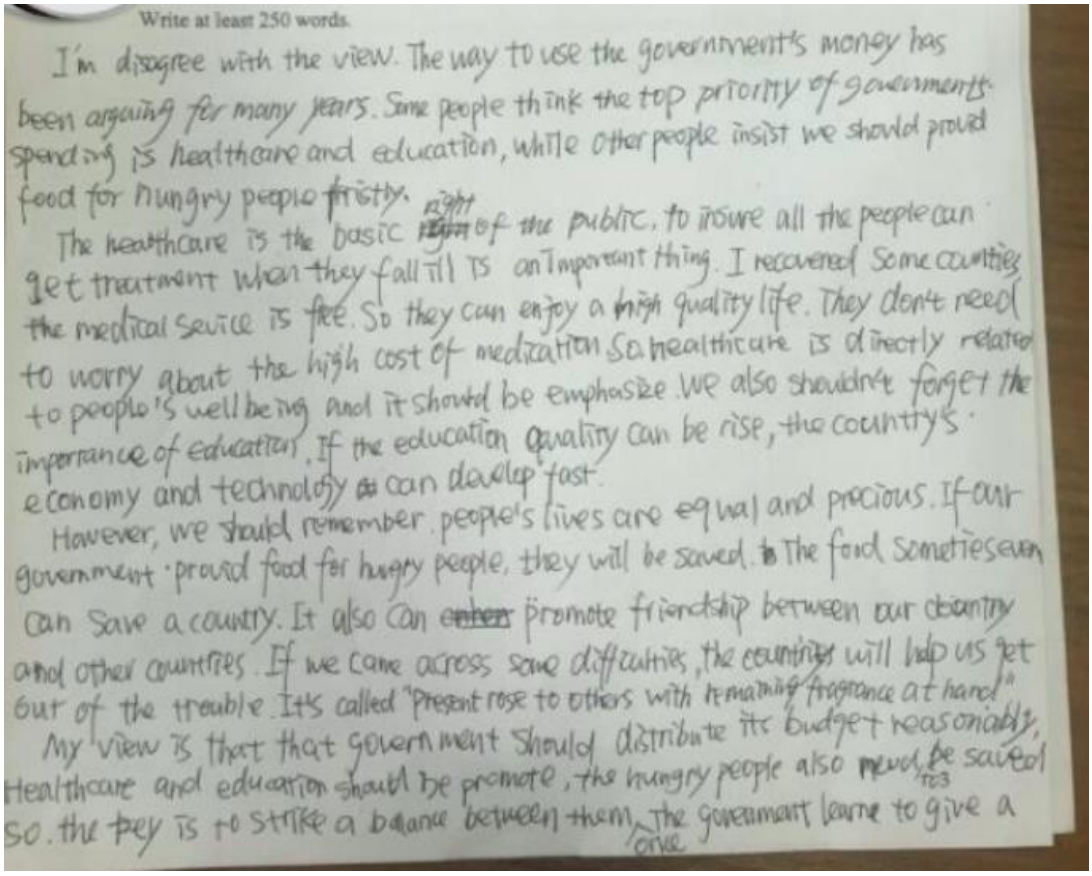
Although these points are not sufficiently developed for a high IELTS writing score, it is clear that he is beginning to understand structural requirements:

As part of a wider pedagogical approach, using model answers appeared helpful for students. There were many for whom structural work was a considerable challenge, seen in their homework essays (30, n = 50 total). Learners generally viewed model answers as valuable, as stated in interviews.

4 Feedback and class sessions on homework essays

Across all three proficiency levels, the use of feedback was another central theme. Although both instructors did comment on student writing, most feedback was delivered in class. Observations and interviews indicated that some candidates were engaging with written feedback more than others were. Ms Zhang believed this reflected student effort levels, and that even modest progress would only be possible if feedback was acted upon. On her courses, this led to feedback being conducted in whole class sessions. Learners were more capable of engaging with the teacher directly than with written feedback on essays, she felt. Ms Zhang's feedback sessions usually lasted about 20 minutes, and involved a teacher-led discussion of specific examples of errors she had chosen from homework essays, corrected on the board. This was followed by pairwork.

Figure 4: Paragraphs using Topic Sentences (Fan's essay)



Write at least 250 words.

I'm disagree with the view. The way to use the government's money has been arguing for many years. Some people think the top priority of governments spending is healthcare and education, while other people insist we should provid food for hungry people firstly.

The healthcare is the basic right of the public, to insure all the people can get treatment when they fall ill is an Imporant thing. I recovered Some countries the medical sevice is free. So they can enjoy a high quality life. They don't need to worry about the high cost of medization. So healthcare is directly relatio to people's well being and it should be emphasize. We also shouldn't forget the importance of education. If the education quality can be rise, the country's economy and technology can develop fast.

However, we should remember people's lives are equal and precious. If our government provid food for hungry people, they will be saved. The food sometieseven can save a country. It also can promote friendship between our country and other countries. If we came across some difficulties, the countries will help us get out of the trouble. It's called "Present rose to others with remaining fragrance at hand".

My view is that that government should distribute its budget reasonably, Healthcare and education should be promote, the hungry people also need to be saved so. the key is to strike a balance between them. The government learne to give a

Mr Li also used whole class feedback sessions, and to a greater extent. Some lessons were designated for homework feedback only. The detailed correction of one piece of writing took approximately forty minutes, as a learner's essay was chosen to be displayed on the board for analysis. A much-improved final model essay was the aim of each class. This included, for example, topic sentences supported by evidence, fuller responses to the task, or properly developed sub-sections of text. Grammatical and lexical corrections were made, and students were encouraged to give feedback to their peers. At the beginning, candidates were apprehensive about correcting classmates' work displayed. Teacher-led explanations of the value of peer feedback overcame this, in addition to Chinese translations of improvements made. Perhaps unsurprisingly, having work displayed on the board in this manner encouraged students to write homework tasks to the best of their ability. According to one candidate:

I can't learn English well by myself, I need the lessons. The classmates and the teacher will lead me to have a better state of English. I learn English every day. I must finish this task which teachers give me. So it's benefits my English. (Huifang)

Students realized the importance of the feedback sessions, and the need to fully complete their homework essays to receive guidance. Between these examinations of learners' work, a textbook also provided sample Writing Task 2 topics expected to feature in IELTS. Using these, further models of how to expand compositions were provided. Following this input, regular timed output sessions were conducted in each lesson. Learners had to write a paragraph within around five minutes, using the phrases that had been provided (or corrected) earlier. Students worked individually, which was the case for most of their test focused writing activities. When asked about this teacher-led approach, Mr Li explained that the differences between pedagogical models (e.g. communicative, a more student-centred problem-solving method than his own) should not be assumed to be more than that:

We can't say one is superior or one is better. It depends . . . we cannot say that the problem is related to the teaching system, British or Chinese . . . communicative or traditional, it has nothing to do with that. I think it only depends how the students analyse the topic socially,

culturally, critically, economically, it depends on teacher. (Mr Li)

This further reveals how teacher cognition affects test preparation pedagogy. Teachers varied in the way they addressed the overarching writing challenges, but were never significantly far apart. The class feedback sessions, and the slight differences described therein above, exemplify this.

VI Discussion and conclusions

With each of the three pedagogical themes now summarized, the research question can now be revisited.

• How are Chinese IELTS candidates aiming for overseas study supported to achieve their required writing section score in their own country?

1 Instructional models used for test preparation

Candidates across all three proficiency levels were mainly supported through the development of lexis, the use of model answers for organizational purposes, and extensive class feedback sessions on their own writing. Additional work was also undertaken on bolstering topic knowledge. Instruction was principally teacher-led, comparable to earlier findings on TOEFL preparation classes (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Barnes, 2017). Language development and specifically test-focused work were quite balanced overall, differing from some earlier findings (Mickan and Motteram, 2009) but concurring with others (Allen, 2016). Recalling Shahrzad et al.'s (2021) assertion that some teachers perceive it as challenging to overcome the tension between test-oriented pedagogy and language proficiency development, it is evident that the two teachers in the current study at least attempted to strike a balance. The fact that other studies in the existing literature reported a range of differently weighted course foci may attest to the variety between test preparation courses. However, it is also apparent that the overall objective of the courses was broadly similar to test preparation courses in other studies, in addition to student expectations of the pedagogical model used, also echoing earlier results (O'Sullivan et al., 2021).

Despite these similar objectives, it was clear that teaching approaches were far from standardized (Chappell et al., 2015) even within one test preparation centre, also supporting earlier findings (Brown, 1998). Teachers used activities and tasks that differed, reflecting their own instructional philosophy, and based on what they believed the class required rather than any kind of empirically grounded or standardized framework. The influence of teacher cognition (described below) on these somewhat ad hoc and individualistic pedagogical choices cannot easily be separated. Nonetheless, the lack of standardization does not necessarily mean that important learning did not occur. Students appeared to be developing both test-oriented and language-related skills, and the overall positive impact of the course was evident, despite some drawbacks (Gan, 2009).

2 The role of teacher cognition in the test preparation process

As was the case with instructional models used, the teachers both shared pedagogical beliefs and varied in them. Earlier findings highlighting the influences of teacher beliefs on educational practices are also supported, regarding reading instruction and teacher cognition in that case (Irvine-Niarkaris & Kiely, 2015). These philosophical divergences were reflected in their instructional approach (as outlined earlier in Table 5) and recalled studies on the potentially negative impact this can have should individual teacher cognition derail intended washback (Cheng et al., 2004; Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996). However, divergences do not necessarily cause negative washback. An example of divergence was evident in the teaching of lexis, where one teacher favoured single words and definitions, but the other offered set phrases and repeatedly displayed them in context. Both instructors believed that lexical development was central to written expression, but beliefs on how to address this took different forms. Similarly, feedback was seen as equally important by both teachers. However, one teacher preferred whole class sessions and the other opted for pair work. The pair-work approach instructor believed in a less teacher-centred approach to feedback. Although these instructional models are divergent, that is not necessarily problematic for learning. More concerning would be if aspects of test preparation pedagogy that have been found to benefit students are overlooked due to instructor cognition. For example, directly teaching students about test format (Mickan & Motteram, 2008) or rubrics (Baker, 2020) may have proved useful for the students on these courses, but instructors did not include them. This supports the earlier suggestion that professional development for test preparation teachers is highly important (Shahrzad et al., 2021). Beyond these test-oriented foci, the question of whether candidates would be better prepared for academic study after the courses, remains to be answered, also supporting earlier reflections (Brown, 1998).

a Potential implications of test preparation for future academic writing. Some aspects of the preparation courses may have proved beneficial to students' subsequent academic writing acquisition, beyond the test.

Developing task-specific lexis, gauging appropriate formality, editing, and using a coherent structure could be helpful longer term. Early attempts to make the connection between reading and writing were not particularly successful, perhaps indicating that students were not yet at the required language proficiency level to cope. Certain aspects of the courses may have introduced useful writing skills that resemble those stipulated as early academic requirements (Fitzmaurice & O'Farrell, 2013). Results support earlier findings that IELTS test constructs appear to encourage positive washback (Allen, 2016) and may foster some introductory academic writing skills at the test preparation stage. However, it is evident that there exists a considerable gap between test preparation writing skills and those necessary for academic writing, echoing earlier findings (Clark & Yu, 2020, forthcoming). Although IELTS does not claim the test does more than measure candidates' suitability for entrance to an English education course (https://www.ielts.org/about-ielts/ielts-for-study), a detailed look at the pedagogical approaches as featured in this study suggests that the test preparation for international study model could be better aligned.

Developing task-specific lexis may introduce adaptation of written work to meet expected requirements, on the positive side. Although lexis was not academic at this stage, some set phrases for beginning or signposting an essay may be developed later. Reading into writing may be a useful introduction to academic writing practices, but it was an unusual pedagogical approach. Although IELTS writing does not require demonstration of knowledge, familiarizing students with common topics may help them to bring in supporting evidence, or at least understand the need to do so. Finally, planning is an important habit for subsequent academic writing (as noted earlier), and it was encouraging to see students acquiring this habit at an early stage of their learning. Paragraphs and structure are especially important for IELTS Task 2, and for subsequent academic writing. Of the basic academic skills outlined earlier (Fitzmaurice & O'Farrell, 2013), producing logical and coherently structured writing is highlighted. As noted by Mr Li, appropriate formality is perhaps more straightforward to understand through a model text. IELTS writing formality may differ from an academic piece, and formality itself in contemporary academic writing may or may not be as important as it once was (Hyland, 2017). However, learning to adapt to the expectations of a target reader is an important academic skill. Critics of IELTS may point to the differences between writing tasks and authentic academic essays, but few would assert that there are no similarities. Learning about essay structure appears to be most useful for later writing here. As with editing (for example), class feedback sessions on homework essays provide important general English practice. It can also be test-focused, if correction or addition of set phrases for IELTS essay writing is included. Although such activities may benefit student writing, it is difficult to see a direct link between these and subsequent academic writing acquisition.

Considering the limited sample, teachers may wish to tentatively explore certain aspects of the findings above in more depth. This includes the viability of introducing early academic writing skills for higher proficiency level students, who have already learned the basics of English writing. Learners in the current study appeared highly focused on the test itself, and somewhat overwhelmed with progress to be made (understandably, especially at lower levels). However, it may be that they are already beginning to learn academic writing skills implicitly. Explaining that although achieving a required test score is the main aim of their preparation course, academic writing skills can be introduced simultaneously, might increase engagement. It is also possible that communicative pedagogy (with opportunities for interaction) mirrors teaching on a university course more than teacher-centred approach. Although the teachers in the current study gave reasons for their pedagogical choices grounded in their beliefs, the shift from their approach to unfamiliar student-centred learning may require further adjustment for international learners. Furthermore, understanding more about the possibility of using reading tasks to help inform writing (at higher levels) could be a valuable experiment. Looking at other academic writing features and requirements, and how they may relate to existing test constructs and pedagogy could be useful to explore.

b Other university admissions tests and implications for academic skills development. From a research perspective, how newer 'digital first' tests with reduced constructs would fare in a similar study would be of interest to investigate, and the implications of less academic tasks for writing acquisition insightful to document. If international students are expected to have the capability to develop academic writing skills, the increased role test preparation can play is worthy of further investigation – for both newer and more established high-stakes tests. Two principal pedagogical elements emerged in one recent study on TOEFL iBT test preparation – general English learning strategies and test-specific foci (Liu, 2014). The latter category included coaching strategies (which had minimal impact on score gains) but working on English more generally with non-test-specific activities did in fact improve test performance over time. Liu notes that this may have implications for test design and constructs, suggesting that adjusting these could allow candidates to further develop academic-related skills that will help them post-test, offering the examples of participating in online academic discussions or writing emails about academic matters.

Previous studies on TOEFL preparation (before iBT) indicated that a more test-oriented pedagogy reduced opportunities for interaction (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996) and instruction focused more on individual activities than group or pair work, in comparison to a more general English class (Barnes, 2017). Teacher beliefs influence TOEFL preparation (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996), and can reduce the positive washback intended by the test design, should classroom focus be overly swayed by instructor perspectives on course content (Cheng et al., 2004). Implications for international students not taught with some communicative pedagogical element may be particularly problematic for their productive skills development. However, the inclusion of integrated skills testing in TOEFL iBT is commendable, and may ease the transition into more academic work, particularly reading into writing tasks that do reflect the study domain (Chan et al., 2015; Clark & Yu, 2020). On the other hand, how the TOEFL Essentials Test (and its considerably narrowed test constructs) fares in this regard remains unclear. Released in August 2021 in reaction to the pandemic, the test description can be found here: https://www.ets.org/s/toefl-essentials/score-users/about.

Another large-scale university entrance test in the UK context is Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE-A), although independent studies around it are few. One recent look at PTE-A test preparation observed that repeated test taking represents negative washback and reminded developers of the need for test design to foster development skills reflecting the TLU domain (Knoch et al., 2020). Finally, the Duolingo English Test (DET) has made pandemic-related inroads into the university entrance testing market, particularly in the US. Independent research on this test is nascent, but serious concerns about constructs and test score use have been raised (Wagner, 2020). Implications for test preparation and negative washback are noted, and the lack of encouragement to develop language skills for university study observed. As with many other aspects of the test, the implications of the DET for test preparation pedagogy are currently unknown. Another research area for consideration since the pandemic began is the implications of online test preparation, and how this relates to some of the issues raised in the current article. Furthermore, the effect of repeated test taking on IELTS writing is of research interest. It has been observed that candidates writing changes over multiple test attempts, and Task 2 essays may become (for example) longer, more linguistically accurate and coherent (Barkaoui, 2016). Despite these improvements in specific writing features, the finding that test-takers may perceive the need for repeated attempts as negative (Chappell et al., 2019) should not be overlooked. If test preparation is indeed to be 'appropriate, ethical and learning-oriented' (Clark & Yu, forthcoming, p. 7) candidates should also view it as such.

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