

IELTS and the Australian Context: Globally Mobile International Students

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Abstract

This research note preliminarily investigates the Australian higher education sector as it pertains to its international student cohort. Australia is one of the major higher education study destinations in the world. The sector is a vital component of its service-orientated economic model which aims to progress a knowledge economy. Therefore, it must compete with other attractive study destinations of the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) for the globally mobile student cohort and who predominantly come from China and India. In recent decades, Australia has committed to a skilled migration policy to which the higher education sector is inextricably tied. It is not an uncommon pathway for international students who have enrolled in and graduated with an Australian degree to then seek employment and permanent residency. Thus, they will likely face the challenge of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test more than once. The IELTS test and its gatekeeping function for non-Australians has a two-fold purpose. Its score assesses both the English language proficiency of international students' enrolment into Australian universities and plays a role for their entry into the Australian workforce. In this research note, analysis of secondary data included in relevant reports has mainly been reviewed. This initial exploration has enabled for closer examination of the IELTS test's ubiquity in Australia for the aforesaid dual purposes. It also aims to determine the awareness of the IELTS test in Japan among associated stakeholders. The conclusions of the reports referred to do not reveal the predictive validity of IELTS as an English language proficiency for the Australian workplace. Yet, the reports are more positive in terms of the potential washback of the IELTS test on educational institutions in Japan (China is also mentioned). By gaining more insight into these bifurcate domains, this research note attempts to provide impetus for heightened examination by English Foreign or Second Language (EFL and ESL) educators of the merits and demerits of the IELTS test as an instrument of students' possible tertiary and career ambitions. Additionally, it highlights the inopportune decoupling of the IELTS test from non-Australians' study, employment, and/or migrant pathways. For those Japanese students who may desire global mobility or who are transnationally inclined, this research note states that IELTS is an important foundation.

Key words: Australian higher education sector, international student, skilled migration, IELTS, Japan, washback, predictive validity, globally mobile

Introduction

Australia's economy is in part reliant on the globally mobile international student. Not only for enrolment in Australian universities, but also for their acquired skills, post-graduation in the Australian employment market. This paper will reinforce that the IELTS test is central to the transnational success

of the globally mobile international student who desires to reap from their Australian degree investment through employment there. Australia encourages non-Australian graduates to pursue this pathway towards skilled migration to address the gaps in and advance the progress of their knowledge economy (Hamilton, 2017). Despite the attractive migration policies, the employment of international students upon graduation in Australia is not a given (Blackmore, Gribble, Farrell, Rahimi, Arber & Devlin, 2014). To obtain permanent residency visas, favoured by employers of non-Australian international graduates, the IELTS test holds a crucial gatekeeping function (Obaidul, Ngoc & Kirkpatrick, 2018). However, it also holds another gatekeeping function, initial entry into Australian universities. Thus, this research note will underscore how the IELTS test plays an important bifurcate role for both enrolment and employment in Australia.

To elaborate on IELTS' dual-role in the Australian tertiary and employment contexts, two testing dimensions will be addressed, washback and predictive validity. In this research note, washback refers to the impact of the IELTS test on language learning, curriculum and policy, and predictive validity refers to the external domains where the IELTS test may be relevant (Messick, 1996). Firstly, the washback of the IELTS test will be investigated to ascertain its positive or negative effect. This will be viewed from the perspectives of Japanese and associated educational bodies relevant to pre-entry into foreign universities (China will also be briefly addressed). Secondly, the predictive validity of the IELTS test, post-graduation for skilled migration into the Australian workforce will be critically evaluated. In the end, the research note will provide some recommendations that EFL and ESL educators and/or academics interested in this particular globally mobile student cohort could consider in light of IELTS' omnipresence.

Methods

The method of research predominantly involves the analysis of secondary data reports and to a lesser extent a review of related academic articles on the dual-focus of the IELTS test and the degree of its washback and predictive validity for the contexts aforesaid. For the secondary data, the reports have been selected based on their capability to illuminate the issues associated with the IELTS test's washback and predictive validity for contexts mentioned previously. Due to the Australian and IELTS emphasis, the reports have been published by a limited range of sources. These include: the Australian government, specific Australian universities that had received grants to carry out research, and the IELTS Research Report Series itself (It must be noted that International Education Specialists Australia [IDP Australia] is a major stakeholder in this series. Furthermore, it is in partnership with the British Council and University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations.). To provide more evidentiary support for this brief research note, select academic articles, international reporting bodies' websites, and ministry and company websites have also been consulted. To recap, this research note seeks to embark on initial research to ascertain the scope of the IELTS test from two angles. Its washback effect, which is mainly related to Japan's tertiary EFL context. Plus, its predictive validity which is related to Australia's higher education international student graduates, and their subsequent workplace entry.

Literature Review

Global Mobility of International Students

The number of international students has been steadily increasing, worldwide. In 1975, only 0.8 million were enrolled. From the year 2000 to 2012, the number of students travelling overseas for the purpose of higher education increased from 2.1 to 4.5 million (GPS Education, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012; OECD, 2014). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2022) similarly found that the number of globally mobile students had risen to 3.5 million by 2016. Their figures surmise that in less than two decades there has been an increase of international students from 2 million to 6 million. In the post-pandemic era, UNESCO (2022) predicts that the figure will reach 8 million students by 2025.

Percentage-wise however, in 2019 (i.e., pre-pandemic) the global mobility of international students was 2.6 percent. Therefore, UNESCO (2022) appears to be on the side of promoting efforts to make the global education industry more open. In this vein, the conference called for more widespread recognition of qualifications for learners and for more countries to do so. Maneiro (2019), writing for UNESCO's International Education for Latin Students (IESALC), raises a point of contention that the 2.6 percent is at present, exclusive (UNESCO, 2022). It is thus foreseeable that from the recent UNESCO World Higher Education Conference 2022 in Barcelona, Spain, their social media post on Twitter advocated: "Let's open the gates of #HigherEducation to #UnleashTheTalent of the new generation".

Nevertheless, UNESCO (2022) points out that there are numerous factors driving the expansion of the international student based on their present characteristics which include: the global demand for tertiary education, the value perception of studying at tertiary institutions overseas, the specific policies of a government that allow for student mobility, especially within a geographic region, the efficiency of transportation, the effectiveness of communication, especially with regard to costs, and the growing competitiveness for and attractiveness of the internationalised labour markets for highly skilled people.

Inevitably, for some international study destinations, attracting the globally mobile student to their tertiary education sector, can not only bolster the nation economically, but can also be part of a broader strategy to recruit highly skilled migrants (OECD, 2014). For this cohort, studying abroad is considered the first of many fundamental and subsequential stages on the pathway to permanent residency, and this could be in a country offering a higher standard of living (Blackmore et al., 2014). In the OECD countries, the average percentage of international students who remain after graduation to capitalise on their investment in their chosen study destination country is 25 percent (Blackmore et al., 2014; OECD, 2014). Moreover, Hong, Lingard & Hardy (2022) put forward that international student higher education alumni have benefits which exceed the economic, social and cultural impact for any one nation.

Australia as a Study Destination for International Students

Connection to Migration

Skilled migration potential increased the competitiveness and the marketisation of the Australian

higher education sector. Hamilton (2017) elucidates that for Australia, education, economic growth and migration are inextricable (Department of Home Affairs, Australia, 2019; Hong, Lingard & Hardy, 2022). The momentum given for this course was the decline in Australian government funding of the higher education sector and the consequent progression of the nation to tap into the evolving global knowledge economy. Thus, the Australian higher education sector has seen significant reform since the 1990s (Hamilton, 2017). Once the Australian government had dramatically changed the migration program to a skills-based one, this created an export market for Australian degree qualifications, notably by full fee-paying international students (Australian Universities, 2020). This was preceded by an employment and migration pathway for international students on graduation. That is, they were welcomed to apply for permanent residency in a noted skills shortage field. The skilled migration program has enormously served to counteract the lack of professional and technical skills that Australia has as it continues its transition to a service-economy (Australian Government Australian Investment Commission, 2022; Hamilton, 2017).

Enrolments

Australia is the third largest study destination for international students. The US is the most popular among globally mobile students and attracts 18.6 percent, the UK 8.2 percent and Australia 7.2 percent (Australian Universities, 2020). Globally, China is the world's largest source market for international students (followed by India), and it is also Australia's number one source of international students (India is Australia's number two) (Australian Government Australian Investment Commission, 2022). The pandemic dramatically affected the mobility of international students worldwide. Yet, the multi-modal mediums of instruction that existed prior to and at a majority of universities in Australia, meant they could mitigate its impact if the modes were efficiently and effectively deployed (i.e., online study options) (Australian Universities, 2020). Therefore, the major source markets of China and India for Australian universities has remained relatively steadfast.

However, when diversification of the student enrolment base was recently raised by the government, which in part would include shifting the higher education focus back to domestic students, universities swiftly reacted. The Group of Eight (Go8), which is the body of Australia's leading and research-intensive universities lobbied the government to dissuade them from changing track (Group of Eight, 2022). In fact, when reviewing the data from 2000 to 2012, the number of international students enrolled in Australian higher education had increased by 15 percent, and by 2018, they had by 29 percent (Australian Government Australian Investment Commission, 2022). Enrolments overall have grown by 41 percent since 2008, with domestic enrolments only growing by 37 percent compared with international enrolment growth of 50 percent. According to the Australian Universities (2020) data, although Australian universities receive comparatively average levels of investment from the government, they must contend with more than 70 percent of domestic students enrolled in various government loan initiatives (i.e., deferring payment/non-fee paying). Expectedly, Australia is one of the top four receivers of private investment and revenue. In other words, income which comes from fee-paying international students (similar to the US, UK and Canada) (Australian Universities, 2020).

Hence, the aforementioned growth in the international student cohort at universities in Australia shows that it can attract the globally mobile. It seems to be able to attract this lucrative and necessary source market for a couple of reasons. One reason is the more affordable tuition fees that Australia offers in contrast with the US, UK and Canada (Australian Universities, 2020; Lin, 2019). This is one reason why Australian higher education has maintained a solid market share of Chinese and Indian students. By 2019, international student enrolments were almost at a peak of 30 percent (Department of Home Affairs Australia, 2019) (Although strict Australian pandemic border closures damaged demand, it is expected to bounce back.). Another crucial reason which keeps Chinese and Indian students interested in Australia, is its skilled visa options, job opportunities and migration paths upon graduation (Australian Government, Australian Investment Commission, 2022; Unconventional Economist, 2022).

To surmise, as Australia moves into the post-pandemic era, it seems that the higher education sector will remain core to the nation's economic growth. In 2022, under the current government, investments continue in this sector as previous administrations. For example, initiatives are being announced in tandem with public relations campaigns as universities fully open up to attract 20,000 new placements for high performers domestically, and skilled migrant teachers from abroad (Marchant, 2022). Thus, Australia continues on course to compete globally for skilled migration to fill the gaps in its knowledge economy.

The Appeal of Postgraduate Degrees

Moreover, graduate and postgraduate degree holders on the whole perform better in the Australian workforce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021; OECD, 2022). Even as undergraduates, they can attain above entry roles at supervisory level, and managerial roles, are not uncommon, and logically with relatively high salaries. Yet, it is those who have postgraduate degrees who are highly sought after, and coursework postgraduate degrees have a slight edge over research postgraduate degrees. Postgraduate degrees in coursework and research held by international students are presently at 56.9 percent and this eclipses that of domestic students at 21.6 percent (Universities Australia, 2020). Among the proportion of international students studying at university, enrolment in bachelor degrees has declined from 2008 to 2018 from 56.1 percent to 47.6 percent respectively. In comparison, over the same period, the share of international students who have been enrolling in postgraduate degrees for both coursework and research has increased from 37.5 percent to 46.9 percent (Universities Australia, 2020). In fact, in 2018, the growth in postgraduate degrees undertaken by international students in Australia was represented by more than 86 percent for coursework ones and 108 percent for research-orientated ones (Universities Australia, 2020). This growth in graduate and post-graduate skilled migration can only encourage Australia's workforce to flourish.

IELTS

IELTS for the Australian Case

According to the IELTS website, the test "is designed to help you work, study or migrate to a country where English is the native language" (IELTS, 2021). On their website, they highlight Australia,

Canada, New Zealand (NZ), UK, and US as countries where the IELTS test is accepted. They also claim that “It is globally recognised by more than 11,000 employers, universities, schools and immigration bodies including 3,400 institutions in the USA”. They state that IELTS has numerous benefits in addition to assessing English language proficiency. For instance, the IELTS test is an essential recognition of language skills for not only integrating into the host community but for taking advantage of job opportunities. For Australian degree holders, this seems true, and these points are supported by a Deakin University report titled *Australian international graduates and the transition to employment* (Blackmore, Gribble, Farrell, Rahimi, Arber & Devlin, 2014). The academics report that work experience (and whether students remain in or leave the study destination) is considered critical for international students. They note that this is due to the credential inflation of their degree (i.e., the inevitable devaluation), post-graduation. Furthermore, to meet merit-based point systems for migration to Australia, Canada, and NZ, they claim that IELTS is the most popular English language proficiency test (Blackmore, et al., 2014).

Moreover, IELTS readily promotes on its website that in Australia, businesses are increasingly requiring proof of an IELTS score for non-native English-speaking workers. They market for international organisations, such as banks (e.g., The national bank of Indonesia, HSBC in Vietnam, Rabobank in The Netherlands) and big accounting or consultancy firms (e.g., Price Waterhouse Coopers in Australia and China, Ernst and Young in Australia, and Deloitte) (IELTS Australia, 2022a). Therefore, IELTS is somewhat vital for enrolment into Australian universities, and also upon graduation for those international student degree holders with the intention to obtain permanent residency in Australia.

For the first stage, to enrol in undergraduate degrees, Australian universities accept a 6.5 overall band score, with no less than 6 in each skill of speaking, writing, reading and listening (IELTS Australia, 2022b). However, if students seek to gain 10–20 points from the IELTS test for permanent work visas including permanent residency, a band score of 7 plus is considered proficient (10 points) and 8 plus is considered superior (20 points). Considering an undergraduate degree will give you 20 points and a postgraduate degree 25 points, the IELTS test can be very significant (especially if you are over 25, under will give you 20 points) as you need to reach a bare minimum of 60–65 points (IELTS Australia, 2022b) (see also Australian Government Department of Home Affairs Immigration and Citizenship, 2019).

Incidentally, the test taker performance data for IELTS 2021 has been published and some of it may be of interest to this study. The data reports the overall band score and respective skill band score for a number of countries (It should be noted that the IELTS Academic test takers were 75.44 percent and the IELTS General test takers comprised the remainder) (IELTS, 2021). Three countries, Japan, China and India are outlined. The latter two were selected based on them being the two largest source markets for the Australian higher education sector and potential ongoing migration, and Japan (and China to a lesser extent) for the issue of washback aforesaid to the EFL and ESL teaching context. For those test takers whose first language is: Japanese-Overall 5.90: 5.98 (Listening), 6.12 (Reading), 5.70 (Writing), 5.53 (Speaking); Chinese-Overall 5.97: 6.04 (Listening), 6.27 (Reading), 5.76 (Writing), 5.55 (Speaking), 5.97 (Overall); Indian-Overall 6.30: 6.62 (Listening), 6.08 (Reading), 6.00 (Writing), 6.25 (Speaking).

Therefore, among these selected countries it seems that Indian test takers are on average achieving the IELTS score closer to Australian university entry requirements.

Potential Washback of IELTS to EFL: Is it Positive?

Japan

Japan as one of the world's largest economies has not been immune to the forces of globalisation and with that the recognition of the importance of cross-cultural and global communication. Factored into this, Nishida (2013) states that there is also an expectation for students to be motivated to learn the language and to visualise their use of communicating in it in the future (i.e., job settings). Iwashita, Sasaki, Stell & Yucel (2021), all university academics, conducted research and wrote a report as part of the IELTS Research Report Series titled, *Japanese stakeholders' perceptions of IELTS writing and speaking tests and their impact on communication and achievement*. Despite the perceptions being mixed, they seem optimistic about the future demand for effective English communication in Japan as remaining relatively high.

In response to this demand, the EFL field in Japan has had to consider how the students at elementary, secondary, and university levels, are expected to improve their English language competency. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) for decades has committed to the reform of the standardised university entrance examination. One goal has been to have a positive washback on classroom instruction, namely at the upper secondary school level, and to have a more balanced language proficiency across the four skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing) (MEXT, 2016). The listening test has in fact been deemed successful in achieving this (Sasaki, 2018).

In this way, of note is a proposed policy initiative of MEXT and how it relates to IELTS. This test had been one of the eight commercialised language proficiency tests under consideration as a replacement option for university entrance examinations. In support, Sasaki (2018) recommends that this initiative would “revolutionarily” have a positive washback on students' productive skills in the Japanese EFL classroom. At present, this initiative has been put on hold (Hagiuda, 2019). Yet, in light of this dialogue, Iwashita et al.'s (2021) report commissioned on behalf of IELTS IDP Australia, had collected primary data on the Japanese student and teacher perspectives in light of this possible development.

In their study, they administered questionnaires and conducted interviews with participants at educational institutions in Japan (53 native Japanese university students from one large city public university and 45 native Japanese English language teachers—40 of who had studied abroad, 45 percent in the US and 40 percent in Australia). With regard to the questionnaire, five questions were administered. Only Question 1: What are the Japanese students and teachers' levels of familiarity with IELTS? and Question 5: What are teachers' and students' views on the suitability of IELTS as an alternative to the current nationwide examination? were relatively successful in gathering information related to IELTS and will be elaborated on further (Questions 2–4 were not able to ascertain much viable information due

to the participants' lack of familiarity with the Speaking and Writing sections of the IELTS test.). Key points from Question 1 and 5 are highlighted as follows.

Regarding Question 1, only one teacher was unfamiliar with IELTS, while 88.67 percent of the students said that they were not familiar with IELTS. Interestingly, Iwashita et al. (2021) correlated the participants' biodata and found a strong correlation between studying abroad and having familiarity with the IELTS test ($r=.772$). That is, most student participants who were not planning to study abroad had never heard of IELTS, although most of the student participants had heard of EIKEN or TOEIC.

Question 5 showed that about half of the student and teacher respondents were against having, and about half were neutral towards having the IELTS as an alternative for the National Centre Test for University Admissions (Common Test for University Admissions as of 2021), with a small percentage of students actually wanting it. With respect to the inclusion of writing and speaking components in this exam, students were generally in favour of it, or neutral towards it, with teachers generally the same as students. This is considered a point of interest by the researchers as the present test is only a listening and reading test. They seem to believe that if the IELTS test was introduced as a high-stakes test for determining university entry in Japan that the washback of the test could significantly influence the teaching and learning in Japanese high schools (Iwashita et al., 2021; Sasaki, 2018).

Another report from the IELTS Research Report Series by Allen (2017) titled, *Investigating Japanese undergraduates' English language proficiency with IELTS: Predicting factors and washback* concurs, and also incorporates the Japanese tertiary context. Allen (2017) contends that the IELTS test has significant potential to create positive washback for universities. The researcher states that as a four-skills test for English language proficiency, IELTS can raise awareness of the differences in test-takers receptive and productive abilities, and potentially motivate them to strengthen their weaker areas. According to Allen (2017), the levels of accuracy, complexity and fluency required for the spoken and written sections in IELTS to gain high scores, are extremely challenging for Japanese students. As a side note, the National Education Examinations Authority (NEEA) in China, alongside the British Council, is also investigating whether standardised tests of English language proficiency required for entry to the UK, such as IELTS, would have better washback on their Chinese central examination test (CET). Details can be found in the report: *China's standards of English language ability (CSE): Linking UK exams to the CSE* (Dunlea, Spiby, Wu, Zhang & Cheng, 2019).

Despite the potential for positive washback, Iwashita et al. (2021) revealed various reservations about the IELTS substitution of the centre test as follows. The researchers found that students and teachers believed the IELTS test to be more involved, assessing more than language proficiency. Acknowledging that this would require further development of their general communication language skills and especially in speaking and writing. In addition, the majority of students' attitudes and motivation levels varied with regard to how much they were willing to invest (i.e., time-wise and/or money-wise) towards achieving a certain IELTS score. In other words, it is often viewed as a proficiency test to only prepare for overseas travel and/or work. Therefore, there was a view among participants that it was not relevant to their study. Moreover, it was raised that the socioeconomic status of the student may

influence their EFL proficiency levels (i.e., additional time and particularly financial commitment required over and above the standard domestic education).

China

In contrast, since the 2000s the demand for studying abroad has skyrocketed in China. With the nation growing in prosperity, families were able to self-fund their children's study overseas (93 percent in the early 2010s) (Lin, 2019). The UK, Canada and Australia were considered more affordable to the urban emerging middle-class Chinese than the US. Furthermore, Canada and Australia were attractive as they began to establish skilled migration programs, in which IELTS played a central role (Lin, 2019). The number of students who took the IELTS dramatically increased from 20,000 (2000) to 350,000 (2010) (Lin, 2019 cites China Education Online, 2011). Lin (2019) attests that the China-based and burgeoning United IELTS cram school went national, and then on to gain 60 percent of the cram school market share. The rapid growth in demand for international higher education in China in turn has proliferated the number of foreign graduates who return to China. One way for them to differentiate themselves in the highly competitive labour market is to return with foreign work experience. In fact, it is now seen as a vital element of the overseas study "package" (Lin, 2019). Therefore, Australia should be more cognisant of the needs of this vital source market and the issues associated with the use of predictive validity and IELTS use for job opportunities as raised aforesaid.

Discussion

IELTS test scores do not convey meaning if in a contextual vacuum. As Iwashita et al.'s (2021) report pointed out, many Japanese students have a low awareness of IELTS. To counteract this, IELTS band scores may need to become more real to test takers. When there are consequences in real life, including access to a tertiary service, a pathway to a valued position, or in the support of social status, the value of the test becomes heightened (Deygers, Van den Branden & Van Grop, 2018). It seems that more attention by educational institutions could be paid to the IELTS test in Japan, especially on behalf of those students who seek global mobility. Thus, revisiting the proposal of including the IELTS test, previously proposed by MEXT as an alternative university entrance examination is considered by this research to be worthwhile, especially since the washback to EFL education is expected to be positive (Allen, 2017; Sasaki, 2018; Iwashita et al., 2021).

IELTS is certainly not the solution to all English language proficiency issues, notably with regard to its predictive validity. Its common usage as a qualification for skilled migration in Australia and its usage to prove international graduates' English language proficiency for the workplace has resulted in a backlash. Australian employers called out universities for their highly technically skilled graduates' poor English language proficiencies (AUQA, 2009). As the Deakin University report titled *Australian international graduates and the transition to employment* by Blackmore et al. (2014) notes, that even if an international student graduate is an Australian degree holder, and it is held in an area of a skill shortage, they still may not be "work ready" for the Australian labour market. They found that employers nominated the following barriers to employment for this cohort: visa status, communication skills, soft

skills, and local work experience.

The report by Blackmore et al. (2014) may therefore give rise to Obaidul et al.'s (2018) critical argument that more extensive research into the “linguistic management” apropos global mobility and transnational migration should be conducted. In particular, Obaidul et al. (2018) advocate for further research into IELTS due to their concerns that this test's effect is pervasively ubiquitous. That is, its market connection has wide-ranging applications for entry into Australia on a student, work or residency visa. Ultimately, they critique that an IELTS score may underestimate the true value of migrant contribution to Australia. This may be true, nonetheless, IELTS is enshrined in the international student migrant cohort of Australia.

Future Directions

Despite the enshrouding criticism, aforesaid, in Australia, IELTS is ingrained in the pathway from higher education to skilled employment opportunities (and onwards). Therefore, for EFL and ESL academics it may be prudent to be more cognisant of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the IELTS test in the following bifurcate directions. The first being in order to monitor its washback on improving general EFL or ESL education and the second for identifying the gaps in its predictive validity to enhance the globally mobile and migrant knowledge economy workforce. As a result of this dual-focus, students who are considering investing in IELTS can be more aware of its merits and demerits for using English in their future career and more significantly as a pathway to becoming an international student and/or a transnational.

For the first direction, in general, this research note has found that in terms of the washback effect on Japanese or Chinese EFL education, although curriculum which raises awareness of an IELTS score could be challenging to operationalise, it would be in a positive direction for secondary and tertiary educational institutions. However, in terms of the second direction, that is, the predictive validity for the workforce, there are areas that tertiary educational institutions may or may not need to focus on depending on whether they are research or service based. The reality is, for the context of Australia, many international graduates from the largest worldwide source markets of China and India are looking to capitalise on their international higher education investment made in Australia. Hence, they seek to continue along this pathway to gain employment in the Australian workforce based on their degrees. Therefore, the absolute hyperfocus on research and academia by Australian universities may be doing the promise of skilled migration that Australia advocates a disservice to Australia's much needed international alumni contributions. Poor international graduate worker readiness with one of the major issues being their English language proficiency is worthy of further investigation.

To address the latter direction, this research note specifically recommends that for future studies in this vein to review more in-depth the following two reports from the IELTS Research Report Series. Despite being commissioned to compile the report by IELTS, the English language testing centre professionals and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL), English, and applied linguistic university academics who worked on each respective report do not shy away from critiquing the test.

The first report is titled, *Transitioning from university to the workplace: Stakeholder perceptions of academic and professional writing demands* (Knoch, May, Macqueen, Pill & Storch, 2016). The second report is titled, *Literacy practices in the professional workplace: Implications for the IELTS reading and writing tests* (Moore, Morton, Hall & Wallis, 2015). Succinctly, in both reports, the respective authors investigate the extent to which the IELTS Writing (and/or Reading) tasks have predictive validity for the Australian workplace, and draw attention to the gap between IELTS and professional English language proficiency expectations. Moreover, both reports highlight the issue of the present hybrid approach to the IELTS test for both university entry and graduate employment in Australia, the latter of which also requisites migrant or permanent resident visa issuance.

The key takeaway for EFL and ESL educators is that the reports explicitly highlight the varied professional genres which the IELTS simply cannot account for, and particularly in terms of the functions and pragmatics involved. Their combined work has comprehensive examples, one of the more obvious however is for instance, the level of professionalism expected, as balanced with the appropriate level of technical expertise required in daily writing genres (i.e., emails juxtaposed with more formal report writing). These are not covered in the writing sections of the IELTS test. Moore et al. (2015) suggest that if feasibility is not an issue, it is best practice to create an IELTS test for professional use.

Therefore, the overarching purpose of reviewing these two reports in more detail would be for EFL or ESL educators at the tertiary level to glean from it the genres and professional English language skills that these researchers have already identified as necessary and which they note that IELTS does not account for in order to empower non-native graduate students in international workplace contexts. Combing through these reports could benefit their students, in terms of bolstering curriculum that causes positive washback to their high school or university EFL or ESL classes, whether they seek to be globally mobile or not. Particularly in terms of predictive validity, as it is highly likely that whether it is physical or virtual, the modern-day graduate with or without an international outlook will inevitably find themselves somehow, even if slightly, connected to the ever-globalising workplace.

Conclusion

The IELTS test plays an important role in the transnational ambitions of the globally mobile international student and subsequent migrant base interested in Australia. A report published by Nana Oishi (2017) titled *Report into experiences of Asian Australian academics in Australian universities* at Australia's top university, Melbourne University found that Asian teaching and research staff at Australian universities in 2015 represented 15.4 percent (from a cohort of 16.8 percent of PhD holders in Australia). In fact, the share of positions in Australian universities held by Asian-born academics increased by 5.4 percent between 2005 and 2015. This report shows that IELTS, despite its issues of predictive validity for the Australian workplace, can also have a positive washback on advancing productive English language proficiency in EFL or ESL educational institutions. That is if as a result of the IELTS test, EFL or ESL curriculum equips students with the skills to head down a pathway of being a globally mobile international student, Australia could be a platform country for opening them up to a

world of global opportunities. Aforesaid, IELTS can be used for enrolling into Australian universities, obtaining skilled migration visas, and/or gaining employment with domestic yet renowned world-wide universities or large global companies based in Australia or the Asian region.

Therefore, for those Japanese students who envision themselves to be part of a globally mobile cohort; that is, who possess an international posture or transnational goals, targeting a high IELTS score may be the first step on their pathway to a more global future.

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