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- c. showed it to John. d. got in its way to prevent it from escaping.
9. The snake had escaped because
- a. one of the monkeys was able to reach its cage from its own.
 - b. one of the monkeys had escaped and let it out.
 - c. the wood on its cage had warped.
 - d. someone had left its cage unlocked.
10. When the affair was over, John
- a. refused to speak to the narrator.
 - b. preferred not to mention it.
 - c. told the narrator what he thought in a few words.
 - d. blamed him for his carelessness.

careful with it.

3. According to the passage, the narrator,
- a. put the snake in a normal cage.
 - b. made a special cage for it himself.
 - c. asked someone to make a cage for it.
 - d. used one of the monkey cages for it.
4. The narrator was afraid that the snake would escape because
- a. it was so small that it could get through any opening.
 - b. the rain might produce a larger opening.
 - c. he was busy having a bath.
 - d. the monkeys might let it out.
5. When the snake appeared in the hut, John was
- a. feeding the birds.
 - b. making water containers.
 - c. eating fruit.
 - d. putting on his dressing gown.
6. The narrator thought
- a. that the best way to save his friend was not to excite him.
 - b. that if he told John the truth he would jump out of his chair.
 - c. that it was wiser not to tell John about the snake.
 - d. that it would be amusing to frighten his friend.
7. When the narrator spoke, John
- a. stayed where he was, quietly.
 - b. shouted in terror.
 - c. jumped out of his chair.
 - d. threw everything he could find at the snake.
8. When the snake came out from under the chair, the narrator
- a. cut its head off.
 - b. took hold of it behind the head.

was all but overturned. The Gaboon Viper, startled by all this activity, shot out from under the chair and wiggled determinedly towards the back of the monkey cages. I headed him off, and after a few minutes got him arrested in the folds of a butterfly-net, then I carried him and dropped him in his cage. I saw then the reason for his escape: the snakes had been stacked too close to the monkeys, and a female Drill had amused herself by putting her paws through the bars and undoing all the cages she could reach. The first one, as always happens, belonged to the Gaboon Viper. John said little, but it was brief and to the point. I agreed with him, for if the snake had bitten him, he would not have survived: there was no snake-bite serum in the Cameroons, to the best of my knowledge, and the nearest doctor was twenty-five miles away, and we had no transport.

Appendix C (Comprehension Questions)

CHOOSE THE BEST ANSWER A, B, C OR D AND MARK IT ON YOUR ANSWER SHEET.

1. The snake was particularly attractive to the narrator because
 - a. it was very expensive.
 - b. it had been very difficult to obtain.
 - c. its colours were seen at their best.
 - d. his friend was so fond of snakes.
2. The narrator's friend
 - a. was too frightened of the snake to look at it.
 - b. looked at the snake for a moment but did not like it.
 - c. thought it was very ugly and dangerous.
 - d. thought the snake was beautiful but begged the narrator to be

'It's deadly, isn't it, old boy?' he asked.

'Yes, very deadly.'

'Well, for goodness' sake keep it in this cage.'

'Don't worry, I'm having a special cage built for it.'

So the special cage was built, and the slow-moving and deadly snake placed inside. All would have been well if it had not been for the thunderstorm. This broke with unusual force just as I was having my bath and, remembering that the snake cages were piled out in the open, I shouted to the animal staff to bring them in. If the cages got damp the wood warped and naturally, snakes can move through small cracks. The cages were rushed inside and piled up near the monkeys. This proved my undoing.

John was seated near the table, in his pyjamas: he was busy cutting down some old fruit tins to make into water pots for the birds, and he was absorbed in his work. I was just putting the finishing touches to my toilet when I saw something move in the shadows beneath his chair. Putting on my dressing-gown I went closer to see what it was. There on the floor, about six inches away from John's feet, lay the Gaboon Viper. I had always believed, judging by what I had read and was told, that at moments like this one should speak quietly to the victim, thus avoiding panic and sudden movement. So, clearing my throat, I spoke calmly and gently:

'Keep quite still, old boy, the Gaboon Viper is under your chair.'

On looking back, I feel that I should have left out any reference to the snake in my request. As it was, my remark had an extraordinary effect on my companion. He left the chair with a speed and suddenness that was amazing. The tin can, the hammer, and the tin cutters, went flying in various parts of the hut, and the supper table

and suddenness that was startling, and suggestive of the better examples of levitation. The tin can, the hammer, and the tin cutters, went flying in various parts of the hut, and the supper table was all but overturned. The Gaboon Viper, startled by all this activity, shot out from under the chair and wiggled determinedly towards the back of the monkey cages. I headed him off, and after a few tense minutes got him entangled in the folds of a butterfly-net, then I carried him and dumped him in his cage. I saw then the reason for his escape: the reptiles had been stacked too close to the monkeys, and a female Drill had amused herself by putting her paws through the bars and undoing all the cages she could reach. The first one, as always happens, belonged to the Gaboon Viper. John said little, but it was terse and to the point. I agreed with him wholeheartedly, for should the snake have bitten him he would not have survived: there was no snake-bite serum in the Cameroons, to the best of my knowledge, and the nearest doctor was twenty-five miles away, and we had no transport.

Appendix B (The Simplified Text)

READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW .

A talkative hunter arrived carrying a small basket in which there was a fat and beautiful Gaboon Viper. The skin of these snakes is covered with the most complicated and colourful pattern, and having bought it, I carried it in for John to admire. The snake had recently shed his skin, so the colours glowed with his life, a lovely patchwork of pink, red, silver, and chocolate. John admired it, but asked me to keep it safely locked up.

patchwork of pink, red, fawn, silver, and chocolate. John admired it, but implored me to keep it safely locked up.

'It's deadly, isn't it, old boy?' he asked.

'Yes, very deadly.'

'Well, for goodness' sake keep it in its cage.'

'Don't worry, I'm having a special cage built for it.'

So the special cage was built, and the sluggish and deadly viper placed reverently inside. All would have been well if it had not been for the thunderstorm. This broke with unusual force just as I was having my bath and, remembering that the reptile cages were piled out in the open, I yelled to the animal staff to bring them in. If the cages got damp the wood warped and it is surprising how small a crack a snake can squeeze through if it wants to. The cages were rushed inside and piled up near the monkeys. This proved my undoing.

John was seated near the table, in his pyjamas: he was busy cutting down some old fruit tins to make into water pots for the birds, and he was absorbed in his work. I was just putting the finishing touches to my toilet when I saw something move in the shadows beneath his chair. Putting on my dressing-gown I went closer to see what it was. There on the floor, about six inches away from John's inadequately slippers, lay the Gaboon Viper. I had always believed, judging by what I had read and was told, that at moments like this one should speak quietly to the victim, thus avoiding panic and sudden movement. So, clearing my throat, I spoke calmly and gently:

'Keep quite still, old boy, the Gaboon Viper is under your chair.'

On looking back I feel that I should have left out any reference to the snake in my request. As it was, my remark had an extraordinary and arresting effect on my companion. He left the chair with a speed

longer entitles teachers to the sole prerogative to ask questions; rather it advises them to permit the learners to ask questions which serve to clarify and confirm the challenging input. This new approach to teach reading comprehension can be labelled as the *interactional* approach, which, of course, should be distinguished from *interactive* model of reading in which both top-down and bottom-up modes of information processing are involved (cf. Carrell *et al.*, 1988).

Finally, the findings of this study promote the widespread use of authentic reading materials in both EFL and ESL classes. Authentic reading texts have often been criticized on the grounds that they are difficult for learners and thus provide them with incomprehensible input, which is often discouraging. However, as it was shown in this study, it is quite possible to make authentic texts which are beyond the competence level of the learners comprehensible through interactional modifications. As Nuttall (1996) rightly argues authentic texts not only encourage the use of text attack skills, but also exhibit characteristics of true discourse, which are not found in simplified texts. Therefore, they should be widely used by employing appropriate instructional techniques.

Appendix A (The Original Text)

READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW.

A voluble hunter arrived carrying a small basket in which nestled a fat and beautiful Gaboon Viper. The skin of these plump, squat-looking snakes is covered with the most intricate and colourful pattern, and having purchased it, I carried it in for John to admire. The reptile had recently shed his skin, so the colours glowed with life, a lovely

do this task.

Results

The means for the two groups are presented in the following table. A comparison of the two means through a *t*-test revealed a significant difference between them: $t=-2.42$, $p < 0.05$. This suggests that the students who had received the input through interactional modifications had comprehended the reading text better than the students who had received it through linguistic modifications.

Group 1 (n=23)	M	SD
Linguistic modifications	10	3.07
Group 2 (n=22)		
Interactional modifications	12.27	3.22

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study are significant in three ways. First, they lend additional empirical support to Long's claim that interaction and negotiation of meaning facilitate the process of comprehension more effectively than linguistic simplification. It was mentioned earlier that the previous studies of this type were concerned with oral input, i.e. they examined this issue through listening comprehension tasks. This study, however, supported Long's Interaction Hypothesis from a new perspective.

Second, they suggest that if reading input is to become optimally comprehensible, there should be abundant interaction between the teacher and the learners, which in turn gives rise to negotiation of meaning. This new manner of making input more comprehensible no

negotiation (Pica, 1994). It is a type of “interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility” (p. 494).

In this study, the subjects in the first group (G_1) received the input in the first linguistic environment (linguistic modifications) and then did the assigned task, which was answering ten multiple-choice reading comprehension questions. They were given a total time of twenty minutes to read the text and answer the questions.

The subjects in the second group (G_2) received the input in the second linguistic environment, i.e. through interaction and negotiation of meaning. These subjects were presented to the original version of the text and answered the same reading comprehension questions; however, they were encouraged to ask any questions about the meaning of the unknown words, phrases, and structures. To make sure that these procedures would be carefully performed, I had a meeting with the teacher of this class, in which I explained to him the steps he was to follow. Then I attended his class as a non-participant observer to see how everything would go on. According to the given instructions, the teacher first handed the reading text out and asked the students to read it in ten minutes. At the end of this period, they were given another period of ten minutes to ask questions about the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases which they had difficulty with. This was the most important part of the experiment in which negotiation of meaning, in its true sense, was created as a result of a collaborative attempt between the teacher and the students. Finally, after this period of interaction, the comprehension questions were handed out and the students were given another ten-minute period to

Materials and Procedures

The reading comprehension extract used in this study was an extract taken from Fowler (1974). This reading passage, which was beyond the competence level of the subjects, was presented to them in two different kinds of linguistic environments. The first linguistic environment was characterized by input that had been simplified by employing more frequently used words, avoiding complex grammatical structures and omission of some vocabulary items which would not distort the message of the original text. The simplification, a copy of which appears in the Appendix, was done by the researcher. The following figure provides examples of this linguistically modified input.

Original:	A voluble hunter arrived carrying a small basket in which nestled a fat and beautiful Gaboon Viper.
Simplified:	A talkative hunter arrived carrying a small basket in which there was a fat and beautiful Gaboon Viper.
Original:	The skin of these plump, squat-looking snakes is covered with the most intricate and colorful pattern.
Simplified:	The skin of these snakes is covered with the most complicated and colorful patter.
Original:	So the special cage was built, and the sluggish and deadly viper
Simplified:	placed reverently inside. So the special cage was built, and the slow-moving and deadly snake placed inside.

The second linguistic environment was characterized by opportunities for interaction between the teacher and the learners in which the learners were allowed and encouraged to initiate interaction to seek clarification. This sort of interaction has come to be known as

reduction in linguistic complexity in the premodified input was not a significant factor in NNSs' comprehension" (Pica *et al.*, 1987 p. 737).

The study reported in this paper was carried out to further investigate what type of input is better comprehended by language learners.

THE STUDY

The present study resembles the studies mentioned above in that it aims to look into the characteristics of optimal input. It differs from them, however, in that it examines the nature of optimal input for reading comprehension rather than listening comprehension. This, in fact, is a departure from the previous studies. Thus this study addresses the following research question:

Does interactionally modified input facilitate reading comprehension more than linguistically modified input as it does in listening comprehension?

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects for this study included 45 male EFL Iranian students who were studying English at an intermediate level (level 6) of the Iran Language Institute (ILI). The subjects were all adults, most of whom university students, with an average age of 22. Two classes were randomly selected from the central branch of the ILI. The students in these two classes were quite similar in terms of age and educational background. There were 22 students in one class and 23 in the other.

Long's Interaction Hypothesis

Long's Interaction Hypothesis is an extension of the Input hypothesis. Long (1983, 1985) acknowledges that simplification and context *do* have a role in making input comprehensible; however, he adds that interactional modifications play a more significant role in comprehensibility of input, which in turn facilitates the process of language acquisition. In other words, Long's argument maintains that interactive input is a more crucial factor than non-interactive input in SLA. Some of the interactional modifications which are frequently mentioned in the literature are clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and self-repetitions (Ellis, 1990).

In recent years, a number of studies have been carried out in order to lend support to the claim that interaction containing negotiation of meaning serves to make input more comprehensible to the learner than simplification (Long, 1983; Varonis and Gass, 1985; Pica *et al.*, 1987; Gass and Varonis, 1994; Loschky, 1994). Pica *et al.*, for instance, working with 16 nonnative speakers (NNSs) of English found that interactional adjustments increased comprehension more than linguistic adjustments. The participants in their study were asked to listen to a native speaker (NS) give directions for choosing and placing 15 items on a small board illustrated with an outdoor scene in two different input conditions. One group listened to a linguistically modified version of the script, with decreased complexity and increased quantity and redundancy. The second group listened to the same script without linguistic premodification, but with opportunities for interaction with the native speaker. The findings of the study revealed that "comprehension was best assisted when the content of the directions was repeated and rephrased in interaction; however,

contextual information to make sense of the incoming input. These contextual clues are extra-linguistic information (pictures and realia), the learner's knowledge of the world and the learner's previously gained linguistic competence. Thus, for example, it is possible for a learner who does not know the passive structure to make sense of the sentence *John was robbed of his money by the criminal* simply because according to his or her world knowledge the act of robbery is committed by criminals. This sentence could, of course, become more comprehensible with the aid of pictures and employing the learner's previously acquired knowledge with respect to the meaning of the preposition *by*.

The second way in which input becomes more comprehensible is to simplify it. Hatch (1979) summarizes the characteristics of the simplified input as follows:

- a) slower rate and clearer articulation,
- b) more use of high frequency vocabulary and fewer idioms, and
- c) syntactic simplification aided by shorter sentences.

Now does this mean that teachers should consciously simplify their speech when they address their students? Should they be preoccupied with using simpler vocabulary and shorter sentences? The answer to these questions according to Krashen (1987) is "no" because "we make these adjustments automatically when we focus on trying to make ourselves understood" (p. 65).

In brief, Krashen's Input Hypothesis attaches too much importance to the role of comprehensible input in second language acquisition. In this respect, Long's position will be examined in the next section.

not contain $i+5$, i.e. structures belonging to stage 5 or beyond. According to Krashen (1987), optimal input for language acquisition has the following characteristics.

- a. It is comprehensible.
- b. It is interesting and / or relevant.
- c. It is grammatically sequenced.
- d. It must be in sufficient quantity.

Of the four characteristics mentioned above, it is the first one which is more relevant to the focal point of this paper, so it will be addressed below.

As Krashen (1987) puts it, comprehensibility is the most important input characteristic. "It amounts to the claim that when the acquirer does not understand the message, there will be no acquisition. In other words, incomprehensible input, or *noise* will not help" (p. 63). Krashen attributes the apparent failure of educational radio and TV programs in teaching foreign languages to the fact that the input these programs provide to the learners is nothing but noise.

My own children watched programs such as *Ville Allegre* faithfully for years, and acquired about as much as I did: They could count from one to ten in Spanish and recognize a few words such as *casa* and *mesa*! The comprehensibility requirement predicts that TV would, in general, be somewhat more successful than radio as a language teacher, but that even TV would be inadequate in beginning stages. (p. 63)

How can input become comprehensible to language learners? Krashen offers two solutions to this problem: first the use of context by the learner and second the provision of simplified input by the teacher.

According to Krashen, learners can benefit from three sources of

Selinker, 2001).

For instance, a Spanish learner of English, whose native language has the pro-drop parameter, must receive the necessary triggers to suggest to him or her that English is a non-pro-drop language. So the role of input in this case is to help the learner reset the L_1 setting to L_2 setting.

Regardless of different views which exist about the role of input, it should be acknowledged that input must be out there for second language acquisition to take place. Without any input, there would be no output. An ongoing debate, however, in this respect is concerned with what kind of input aids comprehension and hence is optimal for SLA. Stephen Krashen (1985, 1987, 1988), for instance, argues that optimal input is the input which has been made comprehensible through simplification and with the help of contextual factors. Building on this view and extending it, Michael Long (1983, 1985, 1996) admits that comprehensible input is a necessary condition for SLA; however, he states that interaction and negotiation of meaning play a more crucial role in comprehensibility of input than mere simplification. These two positions will be examined further below.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis

The Input Hypothesis is the central hypothesis of Krashen's Monitor Model. According to Krashen (1987), language acquisition occurs when an individual understands input that contains structures which are a bit beyond his or her current level of competence. In other words, if an individual is at stage or level i , the input that he or she should receive and understand should contain $i+1$. This suggests that if an individual is at stage 3, the input that he or she receives should

linguistic – modifications – SLA.

TWO MAIN VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF INPUT IN SLA

The two main accounts of the role of input in SLA are the *behaviorist* and the *nativist* views (Ellis, 1985, 1994). According to the behaviorist view, there is a direct relationship between input and output. Behaviorists rejected the role of human mind as an information processing unit, so they paid no attention to the internal processes that took place inside the learner. They argued that input served the primary purpose of providing the learner with specific linguistic forms and patterns, which he or she had to master. Thus, input was viewed as a source of providing appropriate stimuli for the learner, to which he or she had to give responses (Lado, 1964). The teacher was then expected to give feedback to the learner to reinforce the correct utterances and contribute to the formation of good habits (Brooks, 1960). All these practices were obviously inspired by the concept of operant conditioning (cf. Skinner, 1957).

The second major view on the role of input in SLA is essentially a nativist one, associated with the works of the American linguist Noam Chomsky (1965, 1968, 1986), who argued that every child is born with a built-in language faculty consisting of principles and parameters. The principles are aspects of language which are present in all human minds. The parameters, on the other hand, are aspects that vary across different languages. The proponents of this Principles and Parameters Theory, who are interested in SLA, argue that the role of L₂ input is to help the learner reset the L₂ parameters which are different from his or her L₁. In other words, the L₂ input has a *triggering* role (White, 1989; Cook and Newson, 1996; Gass and

The Impact of Interaction on Reading Comprehension

Sasan Baleghizadeh*

The study reported in this paper aims to compare the comprehension of two groups of adult EFL Iranian students on a reading passage under two input conditions: *linguistically modified input*, characterized by both lexical and syntactic simplification, and *interactionally modified input* with no linguistic modifications but with opportunities for interaction with the teachers. The results of the study revealed that the students who were allowed to seek clarification by asking questions had comprehended the text better than the students who had read the simplified version of the text. The conclusions drawn from the findings of this study are threefold: they lend empirical support to Long's Interaction Hypothesis, recommend interactional approach to teaching reading, and promote the use of authentic reading materials.

It is a widely accepted fact that in order to learn a language, one must receive the necessary data. In acquiring their first language, children receive a large quantity of L₁ data from their parents and the surrounding environment. In learning a second language, the majority of the learners receive the L₂ data from language classes. This data is provided to them through two main sources of input, i.e. the teacher and the textbook. This paper is intended to review the related literature on input in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and find out what kind of input is best comprehended by language learners.

Key Words: interaction – Comprehension reading – lexical –

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Pedagogical Implications

IELTS preparation courses are being offered in almost every corner of the major cities in Iran indicating that English language testing is undergoing a drastic shift from the so-called recognition tests such as TOEFL to state-of-the-art task-based tests such as IELTS. Contrary to what is usually found in ELT textbooks regarding the difficulty of gaining mastery in productive skills, this study has proved that Iranian IELTS candidates face more difficulty in tackling receptive skills, particularly listening. The reason may be less due to their weakness in comprehension, but more to their shortage of practice in performing tasks based on the data they receive. Ellis (2003) argues that input-processing instruction involving interpretation tasks is more effective than production-based instruction. Hence IELTS preparation programs should emphasize the receptive skills more than before and provide the students with ample opportunities to perform all sorts of real life tasks interpreting the information they are exposed to through reading and/or listening. Details of the weak and strong points of the existing IELTS preparation programs can be investigated through a series of studies which similar to the Impact Study done by Hawkey and Saville (2004) should focus on positive and negative washback of IELTS in Iran.

Table 13 – Correlation coefficients between the overall score of the candidates and each of the four modules

	All candidates N=500	Academic candidates N=362	General T candidates N=138
Overall vs Listening	.8869	.8848	.8927
Overall vs Reading	.7990	.7942	.8192
Overall vs Writing	.8282	.8249	.8490
Overall vs Speaking	.8406	.8573	.8095

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. There is no significant difference in the performance of the candidates in the four modules of listening, reading, writing and speaking. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the Iranian IELTS candidates performed best in the speaking module. The other three in order are writing, reading, and listening.
2. Academic candidates and General Training candidates belong to the same population, and thus contrary to what is thought to be the case, Academic candidates do NOT possess a higher command of English compared to General Training candidates.
3. Yielding the highest correlation coefficient, listening seems to be the best predictor of the candidates' general proficiency.

performance of the academic and general training candidates indicating that they belong to the same population.

Hypothesis 3: Correlations

A series of correlations were conducted to trace any similar patterns of variation in the four modules of listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Table 12 shows the coefficients:

Table 12 – Correlation coefficients between different modules

	All candidates N=500	Academic candidates N=362	General T candidates N=138
Listening vs Reading	.6884	.6576	.7650
Listening vs Writing	.6416	.6369	.6689
Listening vs Speaking	.6988	.7230	.6531
Reading vs Writing	.5636	.5624	.6110
Reading vs Speaking	.5486	.5928	.4856
Writing vs Speaking	.6449	.6439	.6575

To investigate which of the four modules is the best predictor of the overall proficiency of the candidates, four related correlation coefficients were calculated which are summarized in Table 13.

candidates, ie academic and general training. Table 11, in two sections, reflects the results:

Table 11 - t-test for the equality of means of Academic and General Training candidates

	Kind	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
overall	1 (acad)	362	5.877	.9829	.0517
	2 (gene)	138	5.786	1.0143	.0863

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed		.002	.966	.916	498	.360	.0908	.0992	-.1041	.2858
	Equal variances not assumed			.903	240.933	.368	.0908	.1006	-.1074	.2890

Since one of the assumptions for a valid t-test is the homogeneity of variance, the Levene test for homogeneity of variance is included. As the F value is not significant (since the obtained p, ie .966 is greater than 0.05), the variances can be assumed to be homogeneous and the Equal Variances line of values for the t-test is used. Since t-value=0.92 and the 2-tailed Sig=0.360 > 0.05, thus the second hypothesis cannot be rejected. In other words, there is no significant difference between the average

Table 9– ANOVA with repeated measures for General Training candidates

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	89.802	3	29.934	10.788	.000
Within Groups	1520.567	548	2.775		
Total	1610.369	551			

Table 10– Scheffe test for General Training candidates

(I) skill	(J) skill	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	.1268	.2005	.940	-.436	.689
	3	-.4710	.2005	.139	-1.033	.091
	4	-.8913(*)	.2005	.000	-1.454	-.329
2	1	-.1268	.2005	.940	-.689	.436
	3	-.5978(*)	.2005	.032	-1.160	-.035
	4	-1.0181(*)	.2005	.000	-1.580	-.456
3	1	.4710	.2005	.139	-.091	1.033
	2	.5978(*)	.2005	.032	.035	1.160
	4	-.4203	.2005	.223	-.983	.142
4	1	.8913(*)	.2005	.000	.329	1.454
	2	1.0181(*)	.2005	.000	.456	1.580
	3	.4203	.2005	.223	-.142	.983

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Hypothesis 2: Comparing Means through t-test

A two-tailed t-test was conducted to simply investigate any significant differences between the general performance of the two types of

Table 8 – Scheffe test for Academic candidates

(I) skill	(J) skill	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-.36050(*)	.08430	.000	-.5964	-.1246
	3	-.44613(*)	.08430	.000	-.6821	-.2102
	4	-.87431(*)	.08430	.000	-1.1103	-.6384
2	1	.36050(*)	.08430	.000	.1246	.5964
	3	-.08564	.08430	.794	-.3216	.1503
	4	-.51381(*)	.08430	.000	-.7498	-.2779
3	1	.44613(*)	.08430	.000	.2102	.6821
	2	.08564	.08430	.794	-.1503	.3216
	4	-.42818(*)	.08430	.000	-.6641	-.1922
4	1	.87431(*)	.08430	.000	.6384	1.1103
	2	.51381(*)	.08430	.000	.2779	.7498
	3	.42818(*)	.08430	.000	.1922	.6641

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

As it can be seen, among all mean differences, only the mean difference between reading and writing is not significant in academic candidates.

In General Training candidates, the post hoc test shows that mean differences between speaking and the other three modules are significant.

Tables 9 and 10 present the results.

Table 6 – ANOVA with repeated measures for all candidates as a whole

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	181.828	4	45.457	18.136	.000
Within Groups	5000.294	1995	2.506		
Total	5182.122	1999			

The obtained F-value of 18.136 and the significant level of .000 ($< .05$) indicate that there is a significant difference between the means of the candidates in the four modules, meaning that they have different levels of ability in the four skills.

For a more thorough analysis, two oneway ANOVAs with their related post hoc tests were conducted on the two types of candidates, ie Academic and General Training. Table 7 and 8 contain the results for Academic candidates.

Table 7 – ANOVA with repeated measures for Academic candidates

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	140.101	3	46.700	36.305	.000
Within Groups	1857.468	1444	1.286		
Total	1997.569	1447			

candidates as a whole and the two groups of candidates:

Table 3 – The statistics of all candidates as a whole

Module	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max	N
Listening	5.35	1.17	1.0	9.0	500
Reading	5.64	1.03	1.0	8.5	500
Writing	5.87	1.16	2.0	9.0	500
Speaking	6.29	1.21	.0	9.0	500

Table 4 - The statistics of Academic candidates

Module	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max	N
Listening	5.40	1.18	1.0	9.0	362
Reading	5.76	.99	1.0	8.5	362
Writing	5.84	1.18	2.0	8.0	362
Speaking	6.27	1.18	.0	8.0	362

Table 5 - The statistics of General Training candidates

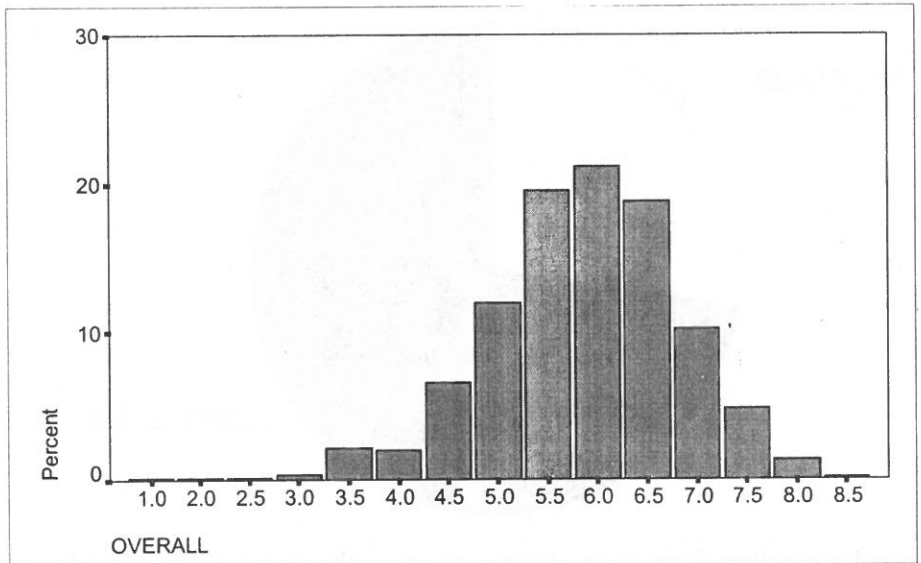
Module	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max	N
Listening	5.24	1.16	2.0	9.0	138
Reading	5.33	1.06	3.0	8.5	138
Writing	5.93	1.10	3.0	9.0	138
Speaking	6.35	1.28	.0	9.0	138

Hypothesis 1: Comparing Means through ANOVA

In order to find out whether Iranian IELTS candidates do or do not show a better performance in any of the skills (modules), an ANOVA with repeated measures was conducted. Table 6 presents the results of the oneway ANOVA for all candidates as a whole.

Table 2 - The frequency of obtained band scores

Band score	Frequency	Percentage	Cum frequency
1.0	1	.2	.2
2.0	1	.2	.4
2.5	1	.2	.6
3.0	2	.4	1.0
3.5	11	2.2	3.2
4.0	10	2.0	5.2
4.5	33	6.6	11.8
5.0	60	12.0	23.8
5.5	98	19.6	43.4
6.0	106	21.2	64.6
6.5	94	18.8	83.4
7.0	51	10.2	93.6
7.5	24	4.8	98.4
8.0	7	1.4	99.8
8.5	1	.2	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0

Chart 2 - The percentage of the obtained band scores

Tables 3 to 5 demonstrate the descriptive statistics obtained from the

Summary of the Data

Table 1 illustrates a summary of the obtained data from two kinds of candidates:

Table 1- The frequency and the percentage of candidates

Kind of candidate	Frequency	Percent	Cum frequency
Academic	362	72.4	72.4
General Training	138	27.6	100.0
total	500	100.0	100.0

Pie-chart 1 better illustrates the data given in Table 1.

Pie-chart 1- The percentage of two types of candidates

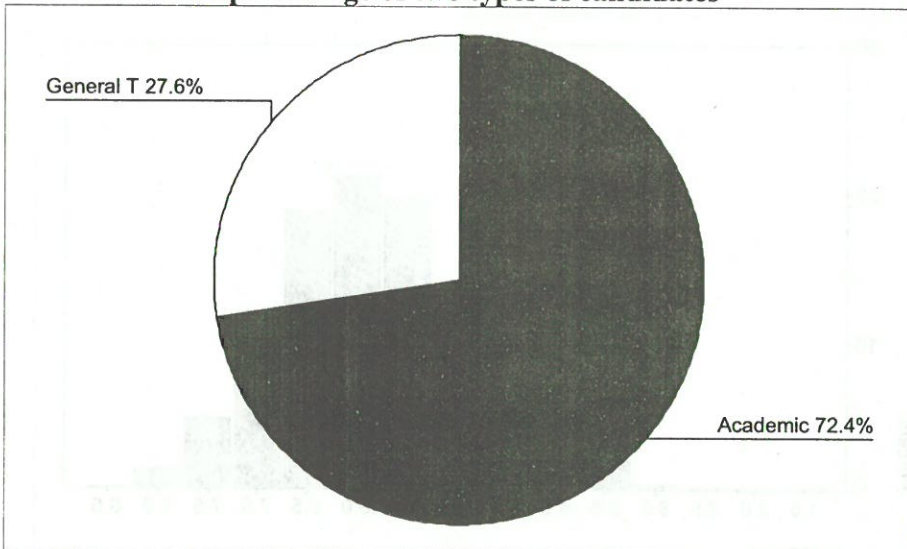


Table 2 and Chart 2 show the frequency of each band score obtained by the candidates:

by 500 Iranian IELTS candidates who have sat for the exam in 2004. The candidates were both male and female and all above the age of 16. From among the 500 candidates, 362 were Academic and 138 were General Training.

Design: The present study, being descriptive in nature, pursued three objectives:

1. Based on an *ex post facto* approach, it aimed at locating possible significant differences in the performance of IELTS candidates in the four different modules. With this objective, the dependent variable was the candidates' communicative performance reflected in the scores obtained in each of the four modules. The independent variable, then, was the skill or module via which the candidates are expected to show their communicative competence. As a result, it entailed a one-factor repeated measures ANOVA.
2. Furthermore, it sought the differences in the overall performance of Academic and General Training candidates. A simple two-tailed independent t-test was employed to trace any significant differences.
3. With a correlational design, it also attempted to determine the highest predictive power in the four language modules.

Data Analysis: To verify the hypotheses of this study, a series of analyses

Were conducted, which can be presented as follows:

language skills (test modules)? If this difference generally exists, is it also observable in the performance of Academic and General Training candidates separately?

2. Can Academic candidates be considered to have a higher knowledge of English language?
3. Which skill can best be used as the predictor of general proficiency of Iranian IELTS candidates?

Research Hypotheses

The aforementioned questions could best be reformulated in the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference among the average scores of Iranian IELTS candidates in the four modules of listening, reading, writing and speaking.
2. There is no significant difference between the average IELTS overall scores of Iranian Academic and General Training candidates.
3. There is no significant correlation between the Iranian candidates' scores in each of the four modules and their overall IELTS score.

Method

Participants: The data used in this study are the actual scores obtained

new developments in testing theory, has resulted in this up-to-date, constantly revised and flexible testing system.

As a task-based test of academic and vocational English, IELTS has been capable of establishing itself all around the world. In 2003, more than 300,000 candidates took the IELTS exam and indications are that the recent strong growth is being maintained in 2004. In the last 5 years, a great number of young Iranians in the pursuit of higher education, better job opportunities and generally a higher standard of living have traveled to other countries, mainly English-speaking countries like Canada, England, and Australia, and thus have been required to sit for the IELTS exam for the assessment of their communicative abilities in English. As a result, the main concern of English language teaching specialists in Iran has shifted towards IELTS preparation programs.

Probably one of the first of its kind in Iran, the present research aims at giving a rough picture of Iranian IELTS candidates' performance in both Academic and General Training formats of the test. It can particularly determine what language skill(s) require(s) more attention and instruction and thus can be quite insightful to those involved in the running of IELTS preparation programs in Iran.

Research Questions

The present study addresses the following questions:

1. Do Iranian IELTS candidates perform differently in the four

Task-based exams: These kinds of exams are capable of combining authenticity and interactiveness in tasks that have characteristics similar to those in TLU, ie the target language use. (Bachman and Palmer, 1996)

IELTS: The International English Language Testing System is an established task-based test of academic and vocational English, covering all four language skills - at nine levels from Non User to Expert User. (IELTS Annual Review 2003/2004)

Academic and General Training Formats: IELTS is available in two formats: Academic and General Training. All candidates take the same Listening and Speaking Modules; however, there is a choice between Academic and General Training in the Reading and Writing Modules. The Academic Reading and Writing Modules assess whether a candidate is ready to study or train in the medium of English at an undergraduate or postgraduate level. The General Training Reading and Writing Modules focus on basic survival skills in a broad social and educational context.

Introduction

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) was formally released for use in November 1989, superseding the earlier English Language Testing Service (ELTS). The ELTS test was originally designed as a test for prospective postgraduate students but a growing demand from other student groups and receiving institutions as well as

The Performance of Iranian IELTS Candidates: A Descriptive Study

Arshya Keyvanfar*

Abstract

General proficiency assessment remains to be a very demanding issue in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Despite the existence of a wide variety of accredited general English language tests, the majority of educational and vocational institutions still prefer to screen their applicants through the two widely known exams of TOEFL and particularly IELTS (the International English Language Testing System) which is capable of evaluating the candidates' ability to perform different tasks via the four language skills. The present study aims at investigating the performance of a group of 500 Iranian Academic and General Training candidates who have sat for IELTS in Iran. The statistical analyses indicate that most unexpectedly Iranian EFL learners have their best performance in speaking and are particularly weak at listening, which happens to be the best predictor of their general language proficiency. Furthermore, it can be claimed that Academic applicants do not significantly perform better than General Training applicants.

Key Words: TOEFL – IELTS – Language skills – proficiency assessment .

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