



## **Outlining International English language proficiency tests: A survey-based study on its need, purpose and scope in the backdrop of Migration**

**Dr.Shiny K G<sup>1</sup>**

**Dr.J Karthikeyan<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Assistant professor, Presidency University, Bangalore- 560064

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Sri Venkateswara college of Engineering & Technology, Chittoor- 517127



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Shiny K G<sup>1</sup>, J Karthikeyan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant professor, Presidency University, Bangalore- 560064

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Sri Venkateswara college of Engineering & Technology, Chittoor- 517127

### **ABSTRACT**

English as an international language and its proficiency is a gateway for Career, Education and Migration. In order to ensure the same, there are many international English language tests are conducted by different organizations worldwide. Their results and score are considered as a mandatory eligibility criterion for job, education and migration by different organizations and institutions. All these tests are primarily testing the ability of a candidate in the four skills of English Language. This article refers various international English language proficiency tests, its features, question and scoring pattern. The commonly used tests are IELTS, TOEFL, Duolingo English Test, OET, CPE (C2 Proficiency), CAE (C1 Advanced), PTE (Pearson Test of English Academic), TOEIC, iTEP, CELPIP, CAEL, MTELP. It also describes how these tests are differ each other in purpose and patten. The researcher conducted a short survey among UG freshers to analyze their awareness and confidence in English language proficiency tests. The results show that many of the UG learners wish to migrate to foreign countries for higher studies but they don't have enough awareness regarding the proficiency tests. One of the predominant problems for many non-native speakers of English to secure a good job and failed to be recognized and rewarded in accordance with their skill, is the inefficiency to use English language. Therefore, coaching centers for these tests and its rigorous preparation is a lucrative business in non-European countries especially in a scenario where migration is encouraged. Often, the lack of awareness about these tests and its purpose will mislead the test takers. It is also important to choose the right test as per the field and purpose as the scores of the test.

**Keywords :** English Language Proficiency tests, IELTS, TOEFL, OET

### **INTRODUCTION**

The globalization of education, better opportunities in career, and unemployment even after graduation enflame the migration from various developing countries to English speaking countries. The data of Project atlas (Project Atlas, 2020) is showing that, more than 5.6 million students are migrated to various English and non-English speaking countries for higher education. 1.6 million migrations were recorded in 2000. It boosted to 5.6 in 2020 and predicted up to 8 million by 2025. 28% of these migrations were happened to US. 31.3% of Australian students are international students in their education institutions. US, UK, Canada and Germany are the top host countries in this list. The data of International Labour Association (ILO report, 2019) states that from 2017 to 2019, migration for employment has been raised to 169 million with a hike of 3%. The major regions of this migrated workforce are distributed at Europe and Central Asia, (37.7 percent) and Americas (25.6 percent). In a closer look, the highest migration is marked in North, South and west Europe (24.2%) and Northern America (22.1%). It restates the supremacy of English language as the lingua-franca of academics, technology and employment. In this current scenario, English is more known for its functional usage. The proficiency in English speaking is a mandatory eligibility criterion either in working place or academic realm. One of the factors that decides the flexible movement of any work force is the proficiency in English language. Therefore, English language proficiency is inseparable from work places.

### **THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

English proficiency ensures academic literacy in academic setting. Academic literacy is the ability of a candidate to pursue studies, research and communicate those findings either in written or spoken form with clarity and objectivity in accordance with the norms of those discipline and institution. (University of Western Australia, 2005). The base of this academic literacy is English language proficiency. Canale and Swain (1980) identifies this proficiency in the form of four competencies. They are “grammatical competence” that ensures the knowledge and competency in the format of language, “socio linguistic competence” which is the ability to use language with apt vocabulary and meaning in different social environment, “discourse competence” that

explains a person's ability to understand meaning as a whole from utterances and texts and finally, "strategic competence" that explains one's ability for self-correction and adapt themselves to the correct usages of language both by form and meaning. The lack of proficiency to communicate in English affects the academic achievement of learners (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999, Daller & Phelan, 2013). In workplace, irrespective of skills, it affects the promotion and growth of the employees. The study of Murray, N. (2010) stated that students and employees who lack English competency may suffer anxiety, isolation, demotivation, and also failed to perform in work place especially when they are in a new environment. This leads to marginalization and underestimate their skills in other areas and ended up with a stigma of failure. This is the primary reason of setting English proficiency as a mandatory criterion for migration. The study of Light et al. (1987) proved the positive correlation between TOEFEL scores and GPA among the graduation learners of state University of New York at Albany. Wongtrirat (2010), in his study considered these international English proficiency scores as a predictor for their course GPA. The study of Martirosyan, N. M. et al (2015) proved that the international students who have good score in proficiency tests and from multi lingual background are scoring high GPA in comparison with others. Another important factor that we need to consider while talking about proficiency tests is the factors that affects and shapes a person's English proficiency. It is shaped by their living environment, social groups, peer groups, education system, teachers, parents and L1. These differences compel for a uniform scheme to test English proficiency and international English proficiency tests by various institutions serves the same in a praiseworthy manner. The objective of this study is to analyse the awareness of UG learners and give an awareness about various international English proficiency tests.

## Various English Proficiency Tests

### 1. IELTS

The "International English Language Testing System" (IELTS) is a predominant test to work, study or migrate to an English native country like Canada, US, Australia or UK. On an average, there are 60,000 people appeared for this exam in a week all over the world (IELTS, n.d). The primary purpose of this test is to assess the proficiency of the migrant in English in a uniform and systematic manner. It tests their ability and excellency in listening, speaking, reading and writing English language. It tests the practical communication ability in academic and non-academic scenarios. Therefore, it divided into two - test for academic purpose and general purpose. Even though, the listening and speaking tests are same, reading and writing tests are different for academic and general tests. General test aims the migrants who are seeking a course below degree level as well as for employment. The duration of these tests are 2 hours and 45 minutes. Except speaking, all other skills test either by the mode of paper or computer. Speaking would be conducted either offline or online mode in a face-to-face interview by a trained IELTS trainer. The score of this test falls in a band of 1-9. 9 is termed as "excellent user" who has an exceptional command over language with fluency and an ability to use apt vocabulary with a complete understanding. Band 8 is termed as "very good user". What makes this user a grade below to 9 is occasional inaccuracies and inappropriate use of vocabulary along with confusion in unfamiliar situations. Yet, they are very good in complex operations of language. The score 7 is addressing a "good user". Here the chance for committing mistake, use of inappropriate vocabulary and improper understanding in unfamiliar situations are more than a "very good user". The score 6 is attributed to a competent user. This user can understand language in complex situations but it also associated with inaccuracies and inappropriate vocabularies while using the same. They may stumble and unable to process information in unfamiliar situations. Grade 5 addresses a "modest user". Instead of an efficient command over language, these candidates possess a partial command. They may understand the overall meaning and handle basic communication but chances for committing the mistakes are comparatively high. Grade 4 is given to "limited user". These candidates can use language in familiar situations in a limited manner but the possibility for mistakes is too frequent. When a test taker can process only general meaning in a very familiar situation and marked with breakdowns in communication, they fall under grade 3 "extremely limited user". Grade 2 is attributed to an "Intermittent user" where they have great difficulty to understand written and spoken language. Grade 1 mentions a "non-user" where they have no ability to use the language but can use and understand few words. Zero denotes a non-test taker. The requirement of grades will be different as per the purpose, company and country. It may vary from 5 to 9. The results of the test will be published either in 5 days for online mode or in 13 days for offline mode. As per the database of IELTS test, there are 30 million tests were taken so far.

### 2. TOEFL

"Test Of English as a Foreign Language" is conducted by Educational Testing Service to test the ability of LSRW skills in English as the way these skills are used in a classroom. As per the data of ETS, 35 million test takers have gone through this exam (The TOEFL Tests, n.d.) since it is launched. It can be either internet based or paper based. Total points for the test are 120 and 30 points for each section. The reading section would have

36 to 56 questions and 34 to 51 for listening. The TOEFL scores are valid for 2 years. 0-31 in TOEFL score would be equal to 1-4 band in IELTS. Similarly, 118-120 would be similar to band 9. The score 35 to 110 falls from band 5 to 8. Speaking and writing will have 6 and 2 tasks respectively. The reading questions will test the ability of the user to understand academic reading materials which includes Factual information, inference questions, rhetorical questions, vocabulary questions and sentence simplification. Listening will test the ability to perceive the spoken English in a classroom context via lectures and conversations. Speaking tasks test the ability to speak in an academic setting through an opinion based and interaction activity and writing test checks the user's ability to write coursework. Usually, they are assigning an essay type question and asked to write the response after listening to an audio lecture. The results will publish in 6 days. Main purpose of this exam is to get eligibility to study or visa eligibility to work in an English-speaking country.

### **3. Duolingo English Test**

Duolingo is basically a language learning platform via games and fun. Their test assesses the English proficiency of international students as a part of their admission process. Their language certification is accepted by many institutions worldwide. Compare to other tests, its affordable and convenient. The duration of the test is 1 hour and the result will be published in 48 hours. The test results will be valid for 2 years. The score scale ranges from 10 to 160 (Duolingo English Test, n.d.). The overall scores are the description on your ability in general to use the language and sub scores specifically measure the proficiency in specific areas. The sub scores of Literacy section assess the ability to read and write, comprehension assess the ability to listen and read, the conversation checks with the ability to speak and listen and production section tests the ability to write and speak. The TOFEL score 120 is equivalent to 160 in duo lingo. The Duolingo score 150 is equal to 117 -118 and 10-60 is equivalent with 0-23 in TOEFL.

### **4. OET**

The purpose of "Occupational English Test" is to test the English proficiency of healthcare professionals. The high scores of OET exam shows that candidates have English language proficiency in clinical communication setting and they can provide good care and ensure safety for the patients. Its primary focus is to test the language proficiency in health care working places thus ensure mobility and development in health care field (About OET, n.d.). Primarily, it tests the four skills of English language in 170 minutes. The listening test has 3 types of listening subsets where they provided different conversation extracts from working places like consultation, presentation etc. Generally, these questions belong to note completion and multiple-choice questions. The reading test has 3 subsets that tests the ability to locate specific information, detail, gist, main points, skim and scan. The writing test assess candidate's ability to convey the message with clarity, precision and organization. Most probable question would be a referral letter in a clinical setting. The speaking test analyses the candidate's ability to understand and communicate in a clinical setting, build a rapport with the patients, provide and gather information etc. The intelligibility, apt use of vocabulary, fluency and language structure competency are some criteria to assess the same. The total score is 500. Along with the numerical marks there are grades ranging from A to E. E grade is the lowest, its score ranges from 0-90. The scores between 100 to 190 referred under D grade. This is equal to IELTS score 5.5. The scores 200 to 290 come under C grade and 300 to 340 is C+ which is equal to 5.5 to 6.5 in IELTS score. The scores between 350 to 450 termed as B grade that is equal to 7 to 7.5 in IELTS. The highest score falls between 450 to 500 which comes under A grade. It is equal to 8 to 9 in IELTS score.

### **5. CPE (C2 Proficiency)**

The result of "Cambridge English: proficiency" or "C2 proficiency" proves that a candidate is highly competent in speaking English. It confirms one's mastery in English language in an exceptional level. The purpose of this exam is gaining permission to live, work or study in any English-speaking country. Since 1913, C2 proficiency test assesses candidates over 130 countries. As per the data (Cambridge Assessment English, n.d.), 7 million assessments happen every year. C2 proficiency proves a candidate's capability to learn a demanding subject and this test result is accepted around 25000 institutions worldwide. It is advisable for those who are pursuing highest level courses like post-graduation or Ph.D or research projects. It certifies a candidate's English proficiency to negotiate, persuade or convince in high managerial setting or international business context. It tests a person's ability to perceive complex meaning levels from written communication. It analyses candidates speaking skill to talk about sensitive and complex issues as well as answer difficult questions confidently and appropriately in different scenarios. The total test time is 3 hour and 56 minutes. The assessment is based on the C2 proficiency level in Common European Framework. The results are published in grade A or B or C or C1. Grade A, B & C is equal to C2 level in CEFR ranging from 200 – 220 points. The score 199 to 180 is equivalent to the C1 grade in CEFR. The result will be published in 6 – 9 weeks after the exam. This is equal to IELTS exam score 8-9.

### **6. CAE (C1 Advanced)**

The base of "Certificate in Cambridge English Advanced assessment" is CEFR and it is a level between B2 and C2. The purpose of this test is checking the eligibility to a person to work or study in an English-speaking country. The CAE certificate holder can speak confidently in seminars and conferences and able to understand

complex articles. They are also competent to write essays and assignments in any given topic and to express themselves with high level of fluency. The reading section will have 56 question and the given time is 1 hour 30 minutes (Cambridge Assessment English, n.d.). The duration of Writing section is also same and it tests a candidate's ability to write different types of texts in two parts. The 40 minutes listening test will have 30 questions from various presentations, conversations, interviews and broadcasts etc. Speaking will be a test of 15 minutes face to face interaction. The scores in between 180 to 199 in Cambridge English score scale constitute the level C1 in CEFR. Unlike many other tests, C1 Advanced certificate has no expiry date. Its valid forever.

#### **7. PTE (Pearson Test of English Academic)**

PTE academic tests the 4 skills of English at a stretch of 2 hours. Its results are for migration and study in English speaking country. PTE assured a candidate's skill in English to pursue the courses in their institution. The scale score ranges from 10 – 90 (PTE Academic Test | Pearson PTE, n.d.). A score of 23 in PTE is equal to 4.5 in IELTS. The highest score 89 is equal to 8.5 in IELTS. Australia, New Zealand and UK are the countries that primarily consider PTE.

#### **8. TOEIC**

The “Test of English for International Communication” (TOEIC) tests English for work place and everyday communication. The weightage is given to Business English. It is more popular in Japan and Korea. It is conducted by a US based agency called ETS (The TOEIC® Exam, n.d.). Unlike other tests, this test started with listening and reading test alone. Later, they added speaking and writing tests too. Therefore, it is conducting in 2 sections. The duration of listening and reading is 2 hours and 1 hour 20 minutes for speaking and writing. The maximum score of listening and reading is 495. The score 275 is equal to B1 in CEFR. The score 490 is equal to C1 grade. When it comes to speaking and writing the total score is 200. The score 120 is equal to B1, 160 is B2 and 180 to C1 in CEFR.

#### **9. ITEP**

The “International Test of English Proficiency” or iTEP assesses the proficiency of a non-native speaker's English proficiency. Its more renowned in Saudi and Mexico. iTEP Academic exam is conducting as a part of college admission process. This 90-minute internet-based exam tests grammar along with 4 skills. The overall score is 6 (English Language Proficiency Test Online | iTEP International, 2022). The iTEP score 1-2 is equivalent to IELTS score 2 and 3. Likewise 3 to 5, 4 to 7 and 5-6 is equivalent to 8-9. The results are valid for 2 years.

#### **10. CELPIP**

The “Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program” (CELPIP) tests one's ability to function English language. The primary purpose of this test is to ensure the skills in English for immigration and professional designation in Canada (Paragon Testing Enterprises, 2021). It tests one's ability to communicate in everyday transaction, communications in workplace and with friends, understanding news and respond to written communication etc. The highest score of this 3-hour test is level 12. The results will be published within 4 to 5 days and it is valid for 2 years.

#### **11. CAEL**

The “Canadian Academic English Language” (CAEL) Test assess the proficiency of English language among the non-native students who wants to pursue their academics in Canadian universities. The success in this test ensures a candidate's skill to understand and perform in academic activities. The questions of this test are in the format of first year graduation program. It assesses the skills in speaking, writing, listening and reading in 3.5 hours. Its results will be published in 8 business days (Overview - Online, 2022). The score is reported on a scale ranging from 10 to 90. The score 10-20 denotes a “Low Beginner”, 30 for a “High Beginner”, 40 for an “Intermediate”, 50 for “High Intermediate”, 60 for “Advanced”, 70 for “Adept” and the score 80 – 90 denotes an “Expert”. These results are valid for 2 years.

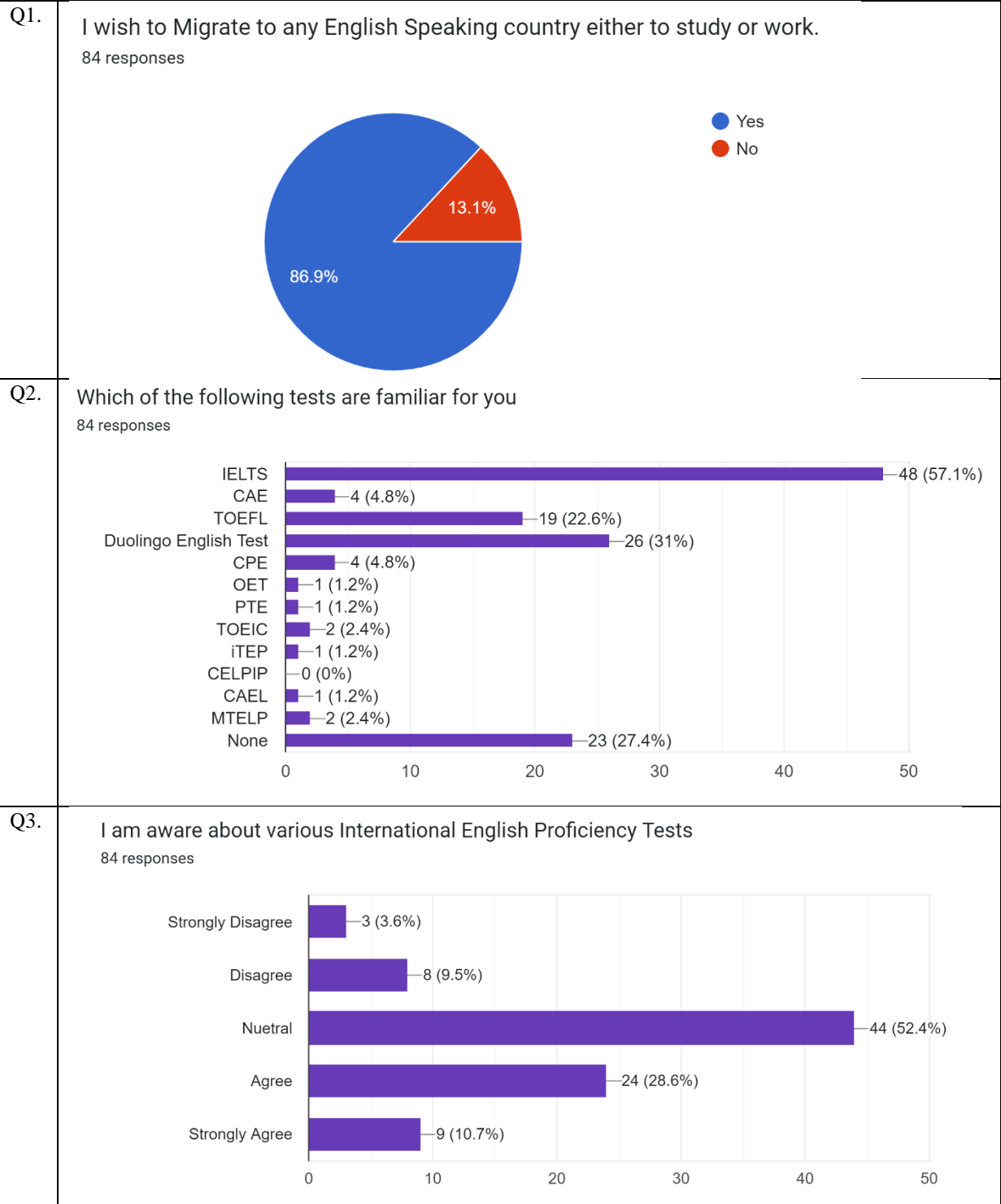
#### **12. MTELP**

“Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency” (MTELP) is for the non-native speakers of English who want to pursue their education in English speaking countries especially in south America (Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP), 2021). It's a paper-based test that assess the proficiency in English Writing, Grammar, Vocabulary, Reading, Listening and Speaking in 6 hours. The results will be published in 6 weeks and the scores ranges from 23 to 100. A score of 76 is necessary for UG programs and 81 for hospitality admissions.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The awareness of young graduates is a deciding factor in the process of migration. The researcher conducted a short survey regarding their awareness in various English proficiency tests. The survey contains a few questions related to their awareness regarding international English proficiency tests. The survey conducted via google forms among the first year Engineering students.

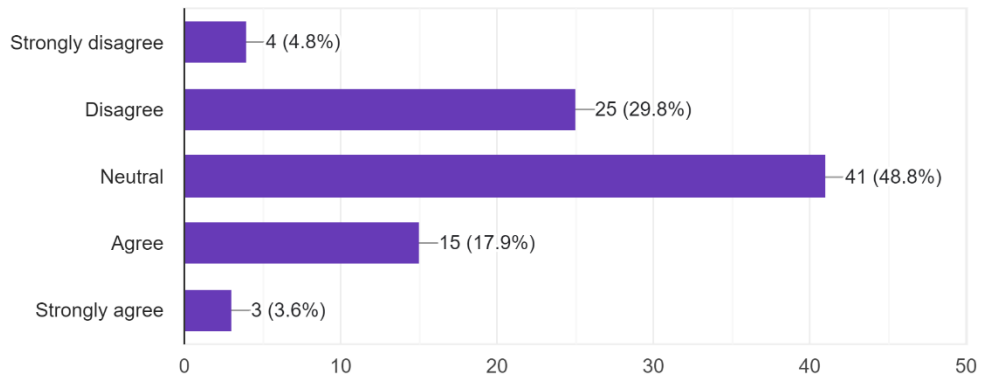
**Data Analysis**



Q4.

I am confident that I can pass English proficiency tests without training

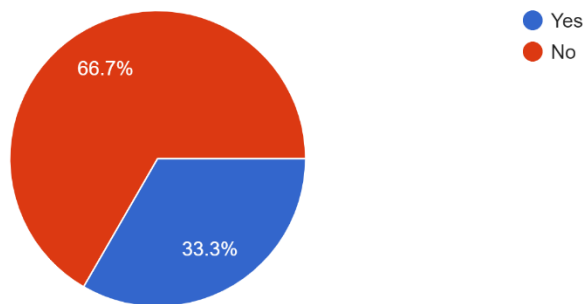
84 responses



Q5.

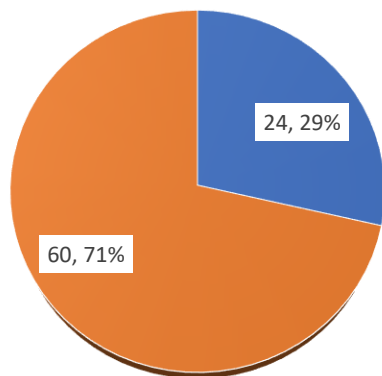
I am aware about the question and scoring patterns of IELTS exam

84 responses

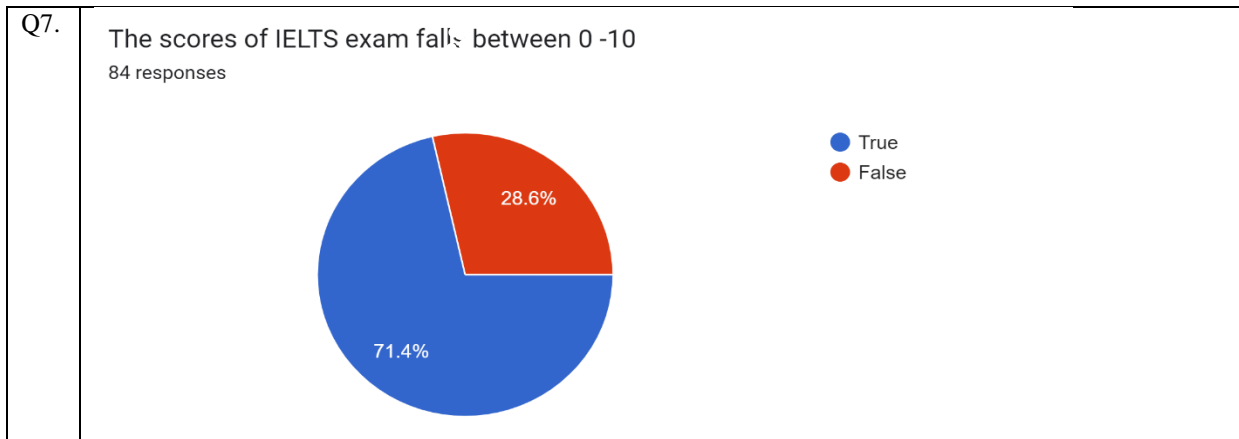


Q6.

What is the full form of CEFR



Wrong Answers Right Answers



### Findings

The above-mentioned tests described a common factor that irrespective of the difference in names, all these tests are primarily assessing the four skills in English. It ensures a candidate's ability to understand, communicate and respond in everyday life situations. The survey results show that these students did not get proper guidance or knowledge regarding various international English proficiency tests. 86.9% students want to migrate either for job or studies but their familiarity (57.1%), confidence (83.33%) awareness (Q3 - 65.47%, Q5 - 66.5%, Q7 - 71.4%) showing negative results. 57.1% students heard about IELTS. The rest of the tests are very few in number (Q2). Most of them heard about IELTS but it is limited to a peripheral knowledge because the questions related to the scores and pattern of IELTS exam marked with wrong answers by majority of the respondents (Q5 & Q7). 83.33% of students are not confident about their possibility to pass these exams. Only 21.42% expressed that they can pass these exams without training.

### Implications of the study

As per the data of project atlas on international education, India, China and Korea have highest number of migrations to the English-speaking countries for academic purpose. The survey data shows that most of these graduate students are unaware about various types of international English proficiency tests and they received less information regarding the test content and pattern. In Indian colleges curricula, English is a part of the syllabus only in the first year. Second year onwards they are dealing with the subject papers only. It again limits their training in English language proficiency and skill. Therefore, an orientation and awareness about these exams will help the students to be better prepared and oriented to face tomorrow.

### Limitations of the study

This study is limited to a small self-reported survey and inference is drawn from percentage analysis. It did not conduct any experimental test or resorted the test result of any international test or interview from student community. Therefore, apart from the concept, the analysis results cannot be generalized.

### Conclusion and Scope for further studies

The study results show light into the need of analyzing English proficiency on the basis of the English scores of students in their higher secondary and UG level. This study poses a question regarding the quality of English teaching. The unawareness about the tests and the pattern of tests makes them poor performers when they are appearing for the same. The teaching and learning process of English should satisfy the needs of the learners and equip them to move to the further stages of their life. The curriculum should ensure the practice of the four skills in English therefore, it would assist them while they prepare for these exams.

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