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Abstract

Numerous individuals with varied backgrounds (doctors, engineers and IT professionals) either want to study in an English-speaking country or want to immigrate there. Hence they have to attempt an English proficiency test –IELTS –that requires good proficiency in writing, alongside listening, reading, and speaking. However writing has been an uphill task leading the test-takers to multiple retakes. Therefore this study is conducted to investigate the level and kind of anxiety associated with writing. The contributors to this study are 38 IELTS aspirants who have been training for IELTS through self-study and a well-known institute in Karachi, Pakistan. Responses were accumulated through Google Forms, they were translated into pie charts and ultimately presented to readers. The outcomes demonstrate that practices of learners and teachers in this context are aligned with the set standards but with minor faults. Findings of this study are essential for IELTS aspirants as well as IELTS instructors.

**Keywords:** Writing Anxiety, IELTS Writing, Likert Scale, IELTS Test-Takers, Student Writers, Teaching Practices, Learning Practices

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**Title**

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**Abstract**

*Numerous individuals with varied backgrounds (doctors, engineers and IT professionals) either want to study in an English-speaking country or want to immigrate there. Hence they have to attempt an English proficiency test –IELTS –that requires good proficiency in writing, alongside listening, reading, and speaking. However writing has been an uphill task leading the test-takers to multiple retakes. Therefore this study is conducted to investigate the level and kind of anxiety associated with writing. The contributors to this study are 38 IELTS aspirants who have been training for IELTS through self-study and a well-known institute in Karachi, Pakistan. Responses were accumulated through Google Forms, they were translated into pie charts and ultimately presented to readers. The outcomes demonstrate that practices of learners and teachers in this context are aligned with the set standards but with minor faults. Findings of this study are essential for IELTS aspirants as well as IELTS instructors.*

**Keywords:** [Writing Anxiety](#), [IELTS Writing](#), [Likert Scale](#), [IELTS Test-Takers](#), [Student Writers](#), [Teaching Practices](#), [Learning Practices](#)

**Introduction**

The world has become a global village which is why now it is common that students of various countries leave their home countries and study abroad with the intention of earning a full degree or a semester experience and undergo a distinct or usually more challenging environment for exposure and prosperity in life. Professionals holding sophistication in their

respective professions, like medical science, engineering, information technology, accountancy and so forth also immigrate from third-world countries to first-world countries, such as the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and France to name but a few with the hope of quality education, better opportunities, resulting in better lifestyle, significant remuneration, and extra incentives compared to their home countries (Recchi & Safi, 2024). Here International English



Language Testing System (hereafter IELTS) plays its crucial role either as a ticket to enter their desired destination, usually the so-called English-speaking countries, or it proves the biggest hurdle in their desires of going abroad.

Answer to the question of how IELTS becomes the biggest stumbling block lies in the fact that writing, in general, at higher education level has almost always been an uphill task to achieve (Tetty, 2024; Rowiyah, 2024). This difficulty has almost always existed owing to lack of clear marking criteria at university level as well as daily practice, theoretical guidance, and comprehensive feedback (Tetty, 2024). Vo and Hoa (2024) also noted this difficulty and agreed that EFL students struggle to follow their teachers' instructions while completing their academic tasks. Moreover, writing is difficult partially due to its various genres, styles, and aims of writing, also it is an arduous task to accomplish because of the initial subjectivity in marking a written piece (Weigle, 2002). Likewise, research and observation even in IELTS classes has also unearthed that this issue persists even in IELTS writing classes due to insufficient guidance on IELTS writing (Vo & Hoa, 2024). Besides, intercultural and religious distinctions are other moderating factors in IELTS writing (Altakhaineh & Melo-Pfeifer, 2022). Some topics in IELTS might invoke cultural and religious clashes among the test takers, such as topics on dating sites, Christmas, co-education, female-led industries etcetera. These moderating factors too might be a cause of anxiety among some IELTS test takers. Hence, the urgency of this investigation into IELTS essay writing arises with the aim of probing into its potential problems, their respective causes, and their ultimate solutions.

IELTS was first introduced in 1980 by the British Council in association with the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES) now known as Cambridge Assessment English as an English proficiency gauging tool (IELTS™, 2024; Read, 2022). Slowly and gradually it captured the entire international market for university admissions and immigration purposes and earned a leadership role in English testing services as around 3.5 million test takers sit IELTS exams every year (Rowiyah, 2024). Today, according to Cambridge's official website (Cambridge, 2024), 25,000 organizations in 130 countries bank on the Cambridge exams as proof of ability in the English language. However, passing a Cambridge exam is not as easy as it is deemed sometimes and it is a difficult undertaking because the IELTS exam is meticulously planned which takes almost 12 months to set one paper (Cullen, 2021) and it is diligently administered. This test is comprised of testing all four language skills:

listening, reading, writing and speaking. The three components are reportedly manageable for a vast majority of test-takers, whereas, writing causes failures. These failures stem from writing anxiety caused by various factors such as, time and language proficiency (Shi, 2024). This empirical study therefore probes into further potential reasons behind anxiety in the writing component of IELTS test.

The term anxiety refers to “a worry or fear about something” and “the feeling of being very worried about something” as per Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD10) and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE6) respectively. The existing body of literature manifests three distinct types of anxiety (trait, state and situation-specific) experienced by students in various disciplines and contexts (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Zhou, Chiu, & Dong, 2023). The term “trait” in trait anxiety is similar to the term “trait” in personality trait. Some students have trait anxiety: meaning they are anxious in almost every situation because this is some psychological disorder that has fossilized in their brains and they strive hard with it as compared to a healthy individual (Leal et al., 2017). Moreover, state anxiety refers to temporary anxiety experienced by someone in a particular situation owing to some inconvenience (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). For instance, a person with state anxiety might become nervous if he is crossing the road and all of a sudden notices a fast-moving car approaching them. This pop-up nervousness is termed as state anxiety. Lastly, situation-specific anxiety is associated with a particular context and the person expresses this sort of anxiety when they are in that particular situation only (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). For example, someone is always afraid of an examination, so whenever their exam deadline approaches, they are fretful. However, if they are out of this particular context, they are always comfortable. This type of anxiety is like being allergic to some medication or so. Anxiety is usually observed in writing practice of any kind initially. Chapter two of this research study manifests various studies on writing anxiety (hereafter WA) carried out in numerous parts of the world and in diverse aspects of academia.

Studies suggest that IELTS writing is one of the areas where anxiety can be observed among test-takers owing to its intrinsic complexities (Mojdehi & Zarei, 2023; Rowiyah, 2024; Ghaemi, & Khorsand, 2024). Thus they fall behind and keep struggling with their overall required band score, because of the essay writing in particular. An online review of the feedback given by unsuccessful students on social media

(Facebook, X (Twitter), and so) illustrates that most test-takers require 7 band score (which means good user), however they fail to prove that they are good users of English, according to IELTS, and they tend to secure 6 to 6.5 band scores which tell the universities/ governmental bodies that they are merely competent users of English. The foreign universities and/or governmental bodies therefore do not offer admissions or immigration visas if the test takers are not good users of English.

## Research Objectives

The objectives of this survey are:

1. To find out if the students are aware of the prerequisites of the IELTS writing component and practise accordingly.
2. To find out, through the lens of students, if the IELTS trainers are teaching as per the right approach.
3. To determine whether their teaching approach lacks clarity in outlining the steps while assisting students as per their grey areas.

## Research Questions

This empirical study answers the following questions:

1. Do student writers know what their examiners require in an essay and practise accordingly?
2. Do the instructors know the ins and outs of IELTS essay writing?
3. Do they teach in a scaffolding manner?

Since writing anxiety reportedly is responsible for this failure of test-takers, this study is motivated towards the testing of the given hypotheses:

## Hypotheses

Two hypotheses have been time-honored in the study under consideration: a null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and an alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ).

The null hypothesis theorises that the IELTS Instructors lack knowledge of IELTS as well as they do not teach utilising the right teaching approaches, and students do not prepare utilising the right learning approach, hence they lag behind ( $H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$ ).

However, the alternative hypothesis suggests that teachers are well trained as well as they apply the right teaching methods, and that students follow their teachers' instructions religiously therefore other areas ought to be investigated ( $H_a: \mu_1 - \mu_2 > 0$ ).

Consequently, if the null hypothesis is rejected, the alternative hypothesis shall be accepted.

## Scope of the Study

The term scope refers to the delimitations or boundaries of a study. The presented study too encountered certain limitations that are outlined below:

First and foremost, the data for this study was collected between April, 2023 and June, 2023 because the selected students who agreed to participate in the study were enrolled during the aforementioned time period. Thus the data was compiled, analysed and it is now presented for readers' consideration.

Moreover, English language students preparing for IELTS merely have been selected for participation in the current study and English language learners in other contexts have not been taken into consideration in here. This is another limitation in comprehensiveness of this study which is attributed to time and resources constraints.

Furthermore, this study was conducted within Karachi, Pakistan merely and responses from 38 students of a single institution in the city were recorded. All IELTS students within the city or country could not have been brought under consideration in the current investigation, not to mention the world. Hence other researchers can probe into IELTS students' writing anxiety at other institutions all over the city, country and the world for increased real-world relevance.

In addition, survey is merely the only instrument that has been employed in this investigation and a more diverse study would require other tools too for more robust outcomes.

Finally, writing anxiety has been the only variable considered for study in this investigation and the overall limitations of this study did not allow the scholars to dig deep into numerous other noteworthy variables.

## Significance of the Study

The investigation under scrutiny is essential because the huge body of literature is almost free from relevant research studies in the context of Pakistan. Therefore this research can assist the IELTS instructors around Pakistan in their teaching practices; they might ultimately ponder over a unique step-by-step teaching method and they may also, with the help of this research, direct their attention to the shortcomings of their learners accordingly. Moreover, the learners will also

benefit from this study by ameliorating their approach to learning and practising IELTS essay writing.

This study has been systematized in five chapters

- i. Chapter 1 introduces the background and context of the study.
- ii. Chapter 2 deliberates on the existing literature.
- iii. Chapter 3 comprehensively outlines the research methodology of the investigation.
- iv. Chapter 4 analyses the data as well as the key findings.
- v. Chapter 5 summarises the key findings; makes recommendations for future research and the major stakeholders.

## Literature Review

The aforementioned situation infers that writing is a problem for most IELTS candidates and this issue persists owing to some worries associated with writing. Studies have shown that there are numerous variables that cause unease amongst the essay writers that constrain them from producing an excellent piece of writing.

Research studies have shown that there are vital distinctions between anxiety faced by freshmen and senior writing-students (Ekmekci, 2018). They also reveal that anxiety stems from conservative teaching approaches, disparaging comments, composition, and time limitation (Ho, 2015). Moreover, self-thought proficiency and social threats also arouse anxiety among student writers (Cheng, 2004). WA is the result of paucity of writing habits (Kara, 2013). Limited experience of writing activities is causing unease in writing (Miri, 2018). And writing anxiety differs in relation to gender of a student (UCGUN, 2011).

When an essay writer sits in the class and starts writing 250-280 words in response to a particularly given topic, some factors restrain them from focusing on their language variety and accuracy, rather they fearfully think of something irrelevant, such as, what score will they secure this time. Some senior students, according to a research study, do not take their scores seriously, hence they comparatively perform better than the freshmen (Ekmekci, 2018). In this study the researcher has explored some possible sources of writing anxiety in Turkish EFL learners and she concluded that the senior students can skillfully dodged writing apprehension as compared to the beginners. This study infers that a language instructor ought to motivate their learners and make them understand the importance of avoiding unnecessary thoughts while writing, and they ought to keep focusing on their

writing process which lacks in students who have newly started writing.

Research has been taking place in the field of linguistics since 1970s and many different aspects of language have been explored. Cheng (2004) while exploring the field of writing has also suggested that students face these problems because of faulty teaching practices. She in her investigation noted that some instructors give students writing topics that are beyond their understanding; the time limit given is also unfair because a huge task cannot be accomplished within, say, 10 to 20 minutes; strict composition rules like grammar, punctuation and others are also a proof of faulty teaching practices. These findings suggest that a language trainer, in case of this study an IELTS instructor, must create a feasible, comfortable and threat-free environment if they want to counter the writing anxiety their students are facing. In addition, Cheng (2004) also reports that personal beliefs about writing are making student writers anxious while writing. She asserts if trainee writers think that an excellent piece of writing is flawless and that at the outset of their writing training they should produce error-free pieces, this will not work for them but it will make them worried and this, in turn, will affect their writing skills. Furthermore, in her investigation into WA she found out that peer pressure also indulges student writers in WA: when a teacher makes their students write a paragraph or a whole essay, they then give disparaging feedback on their write-up which is why then their classmates humiliate them, in order to save themselves from this humiliation, they tend to be extra cautious and fall prey to writing anxiety.

IELTS essay writers can perform well if they write every day because the more they write, the more they maintain a flow in their writing process. This flow develops their habit of writing which reduces the probable anxiety level that they can ever face while writing (Kara, 2013). Further, instructors ought to introduce writing related activities as much as possible and to do so, some special sessions/ labs/ centres must be built to offer students maximum chances of writing and experts must give students encouraging feedback on their work (Miri, 2018). As it is said that practice makes perfect, this is true in case of essay writing as well. Take senior students as an example, their performance is better than those who newly start writing in a writing class (Ekmekci, 2018) because they have had writing sessions already and they have had an ample amount of practice for writing in their classes and this practice helps them mitigate their writing anxiety.

DCGUN (2011) in her examination of 6, 7, and 8 year old student writers reported that female writers have comparatively lower level of writing anxiety than male writers because female students have more positive attitudes towards writing and they also enjoy writing.

The crux of the matter is that all of the researches conducted so far have highly positive, developmental and pedagogical implications on the writing process and coping with the difficulties encountered by learners while writing. In spite of all the studies, we have writing related anxiety in various types of writings in many parts of the world; this is the reason why the presented study is directing its attention towards the writing anxiety faced by IELTS test-takers in Karachi, Pakistan. This study has profound implications on the pedagogical practices and learners' attitudes towards learning, how to write in IELTS exam and secure the best possible results within their first attempts.

## Methodology

### Research Design

Correlational survey design is a form of research in which scholars employ correlational statistic data to gage the relationship between two or more variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This survey design was adopted for this study too where the relationship among different variables (approaches, skills, confidence, practices and learners/instructors) and IELTS writing anxiety was tested amongst candidates receiving training in Karachi city of Pakistan. These learners were under training between the month of April, 2023 and June, 2023 at a well-known institution in Karachi and they had been practising IELTS writing for quite a while then.

### Research Instrument

Likert scale with five viable options (strongly agree –strongly disagree) developed by Ys Cheng in 2004 was employed through Google Forms for survey as the only instrument for data assembling and producing logical results and the results obtained were therefore tremendously informing.

### Procedure

The data were collected from thirty eight (38) IELTS candidates who were preparing themselves for IELTS and they were striving hard with their essay writing in particular. These students were under training for around a month or so.

The respondents were, first of all, asked to choose what best describes their experiences from the 35 questions on a Likert-scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The data collected were then interpreted into pie charts that was then ultimately reported for readers.

## Research Sample

The partakers of this study were IELTS writing learners who already possessed sound academic backgrounds; hence, they had already studied essay writing at their school, college, and university levels. Moreover, some of them had already attempted IELTS also, but had failed to secure their required band scores. Subsequently, they and the rest started classes at this particular institution with the intention of improving their writing skills further and achieving success in overall IELTS.

To elaborate further, based on the maximum variation sampling method out of the 38 IELTS candidates, 9 were medical practitioners (doctors and nurses), 5 candidates were engineers, 7 were recently college graduates, 2 were legal practitioners, 3 English language trainers, 7 of them were professional bankers, and 5 of them were businessmen. All of these candidates were selected from a city of around 30 million people with more than a hundred institutions for English language and IELTS and the participants were selected from one of the well-known institutions in the city with varied backgrounds for the best and fairest representation of all the test-takers in the harbor city.

## Data Analyses Procedure

The data for this study was collected through Google Forms survey and the questionnaire had 35 items altogether: 15 questions were about the skills, approaches, and practices et cetera of student writers and the rest 20 questions were how IELTS instructors taught them essay writing.

After the data was collected online, it was converted into a spreadsheet and then pie charts were produced for each question based on the responses they had received, from SA, A, N, D, to SD. The pie charts for the study now illustrate what percentage of respondents agreed/ disagreed et cetera with what question. It is now easy to notice that whether there is a problem with the students that has resulted in writing anxiety (or lower band scores) or it is the instructors' approaches to teaching IELTS essay writing that have caused some serious issues.



## Analyses and Discussion

### Students' Approach to Learning/ Practising Essay Writing

To begin with, different students responded differently as per their experiences and practices. Respondents who thought that there is a room for improvement in their approach to learning IELTS essays were in a significant minority, merely a 12.1% of them informed the study that they were not confident when they started writing an essay. These are, probably, the students who Ekmekci (2018) reported as freshmen and they were noted with higher level of anxiety because they might not be aware of the basics, like, from where do they start an essay and what is going to be the first task to accomplish for success in writing. However, an overall 69.7% (54.5% agreed and 15.2% strongly agreed) of them stated that they were always confident when they were writing IELTS essays. The confidence among these students infers that they have some background in IELTS writing practice that according to Ekmekci (2018) is a plus point for the seniors that results in mitigation of anxiety which can be observed in this study too. And a moderate number of respondents reported that they are undecided which definitely means that they have never observed their state of minds or attitudes towards writing. Miri (2018) noted this trend that he termed as limited experience stemming from

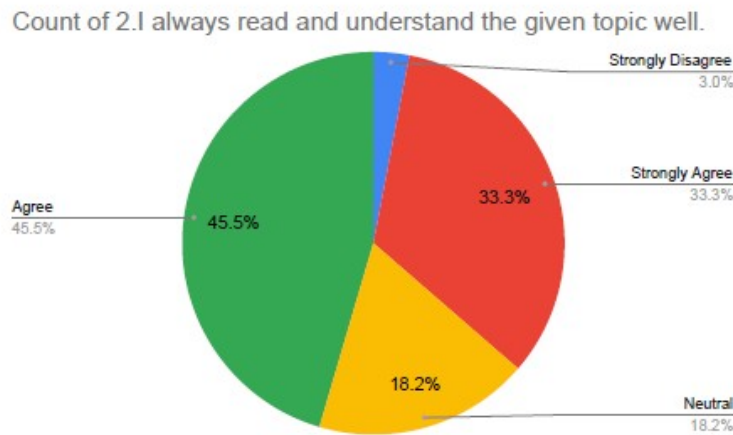
lack of writing activities in ESL/ EFL classes. Hence, it is clear that a language instructor ought to introduce ESL/EFL learners to more and more writing activities to enhance their experience of writing and follow the right steps multiple times for the best long term outcomes.

Moreover, comprehension of topic too received diverse responses. An exactly 3.0% of respondents asserted that they do not always read and understand the given topic prior to writing their essays –this is a serious issue, according to Pauline Cullen, which is contrary to the best writing practices (Cullen, 2021). She further, in her another book, states that planning and applying critical thinking are essential and if students do not follow these steps, they will have to be sure to retake the test multiple times (Cullen, 2020). Planning and the application of critical thinking are only possible when a student reads the topic carefully and understands the task appropriately. This problem does not merely lie with the mere 3 per cent, it applies to the 18.2 percent undecided individuals too. Because they are even unaware of the concept of planning that requires them to read and comprehend the topic well. However, a vast majority (almost 80%) of respondents agreed and strongly agreed with this item on the questionnaire which means that their reason for lagging behind is something other than the issue under discussion.

Figure 1



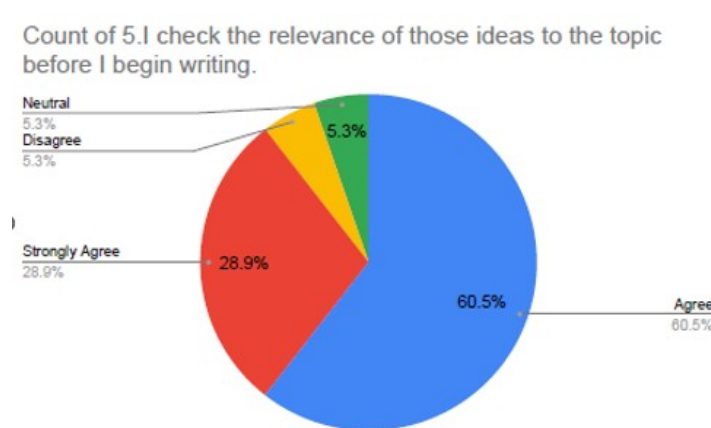
Figure 2



A small fraction (2.6%) of respondents stated that they do not brainstorm ideas in the beginning of their writing, and an overall 15.8% (13.2% disagreed and 2.6% strongly disagreed) reported that they do not employ pre-writing techniques, such as, free writing, making a list, clustering and so on. This is a pressing issue and students must be facing problem with starting to write an essay that Albright and Langan (2023) termed as hitting snags. The vast majority of failed IELTS test-takers, even outside this study, must be facing writing anxiety owing to this lacking in their practice of writing process. If a student follows sequence of the various suggested steps, they shall definitely feel confident when they initiate their first draft through the final draft (Albright & Langan, 2023). However, a substantial number of respondents in this investigation reportedly apply the writing process techniques.

A 5.3% student writers asserted that before starting to write the whole essay, they do not check the relevance of main ideas in their heads with the topic they are given. This irony suggests that they do not plan their essays well and they just start their writing on an ad hoc basis. However, research and authentic material has illustrated numerous steps to be taken for succeeding in penning down an excellent piece of writing. Take the book by Albright and Langan (2023) for example, that suggests four core steps to take to write an essay: 1) discovering a thesis, 2) developing a solid support for it, 3) writing the essay by organising the thesis and supporting ideas, and 4) revising and editing. Another similar percentage remained neutral in this regard which infers that they might have never been taught the significance of understanding the topic and producing a coherent piece. Conversely, a significant number of respondents informed the study that they draw relevance among the ideas.

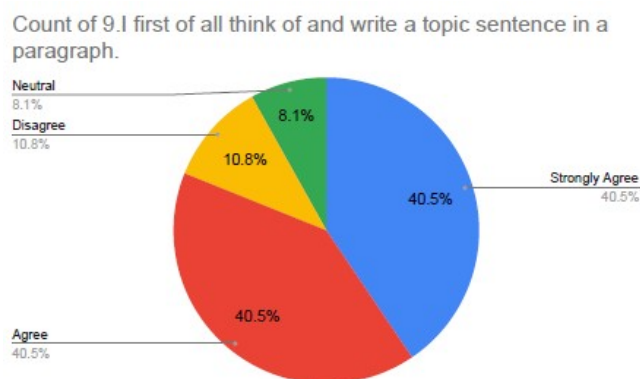
Figure 3



Likewise, another 5.3% and 2.6% reported, while answering questions 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, that even if they go blank regarding a topic, they do not read articles, blogs, relevant course books or some other literature respectively for gaining ideas. This trend is contrary to what experts in the field of writing suggest. Take Albright and Langan (2023) again as an example who have categorically stated that reading aids a student's writing skills as then can learn about the choice of words and tone, how to write an introduction and how to draw a conclusion, as well as reading can benefit in terms of ideas enlargement. This comparatively frictional

representation of survey takers need to adjust their learning skills in order to ace their writing skills. Nonetheless, a great majority of them reported that they watch documentaries, news pieces, lectures and other videos on YouTube to make up their minds on what ideas they ought to include in their essay writing in coherence with the given topic. Whereas, 13.2% and 18.4 percentage of respondents stayed neutral in relation to these questions respectively. This trend subsequently implies that learning practices of a vast majority of respondents is in coherence with the standards set by leading experts and that other areas have to be probed.

Figure 4



Additionally, an 8.1% partakers reported that they do not know how to compose each paragraph, and a 10.8% people informed that they do not think of and write a topic sentence in the beginning of a paragraph, and an inclusively 8.1% people reported that they do not spare 5 minutes from the standard 40 minutes time for proofreading, and 27.0% of them testified that they never discuss their work with anyone when practising essay writing outside the classroom. Besides,

a further moderate number of partakers illustrated neutrality during the investigation which means they were not even sure what these steps require them to do or even why are they crucial. These are some of the wrong practices that are constraining them from securing a band 7 or above on IELTS exam. The socking part, however, is that a substantial number of the partakers responded positively to all the questions under consideration at this point.

Figure 5

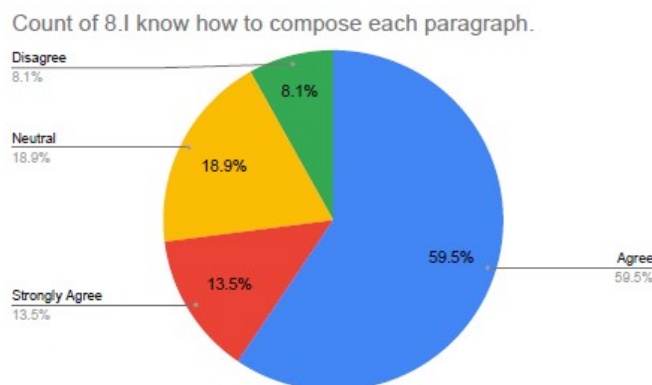


Figure 6

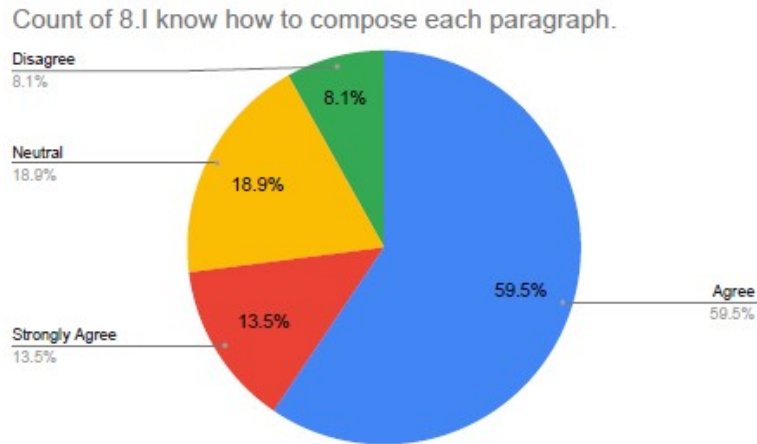


Figure 7

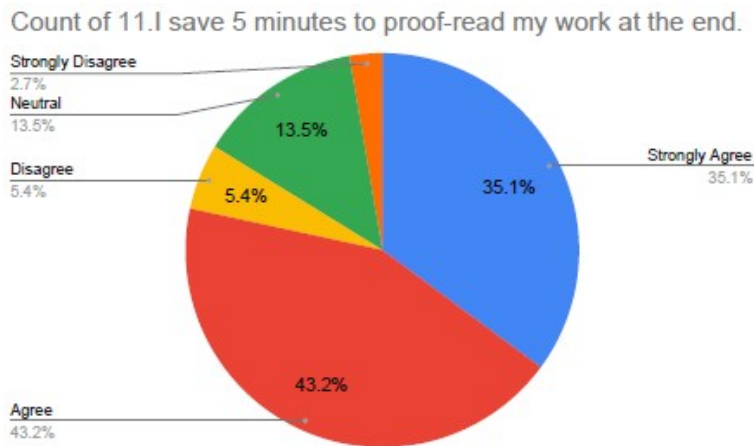
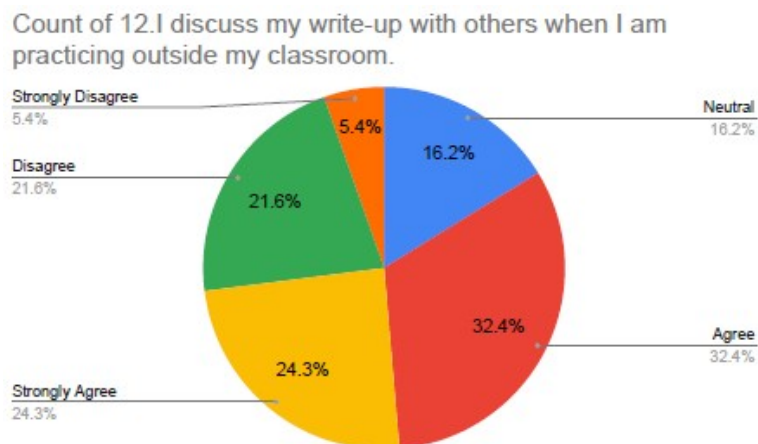


Figure 8



Besides, 5.4% respondents revealed that they are reluctant to be enlightened as on their errors. This emotional state might

also be one of the anxiety causing elements. And a 2.7% of them reported that they do not encourage people in



highlighting their flaws because it might be terrifying them, however a great majority affirmed that they take the constructive criticisms positively and they learn from that criticism. Zhao, Zhang, Schunn, He, Li, & Zhao (2023) also confirm the virtues of feedback by stating that students who bore a positive attitude towards peer feedback outperformed those without such an opportunity. Lastly, a whole of 24.3% students reported that they do not even like the negative comments given by their instructors. This is the attitude that Ho (2015) referred to as disparaging comments; these students disapprove of the disparaging comments both from the peers as well as the instructors. The feedback offered by peers was noted in the study by Cheng (2004) also which was disapproved by students even then too. The feedback was

considered a social threat by the scholar in that study. I believe, this is a negative attitude demonstrated by these student writers, and all others too, which shall definitely be one of the factors responsible for their lower scores and anxiety in the IELTS writing exam. The reason is that feedback is an essential instrument of positively affective engagement that helps produce excellence in writing and hence significantly associated with writing performance (Jin, Jiang, Xiong, Feng, & Zhao, 2022). Similarly, Zhao et al. (2023) also noticed that peer-to-peer feedback aided students enhance their linguistic as well as subject knowledge. The resistance of such fruitful practices is suggested to be causing students to lag behind.

Figure 9



Figure 10

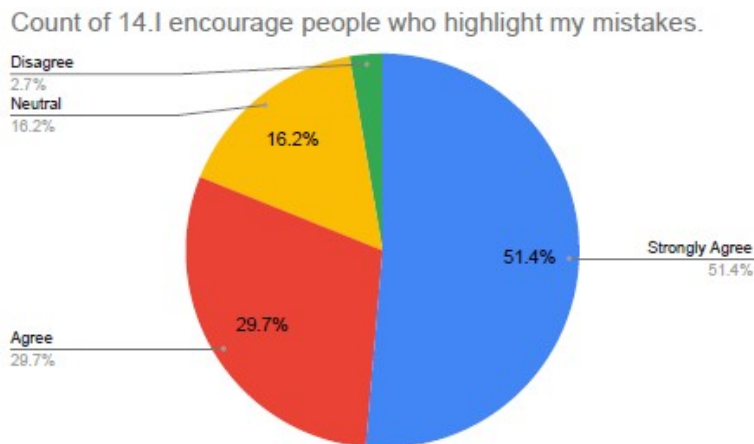
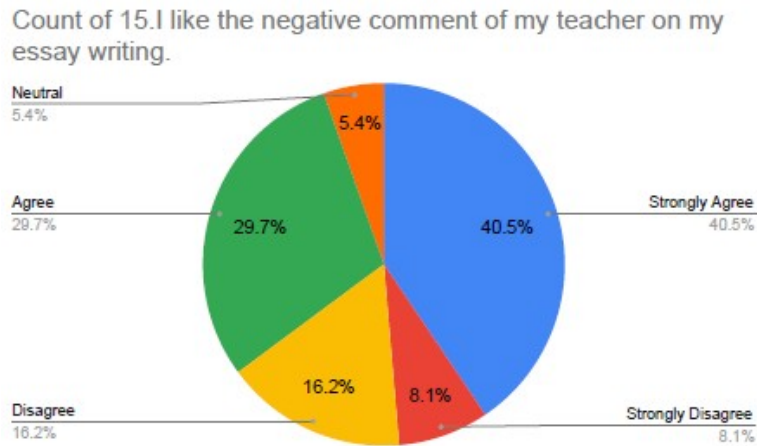


Figure 11



### Students’ Perception on Their Teachers’ Approach to Teaching Essay Writing

Likewise, it is significant to probe into the facilitators’ teaching methods too because a faulty teaching approach can also cause anxiety among learners that can consequently result in poor results. As effective teaching methods that not only suit the ESL/EFL students but serve the ESL/EFL class goals too are significantly essential for pedagogical implications (Hussin & Aziz, 2022). Therefore this empirical study investigated approaches of IELTS instructors as well, those who were teaching participants of this study, through the lens of the current survey respondents in light of their lived experiences.

A minor fraction of participants, among the 38 partakers of this survey, reported that the teachers’ practices manifest some room for improvement. To exemplify, 8.1%

participants agreed when asked whether their teachers take them on business basis or not and another 10.8% participants strongly agreed to the same question. As is evidenced by the existing body of literature that commercialisation of education has led to academic capitalist regime which is why educational institutes often demonstrate market-based behaviour and the public good has increasingly taken a backseat (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2024). This trend is to some extent true in the context under critical examination too, owing to the noticed perception of respondents. However, a great divide amongst the respondents was seen in this respective too as almost half of the participants thought that their institution is not run on commercial basis merely and that the public good has not taken a backseat at their institution –meaning a fractional segment is critical while a major segment is appreciative of the teaching model in the context of this study.

Figure 12

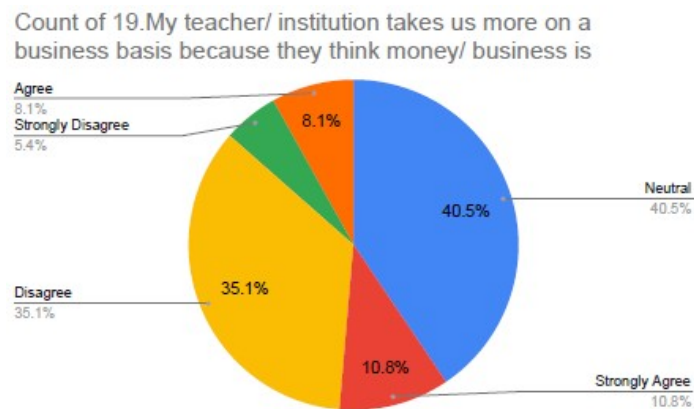
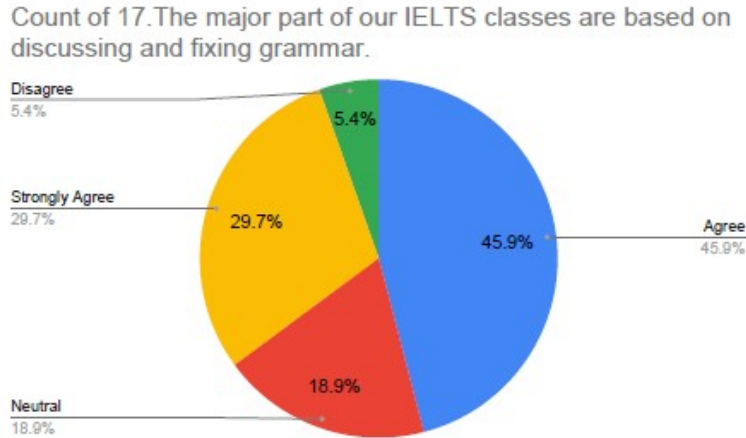


Figure 13



Moreover, 45.9% of them agreed that their teachers spend more time on discussing and fixing grammar and 29.7% strongly agreed with this opinion, and this is a serious issue in development of IELTS essays related skills because in IELTS classes there should be a mix of discussing both the language and the composition, and I would give more weight to the composition part at this stage because it can easily be fixed within a month or two. However, the language part is a time-taking job to do which therefore requires a separate level before joining IELTS classes. This fact, revealed by a major segment of respondents in this study, spots a real issue. Further, a vast majority –32.4%, 51.4% A and SA respectively –reported that their teachers have shared links to various reading and listening materials for their knowledge and skills

enhancement. This practice is aligned to the suggestions made by key authors in the field of ESL/ EFL writing for enhancing students’ writing skills through reading (Albright & Langan, 2023). Conversely, a small fraction, 8.1% of them reported a paucity of such facility at their institution that indicates a faulty teaching approach as well as a clear divide among the perception of the respondents. Moreover, only 2.7% of respondents re-counted that they were not provided with the relevant reading activities within their classes for their skill building, whereas, a great majority of them (54.1% and 35.1% agree and strongly agree respectively) believed that they were incessantly introduced to useful and relevant reading comprehension activities within their classrooms that resulted in their skill building.

Figure 14

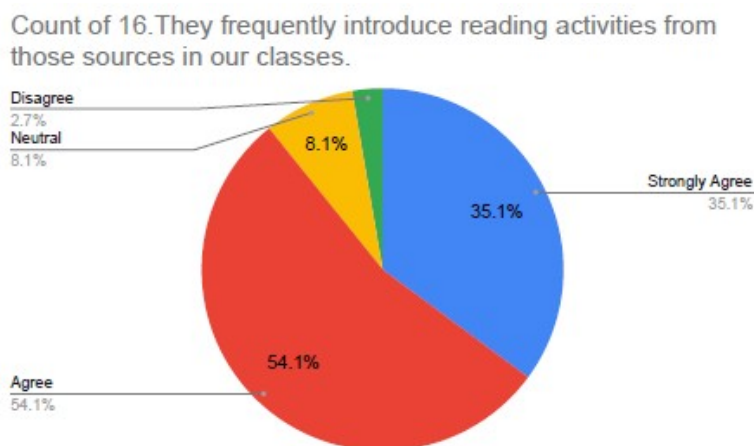


Figure 15

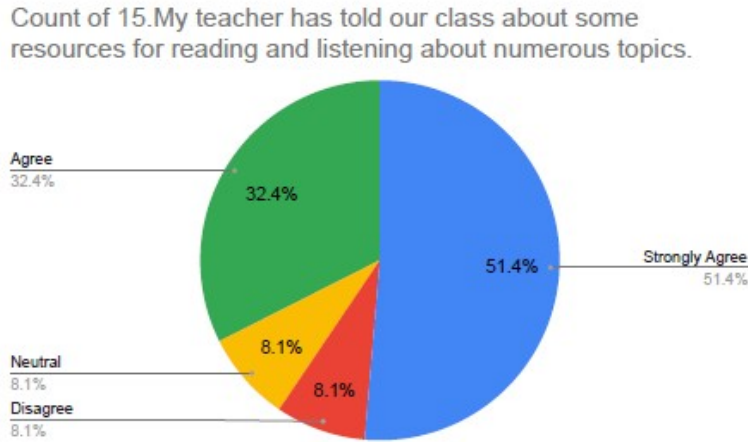
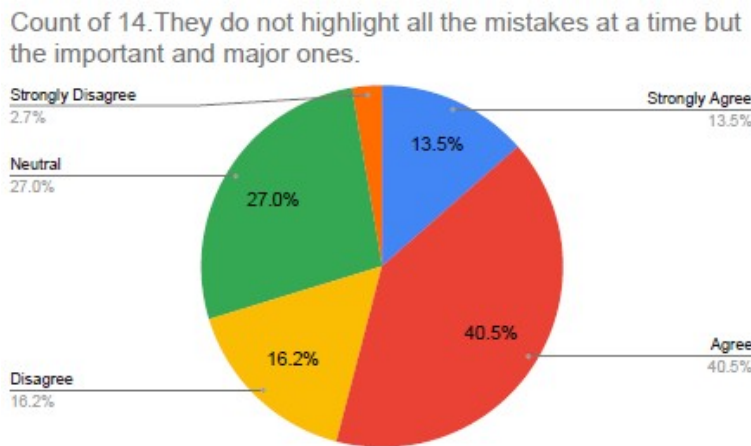


Figure 16



Similarly, 16.2% participants think that their instructors do not pinpoint every single error in their essays with another 2.7% of them strongly agreeing with this fact and almost one third of the survey partakers were undecided in this regard. On the contrary, a substantial majority reported that they are offered a significant insight into their writing inconsistencies. Corrective feedback, according to the existing body of literature, manifests the greatest motivational function (Cen & Zheng, 2024). And the ESL learners demonstrate high regards for the written corrective feedback from their teachers and attribute refinement of their writing skills to the feedback (Adzhar & Sazalli, 2024) which is true in the context under examination too. In light of these research findings, students should be highly motivated towards their IELTS essay writing and writing anxiety ought to take a backseat in this scenario, however the failure of IELTS test-takers raise concerns that need to be addressed.

Moreover, 2.7% contributors are not happy with the pre-writing techniques they were taught; 5.4% of them thought that instructors do not assist them with ideas when they go blank; 2.7% thought that their teachers either did not highlight their flaws or they did not help to fix them; 13.5% disagreed when asked if their teachers wrote a part of an essay as a model and pointed at its composition; 2.7% disagreed and 5.4% strongly disagreed with the individual assistance being provided by their trainers. 2.7% of them disagreed with the opinion that their teachers allow a healthy discussion with them on their essays; 29.7% agreed and 24.3% strongly agreed that they were merely given grammar and spelling related feedback, and not the other criteria such as, task response and/ or coherence and cohesion which is something alarming in the context of IELTS teaching. All these faulty practices were reported by merely a small percentage of the respondents which means that a vast majority of IELTS



candidates think the other way around. If so, then scholars have to dig deeper in the unsuccessful attempts of IELTS writing exams and find out the real reasons of writing failures.

Figure 17

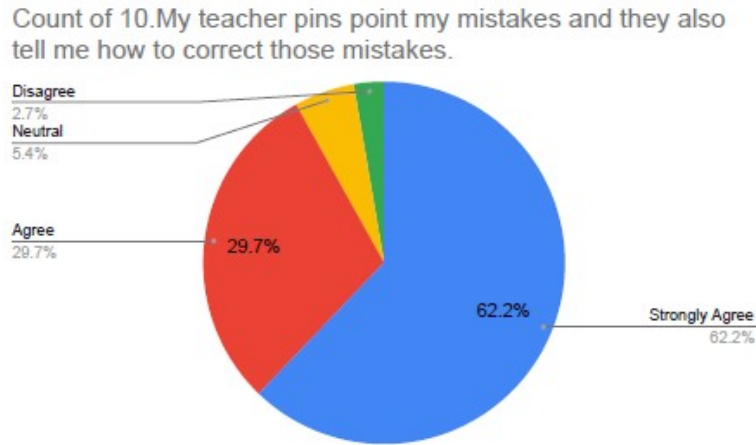


Figure 18

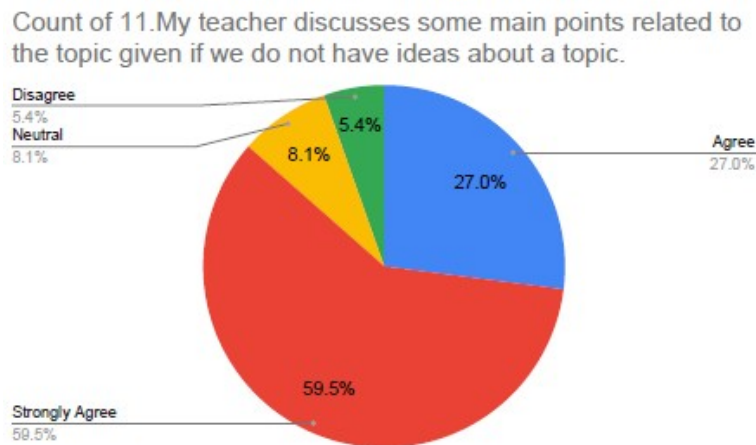


Figure 19

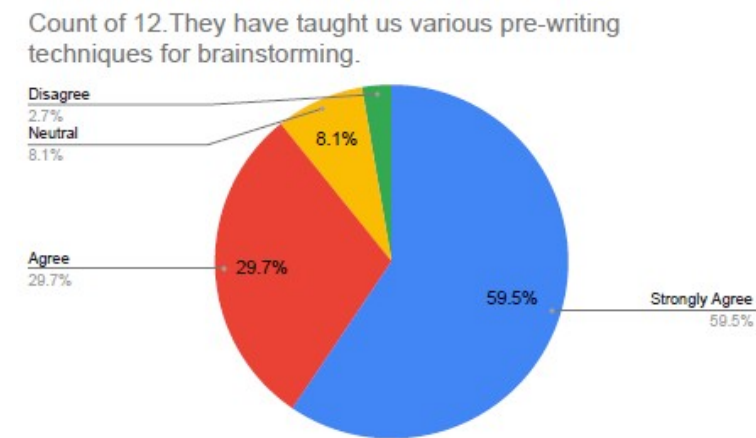


Figure 20

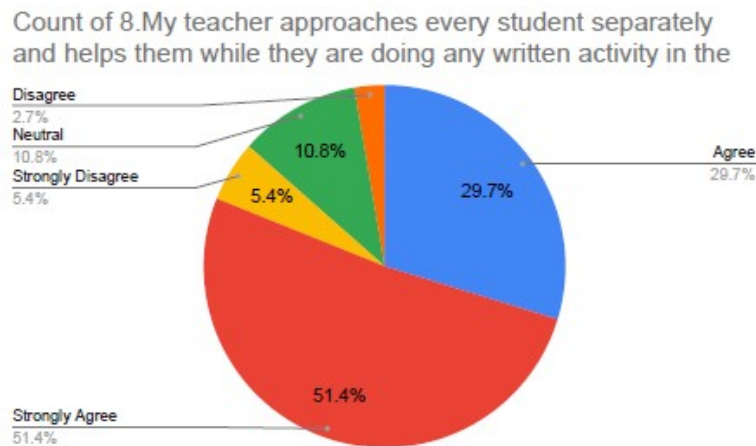


Figure 21

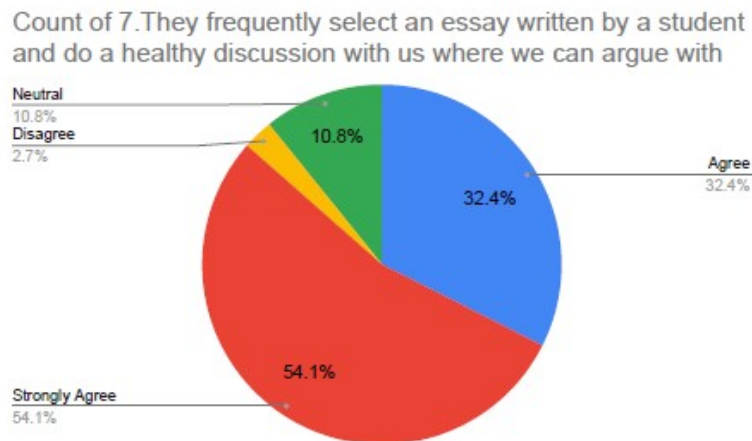


Figure 22

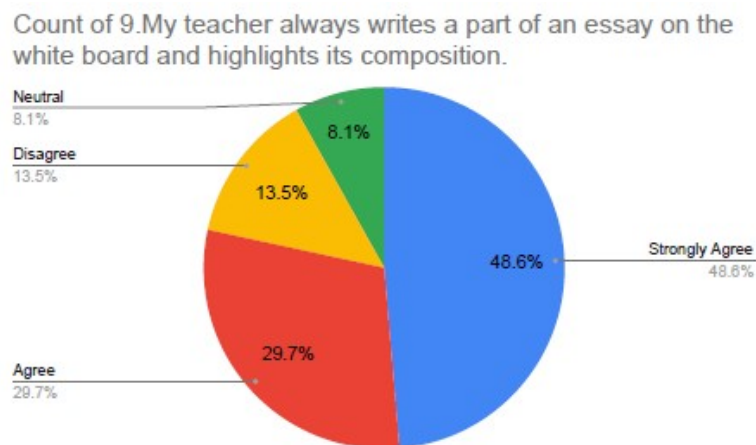
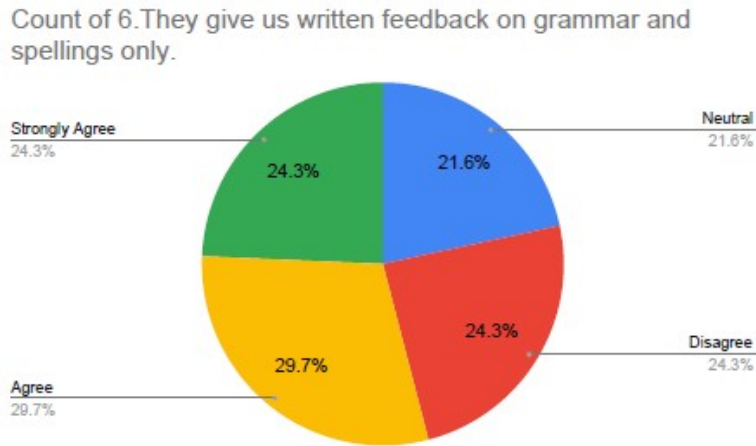


Figure 23



In the same way, only 2.7% percentage of them thought that they did not receive feedback based on writing task-2 criteria set by Cambridge English Language Assessment, IDP: IELTS Australia, and the British Council. Furthermore, another 2.7% participants reported that they did not receive feedback on their written work frequently as per those criteria, and 2.7% of them even said that their teachers have not provided them with IELTS writing task-2 bands descriptors. Providing students with the IELTS writing task-2 band descriptors is significantly essential as it offers the learners a little more washback effect, serving the classroom evaluation of learning, and ensuring inter-rater reliability by following a pre-determined pattern of marking (Brown & Abeywickrama,

2018). However, a great majority agreed and strongly agreed (29.7% and 64.9% respectively) that their teachers have provided them with rubric. Finally, amongst the 20 questions about the teachers' approach, the first of them was whether or not their institutions have a policy of placement test and assigning appropriate level to the candidates at the time they step in the institutions; only 5.4% respondents disagreed, but 18.9% agreed and 64.9% strongly agreed while reporting on this question. Conducting a placement test is crucial because its core purpose is to place a learner into an appropriate level or section of a language school or curriculum (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018).

Figure 24

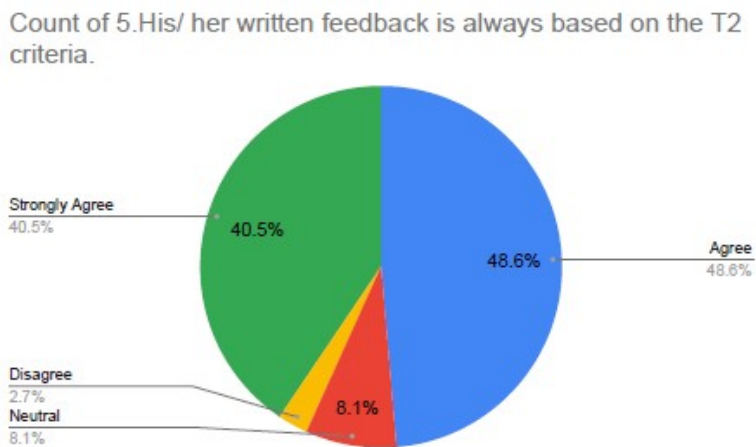


Figure 25

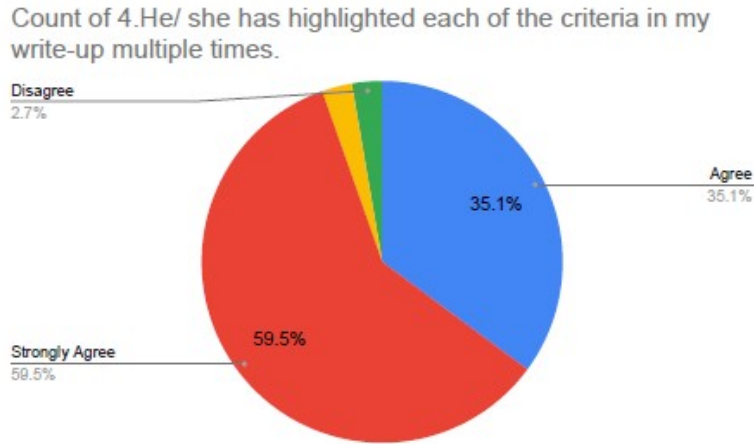


Figure 26

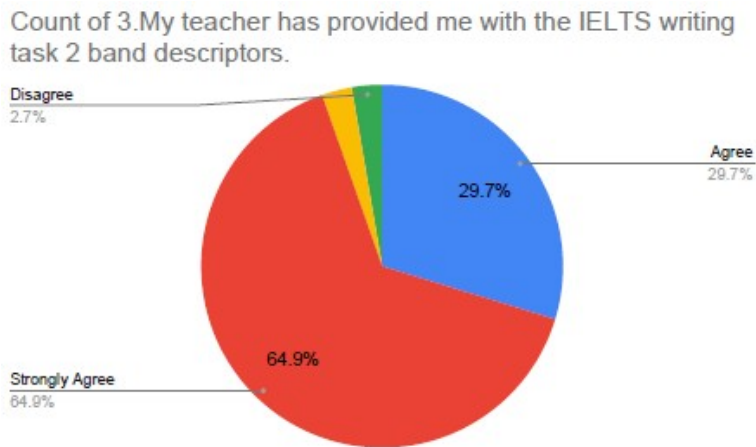
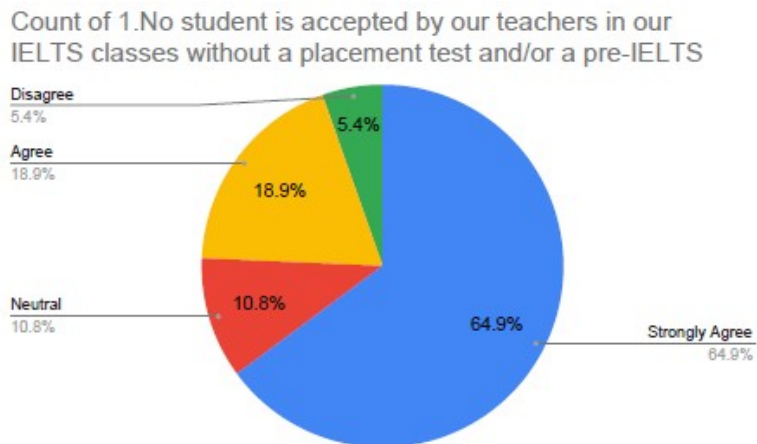


Figure 27



To summarise, a small subset of respondents reported on their practices of learning to write that they were not

confident while starting to write an essay; they do not read to comprehend the topic prompt well, or brainstorm ideas prior



to writing and they do not even utilize the pre-writing techniques. Moreover, the small fraction of them even reported negatively when asked about the extensive reading or listening for accumulating ideas to write an essay; they reported their unawareness of composition of a paragraph and planning and proofreading even. Also they showed their reluctance of discussing their work with others for corrective feedback and they were equally reluctant to be enlightened as on their errors. Another tiny proportion of them stayed undecided on these matters. However, an overwhelming majority of respondents reported positively on all the items discussed above.

Likewise, this same trend of reporting was true in relation to teachers' practices too. Because a minority of these participants shared negative perceptions about their IELTS instructors. As a small segment believed that their institutions is focused more on money making than helping students with their writing skills; they were negative about the teachers' feedback, the extra material provided for skill building and even the pre-writing techniques. They also showed negative attitudes towards the correction of their flaws, inadequate individual assistance provided by the instructors and the teachers' practice of writing full essays or parts of an essay with them for a healthy discussion and demonstration of how an essay is written. Besides, the handful of respondents also reported negatively on the provision of band descriptors as well as instilling the IELTS writing task-2 criteria into them appropriately by giving feedback based on it. The clear divide among the respondents was seen even in this respect too because a notable majority of them disagreed with them and reported positively on all these items on the survey.

As a final point, the study proves that the majority of students' and the teachers' approaches to learning and teaching IELTS essays are the right approaches respectively as per the responses obtained in the empirical study under consideration. On the contrary, a small segment of the respondents reported a room for improvement. In some minor cases the students' approaches, practices, and skills are inappropriate and in other few cases the teachers are wrong from the lens of their students.

## Results

The overall outcomes of this study illustrate that a great majority of IELTS candidates are satisfied with their teachers' approaches to teaching as they are aligned with the set

standards, of how they ought to be taught, and that their own learning practices also meet the world standards, of how writing ought to be mastered. Nevertheless, a substantial majority of respondents to this survey also believe their teachers invest significant part of class time into fixing their language issues merely (grammar and vocabulary), instead of creating a balance among the Cambridge set criteria. This is the only major problem highlighted by a big segment of participants in this investigation which requires the IELTS instructors to create a balance in the four IELTS writing criteria, namely task response (TR), coherence and cohesion (CC), lexical resources (LR), and grammatical range and accuracy (GRA). Ideally speaking, only students with good proficiency of English ought to be placed in an IELTS class through a placement test. But even if students with a moderate level of English proficiency are also placed there owing to their lower band requirement or so, a balance among the criteria must be ensured. Because each criterion individually contribute to the overall score of a student. So if a student is good at LR and GRA, they might not necessarily be doing well on the TR and CC parts of IELTS writing as well. Therefore all areas must be individually fixed and time ought to be equally assigned to them in order to fix all areas well for better results. In addition, a minor percentage of respondents to this questionnaire highlighted some grey areas their learning practices and their instructors' teaching practices.

## Limitations and Future Recommendations

Despite the outcomes of this study, the fact of the matter remains the same and the problem of lower band score in IELTS writing component remains unresolved. This study reveals that teaching and learning in this case are not flawed especially for a vast majority of respondents to this investigation. Now other studies need to be conducted by either increasing the population size or the sample out of it.

Besides, to help teaching and learning practices further, scholars can attempt to resolve the writing issues by enhancing writing activities in ESL/ EFL classes. They can, moreover, find out if their students follow the writing process religiously (planning, writing and proofreading). Also they can probe into extensive reading aiding writing skills; scholars can also investigate if learners take and appreciate corrective feedback. Further, scholars can study commercialisation of education therefore the teachers' attitude and interest in teaching; they can also see if teachers are investing more time into fixing their language issues

merely, instead of creating a balance among the set criteria. And they can also critically examine if feedback based on the set criteria is offered more frequently; if the teachers give appropriate written corrective feedback on students' essays; if teachers allow healthy discussions with students in a class. Finally, they can also empirically investigate if students are placed in the right level or course through a placement test.

Other than this, there are various other areas (such as, educational background of a student, profession of a student, gender, age, time invested in practice, writing self-efficacy, writing habits, writing motivation, tools for helping improve writing skills, to name but a few) related to this issue in literature which need further exploration.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

This study is a good piece of news and a resource of validity and reliability for the IELTS instructors in relation to their

pedagogical practices. They should not only continue to teach in the manner they are already teaching but the ones who are not teaching as per these standards ought to adapt to this tested, accepted, validated and reliable way of teaching IELTS essay writing.

### **Acknowledgements**

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**Appendix 1 (Students’ approach to learning/ practicing essay writing)**

Writing Anxiety Questionnaire I--- based on Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI –Cheng, 2004)

Name:.....  
 Gender: Male  Female   
 Qualification: .....  
 Date: .....

Instruction:

1. Read the following statement and express your degree of agreement / disagreement by ticking (√) the appropriate column.
2. Note that SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Uncertain, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree.

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I am always confident when I am writing an essay.					
2. I always read and understand the given topic well.					
3. I first of all brainstorm some ideas.					
4. For brainstorming I use various pre-writing techniques, such as, free writing, making a list, clustering, and scratch outline.					
5. I check the relevance of those ideas to the topic before I begin writing.					
6. I read some articles on the internet or relevant course book if I fall short of ideas.					
7. I search the relevant information on YouTube.					
8. I know how to compose each paragraph.					
9. I first of all think of and write a topic sentence in a paragraph.					
10. I can explain the main point in a paragraph well with relevant examples.					
11. I save 5 minutes to proof-read my work at the end.					
12. I discuss my write-up with others when I am practicing outside my classroom.					
13. I enjoy learning about my mistakes.					
14. I encourage people who highlight my mistakes.					
15. I like the negative comment of my teacher on my essay writing.					

**Appendix 2 (Students’ Perception on Their Teachers’ approach to teaching essay writing)**

Writing Anxiety Questionnaire I--- based on Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI –Cheng, 2004)

Instruction:

1. Read the following statement and express your degree of agreement / disagreement by ticking (√) the appropriate column.
2. Note that SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Uncertain, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree.

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. No student is accepted by our teachers in our IELTS classes without a placement test and/or a pre-IELTS level.					
2. My teacher has taught me the Writing T2 criteria well.					



Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
3. My teacher has provided me with the IELTS writing task 2 band descriptors.					
4. He/ she has highlighted each of the criteria in my write-up multiple times.					
5. His/ her written feedback is always based on the T2 criteria.					
6. They give us written feedback on grammar and spellings only.					
7. They frequently select an essay written by a student and do a healthy discussion with us where we can argue with them and clarify our concepts.					
8. My teacher approaches every student separately and helps them while they are doing any written activity in the class.					
9. My teacher always writes a part of an essay on the white board and highlights its composition.					
10. My teacher pins point my mistakes and they also tell me how to correct those mistakes.					
11. My teacher discusses some main points related to the topic given if we do not have ideas about a topic.					
12. They have taught us various pre-writing techniques for brainstorming.					
13. They encourage us to read on relevant topics to collect ideas, learn vocabulary, and practise grammar.					
14. They do not highlight all the mistakes at a time but the important and major ones.					
15. My teacher has told our class about some resources for reading and listening about numerous topics.					
16. They frequently introduce reading activities from those sources in our classes.					
17. The major part of our IELTS classes are based on discussing and fixing grammar.					
18. My teacher has professional and highly recognized teaching qualifications.					
19. My teacher/ institution takes us more on a business basis because they think money/ business is important.					
20. They promote education and they are honest with their work.					