

‘A PERSISTENT SOURCE OF DISQUIET’²⁸: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CULTURAL CAPITAL ON THE IELTS EXAM

Hilda Freimuth

Preparatory Program Department, Khalifa University of Science, Technology, and Research, Abu Dhabi, UAE

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the findings of a cultural content analysis conducted on the reading component of twenty IELTS exams. A total of sixty reading passages were examined for cultural capital. The study found that, on average, one reading test contained fourteen cultural references in terms of a variety of cultural elements including cultural objects and historical settings. Geographically speaking, the readings referred to 139 places or regions around the world with only five references pertaining to the Middle East and none to the United Arab Emirates where this study was conducted.

KEYWORDS

IELTS, Reading, Culture, Bias, Assessment

1. INTRODUCTION

This study took place in Abu Dhabi at Khalifa University’s foundation program. The content analysis was part of a wider study investigating the cultural bias of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), an international proficiency exam students take to get into the faculty programs. The study was conducted to address the numerous student complaints of bias. Upon further investigation, only two significant studies were found to have explored this topic: Khan’s¹ investigation of the cultural bias found on the speaking part of the IELTS exam and Hawkey’s² study identifying it as a concern for some candidates. The IELTS organization³ maintains no bias is inherent in its exam and that the exam is fair to all cultural groups. With university students in the UAE claiming the contrary and little evidence in the literature to support students’ claims, a further investigation into the matter was warranted to fill the wide gap in the literature. This research on the bias of the IELTS exam is important not only to UAE students but also to the many other candidates of varying nationalities taking the exam every year. If the research shows the exam has cultural bias, then the exam’s validity is under threat. This research may prompt the IELTS organization to revisit its exam creation process as a result, leading to a fairer international exam overall. Consequently, this research can impact millions of people around the world. Since Khan¹ looked at the speaking component of the exam and the reading component is considered to be one of the most challenging parts of the exam according to Khalifa University students, the reading section of the exam was a good choice for further investigation. This leaves the writing and the listening components of the exam open for future investigation.

This paper will begin with a look at the nature of reading and then examine the role of culture in second language reading comprehension. It will then move on to investigate the current literature available on the effect of culture on the IELTS exam before outlining the methodology used in this study. The paper then presents the findings before engaging in a detailed discussion of the results.

2. READING THEORIES AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING AND CULTURE

Historically speaking, there have been three major movements in the field of reading theory. At first, it was believed that reading was a bottom-up process that solely involved the decoding of the message⁴. This required no higher-order thinking skills, only the movement from letter to sound to word and then meaning. Goodman⁵, however, put forth another theory that involved looking at a text holistically. Goodman believed that the act of reading was more of a psycholinguistic guessing game than a simple act of decoding. To Goodman, reading meant applying and testing hypotheses throughout the reading process in order to reconstruct the message in the text. The two perspectives were eventually combined in reading theory with the creation of Rumelhart's⁶ interactive model. Reading is now seen as a much more complex process with the metacognitive view of reading, which includes the use of higher order thinking skills, gaining greater momentum.

According to Alderson⁷, there are three levels of understanding taking place when one reads. The lowest level equates to that of the bottom-up theory where the understanding is literal. Meaning is derived from the letters on the page that make up words with words making up sentences and so on. This level is in stark contrast to the second level, referred to as inferential. Inferential understanding comes from 'reading between the lines'. The information that is not explicitly stated in the text is understood. The third level of understanding is that of critical evaluation. The ability to go beyond the text to make critical evaluations is a highly cognitive skill.

Kintsch and Van Dijk⁸ divide up the levels of understanding differently by looking at the processes that generate the understanding instead. Micro-processes refer to those processes that allow someone to examine the text at face value. When macro-processes are activated, on the other hand, the reader is able to gain a deeper understanding of the text.

Nuttall⁹ likens the act of reading to the act of assembling a table. At the start, there are many bits and pieces that need assembling. If all goes well, at the end of the process the table is assembled as originally intended. However, often there is a nut or bolt inexplicably left over. Dumbfounded, one wonders where the missing parts go. The item is, nonetheless, assembled – perhaps not as intended by the producer but to the best ability of the interpreter. These skills could be likened to the skills and strategies used in the reading process. An important factor here is that the successful assembly of a table requires the knowledge of what a table is and how it is used in the first place. This refers to the importance of background knowledge in reading.

Background knowledge is an umbrella term which subsumes various kinds of knowledge. Topic knowledge, text knowledge, linguistic knowledge, and cultural knowledge all fall under this umbrella. Brown¹⁰ defines the term as that which a reader brings to the task at hand including the reader's experiences with the topic and feelings towards the topic. Alderson⁷ defines background knowledge as that which is related to how the world works, claiming world knowledge is essential to do any form of language processing (p.45). Models of reading that place importance on background knowledge above all else are referred to as 'schema theory'¹¹. Schema theory refers to the activation of a reader's stored networks of information in the brain to which the

reader links and integrates incoming knowledge⁷. Vacca and Vacca¹² extend the definition of schemata to include that which is brought to the text situation: “experiences, conceptual understanding, attitudes, values, skills, and strategies” (p.15).

Pulido¹³ cites studies done by Carrell¹⁴, Chen and Donin¹⁵ and Hudson¹⁶ as showing empirical support for the importance of a reader’s prior knowledge (available in the form of cognitive schemata) of the topic in second language reading comprehension. Carrell¹⁷ makes a distinction between two kinds of schemata: content and formal. Content schemata pertain to the knowledge brought to the reading process by the reader in relation to the content of the text. Formal schemata refer to the reader’s internal network of linguistic knowledge – that is, knowledge of and about the language. This paper concerns itself with the former – content schemata.

According to Steffenson and Joag-Dev¹⁸, a reader’s background knowledge is heavily influenced by the reader’s culture. This is confirmed by research done on the role of cultural familiarity in the reading process (see Chandler¹⁹, Dolan²⁰, Freebody²¹, Hirsch²², Tierney²³, Winograd²⁴). From a perspective of schema theory, texts which draw on content schemata only available to some sets of readers would constitute cultural bias. An example supporting this theory is Steffenson and Joag-Dev’s¹⁸ study which asked participants from India and the United States to read passages on weddings. The study found that participants read passages related to their own cultural background more quickly. They were also able to recall a greater amount of information about the culturally appropriate text, producing more culturally based distortions of the alien text. These findings are particularly troubling when it comes to the assessment of reading, especially for high stakes exams such as the IELTS.

At this point in the review, it is important to distinguish between reading theory and literacy theory. The reading theories outlined in this section link to *one* type of literacy perspective only – that of the traditional view of literacy. Street²⁵ terms this view the ‘autonomous model’. This perspective of reading and writing sees literacy as a single phenomenon where one is either literate or not. This literacy equates to an acquisition of a set of skills obtained through formal education. It does not take into account other forms of literacy found in differing social contexts – for example, symbols spray painted on concrete walls, the recognition of the shapes of street signs, or communal literacy²⁶. Street’s Ideological Model of Literacy challenges the status quo. This model is offered up as an alternative to the traditional view of literacy. Literacy is now expanded from the technical interpretation to include reading and writing in various different kinds of social practices. The view of literacy is now dependent on social context rather than solely on a set of skills resulting from formal schooling. In this perspective, literacy is relative, negotiable, and local.

2.1. Research on the Effect of Culture on IELTS

Very little research has been done pertaining to the cultural bias or content validity of the IELTS exam. Bias in content validity occurs when a task or test item is more difficult for one cultural group than another due to lack of exposure or experience with the item or topic²⁷.

One of the few studies done on the cultural bias of the IELTS exam was conducted in Southeast Asia on the speaking component of the exam. This study, conducted by Khan¹, revealed that limiting cultural bias was largely up to the examiners themselves as they chose the topics from a set of standardized questions. Khan¹ found the IELTS exam to be unsuitable for the Bangladeshi culture due to the creative lateral thinking needed for success on the speaking test. To avoid misunderstandings, examiners had to choose topics carefully. Take the topic of ‘holidays and weekends’ as an example. It is unsuitable for this cultural group because the two concepts are one

and the same in Bangladeshi culture. The topics of 'solitude' and 'pets' are likewise inappropriate.

Another relevant study, conducted by Hawkey², found that of 572 IELTS candidates surveyed, 27% expressed perceptions of 'unfairness'. Of this percentage, unfamiliarity of topics appeared in second place at 21%. Time pressure was ranked at number one. In response to the question "Is this test appropriate for all nationalities/cultures?", 73% indicated a positive response. The remaining 27% included 'target culture bias on topics and materials' as one of their main reasons for a negative response.

Hawkey's² research stops at these findings but Green²⁸ stumbled on a continuation of this theme while conducting a study on the wash-back effect of the IELTS. In his findings, Green highlights a "persistent source of disquiet", referring to the "cultural accessibility" of task 2 writing topics found on the IELTS (p.214). This study aims to address some of this disquiet.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the reading passages of twenty exams, totalling sixty passages, were examined for cultural capital. This was done through a content analysis, an analytical technique which is applied to a variety of research data including documents, papers, data, transcripts, discourses etc. where you identify and count references or words and phrases for either existence or frequency.

Historically, the content analysis technique is closely linked with quantitative studies - originally designed to deal with large amounts of raw material²⁹. According to Titscher et al.³⁰, the technique is one of the longest standing methods of textual analysis available in social research. Ryan and Bernard³¹ concur with this as well, citing it as a "major coding tradition" (p. 780). In the classical technique, the focus is on establishing precise categories and counting 'instances' – either for existence or for recurrence. Instances are systematically identified, coded, and grouped before being analyzed quantitatively³². It is the systematic nature of this tool that affords it its objectivity²⁹. For this method to work, it is important to design a fool proof coding system to enable other coders to yield the same results. This speaks to any concerns of reliability and validity as well. Some researchers prefer to use the alternative 'Comparative Keyword Analysis' (CKA) software to analyze their data. It is similar in nature to the classical content analysis but offers that extra objectivity by removing "the pre-existing preferences of the researcher... as key words are identified purely because of their relative frequency" (p. 236)³². The researcher, in essence, is removed from the entire process here. This allows for patterns or features that may otherwise be overlooked by the researcher to emerge.

In more recent times, the technique has grown to include any procedures that work with categories. Babbie³³ offers up a concise summary by stating that content analysis is "essentially a coding operation" (p. 309) which can be used in both quantitative and qualitative studies. There does not appear to be a consensus on the technique's definition except that it is used to clearly identify aspects of text content³⁰. Whereas quantitative analysis entails the counting of explicit words, phrases, or categories, qualitative analysis refers to the identification of major themes²⁹.

The entirety of this research study on the cultural bias of the IELTS exam included both types of analyses. The one written up in detail here – the cultural content analysis – was of the classical kind. Software was not used to analyze the data here since the researcher wanted to isolate specific categories of culture.

The findings in this classical analysis were further supported by the findings of a qualitative analysis applied to the transcripts of 21 students who were interviewed in a focus group part of this study. In this part, students sat the reading components of some of the exams listed in the upcoming subject section then gathered to express their opinions on various matters related to the IELTS exam, including topics related to the time pressure, difficulty of questions, and familiarity of subject matter.

3.1 Subjects

The purpose of the cultural analysis of the contents found in the reading components of the IELTS exam was to determine the *existence* of culturally unfamiliar aspects in the readings. The 'subjects' – in this case 'the exam readings - were taken from past exams published by Cambridge. The exams were chosen for their topics and were purposely taken from a variety of books to reflect different years of tests. The following table outlines the exams and the titles of the passages used in this analysis.

Table 1. Cambridge IELTS Exams Reading Topics (Subjects of Study)

Book 6: Tests 1,2,3, 4	Sports Science in Australia 6.1.1 International Commerce and Trade 6.1.2 Climate Change and the Inuit 6.1.3 World Bank's Study of Public Transport Efficiency 6.2.1 Health and Lifestyle of Ageing Population Study 6.2.2 Development of Number System 6.2.3 Cinema: Beginnings and Effects 6.3.1 Motivation of Employees under Adverse Conditions 6.3.2 Anti-aging Research Advances 6.3.3 Effects of Pharmaceutical Marketing 6.4.1 Children of Literate Mothers Better Off 6.4.2 Bullying in Schools 6.4.3
Book 7: Tests 1,2,3,4	Bats: How Engineers Could Help Them See at Night 7.1.1 Water: history and current policies on water 7.1.2 Power of Suggestion: A New Learning Approach 7.1.3 The Resilience of Japanese Pagodas 7.2.1 The True Cost of Food 7.2.2 Makete Rural Transport Project 7.2.3 The Intelligence of Ants 7.3.1 Origins of the Native American Population 7.3.2 Forest Decline in Europe 7.3.3 One theory of how Pyramids were built 7.4.1 Alaska Salmon Industry 7.4.2 Effects of Unpredictable and Predictable Noise 7.4.3
Book 4: Tests 1,2,3,4	Study on Children's Scientific Knowledge of Rainforests 4.1.1 The Senses of Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises 4.1.2 Visual Symbols and the Blind 4.1.3 Death of Minority Languages 4.2.1 Alternative Medicine in Australia 4.2.2 The Brain and Playing 4.2.3 Lessons Learned from Street Youth Programs: Impoverished Young People 4.3.1 Power of Volcanoes 4.3.2 Obtaining Linguistic Data for Research 4.3.3 Human Sporting Performance 4.4.1

	The Nature and Aims of Archaeology 4.4.2 Scarcity of Health Care Resources 4.4.3
Book 2: Tests 1,2,3,4	Airports built on Water 2.1.1 Understanding of 'Health' 2.1.2 Deductive Reasoning in Children 2.1.3 Implementing Hotel Organization Model 2.2.1 Language Barrier Problems 2.2.2 Port Cities 2.2.3 Absenteeism in Nursing 2.3.1 Car Problems and Solutions 2.3.2 Biometrics- technology that identifies people 2.3.3 Green Consumers 2.4.1 Illiteracy and the Role of Pictures 2.4.2 Human Genome Project: Genes 2.4.3
Book 3: Tests 1,2,3,4	History of the Rocket 3.1.1 Dangers of 2nd Hand Smoke 3.1.2 Scientific Research Method 3.1.3 The Dung Beetle 3.2.1 Government Farming Policies 3.2.2 Concept of Role Theory 3.2.3 Ethnography Collections 3.3.1 Indian Influence on the Amazon 3.3.2 Hormone Levels and Moods 3.3.3 Air Pollution 3.4.1 History of Votes for Women 3.4.2 Measuring Organizational Performance 3.4.3

3.2 Instruments of Analysis

This content analysis was based on a limited number of Lazar's³⁴ list of cultural aspects: objects, products or things (eg. camel trappings), social structures and roles (eg. doctors as highly-esteemed citizens), customs and traditions (eg. a festival), proverbs and expressions (eg. hand in glove), political or historical settings (eg. Australia in 1994), superstitions or beliefs (eg. magic as evil), as well as geographical locations.

3.3 Procedures

The following steps were taken to conduct the 'content analysis':

- Step 1:** Decide what kind of analysis is going to occur. This refers to single word or set of words and if the coding will be for existence or frequency.
- Step 2:** Decide the number of concepts to code for. Concepts and categories need to be created and defined to limit the analysis.
- Step 3:** Come up with a coding system. Colours, numbers, and abbreviations are often used.
- Step 4:** Do the analysis and code the texts.
- Step 5:** Analyze the results

This study coded for *existence only* of Lazar's list of cultural capital. The procedural instructions fit the analysis the following way:

- Step 1:** Analysis is for single or set of words (=1 concept) and coded only for existence (not frequency)

Step 2: Six components of Lazar's³⁴ list of cultural components are to be used. If there are any references (either with or without an explanation or detailed description) to the following, they are to be recorded (an example is given for each category for a clearer understanding):

- a) cultural objects, products or items: a 'talking stick'
- b) customs, traditions, and festivals: La Tomatina
- c) political and historical terms or events: Germany 1945
- d) proverbs and idiomatic expressions: head for the hills
- e) social structures, relationships, and roles: father as homemaker
- f) beliefs and superstitions: magic is evil

To assist with the identification of a, b, c, e, and f the following question will be employed in the analysis: Is _____ (concept/product/belief) more/less part of my shared cultural knowledge than another cultural group's? If the answer is yes, it goes on the list.

Step 3: The following coding system and colour system is used:

- CO = cultural objects etc. (yellow)
- CT = customs and traditions (green)
- PH= political and historical references (pink)
- PE= proverbs and expressions (orange)
- SR= social structure etc. (blue)
- BS= beliefs and superstitions (purple)

Step 4: Texts are analyzed and colour-coded as per Step 2 coding. If the same reference is made more than once in the same passage, it will only be highlighted and counted once.

Step 5: Colour-coded instances are added up and put into chart format for quantitative analysis.

Step 6: Triangulation with other instructors occurs

This content analysis was, at least in part, subjective due to the interpretative nature involved with identifying cultural items and concepts. To remedy this, the list of cultural objects and beliefs and social roles (the other categories are clearly identifiable) isolated by the researcher were given to three other instructors for confirmation through discussions. An example of a subjective placement would be the term 'monsoon'. This word is found in one of the IELTS readings yet is not a term easily understood by all students. Even if the students did recognize this as a 'powerful rainstorm' found in India and Southeast Asia, only a small number of the students would have firsthand knowledge of this phenomenon. Perhaps, the word 'storm' would have been a less culturally laden word choice. The question 'Is ___a monsoon___ more/less part of my shared cultural knowledge than another cultural group's?' is applied. The answer, according to the researcher, is yes. It is less a part of my shared knowledge (a person from the West) than a person from India. To ensure the inclusion of this word on the list is correct, three other instructors look at the word and weigh in on the matter – from two perspectives: that of an Emirati student and that of other international students. If they all agree it is culturally laden, the item stays on the list. If they all agree it is not culturally laden, it is removed. If one or more disagrees, reasons for and against the item's removal from the list are discussed. The final say, however, remains with the researcher. This process was put in place to triangulate the data and give the content analysis greater validity.

To further triangulate the findings, 21 students sat the reading component of the exam. Upon completion, the students gathered into small groups to discuss their opinions on the topics, questions, and time pressure of the exam.

A separate analysis was done on references to geographical locations on the exams. Each reading passage was examined for the reference of cities and countries and regions in the world. If any location was repeated inside the passage, it was not recorded again. However, the analysis coded

for *frequency* over all the passages to establish the number of times certain locations were mentioned.

4. RESULTS

The content analysis of the different cultural components revealed that on average, one reading exam (equalling three passages) contained 13.6 cultural references in total (see figure1). Of all the categories, the two yielding the highest occurrences were those of ‘cultural objects’ and ‘political and historical settings’ with 4.2 references and 6.4 references respectively per exam. Examples of cultural objects found in the readings are things like marbles, horse-drawn carriages, the Holy Grail, manioc, igloos, and Indian susus. The political-historical category included the mentioning of protests, communism, women’s political movements, referendums, as well as a number of different locations and events around the world. The category of proverbs and idiomatic expressions had fewer incidences, coming in at 1.05 per exam. Examples of these included such expressions as ‘blind alleys’, ‘green lungs’, ‘canary in a mine’, ‘seeing through a darker glass’, and ‘going off the boil’. The category of social roles revealed 1.1 references per exam. This category contained concepts such as welfare for all, the social responsibility of businesses, and women as executives. The belief and superstition category had the fewest entries, second only to the category of customs and traditions which had none. On average, one exam had 0.85 references to a belief system or superstition. Examples of these include the belief that girls are more sympathetic to animals than boys, playing makes you intelligent, and ants are similar to human beings. For a more detailed look at the data see Tables 2 and 3 in the appendices section.

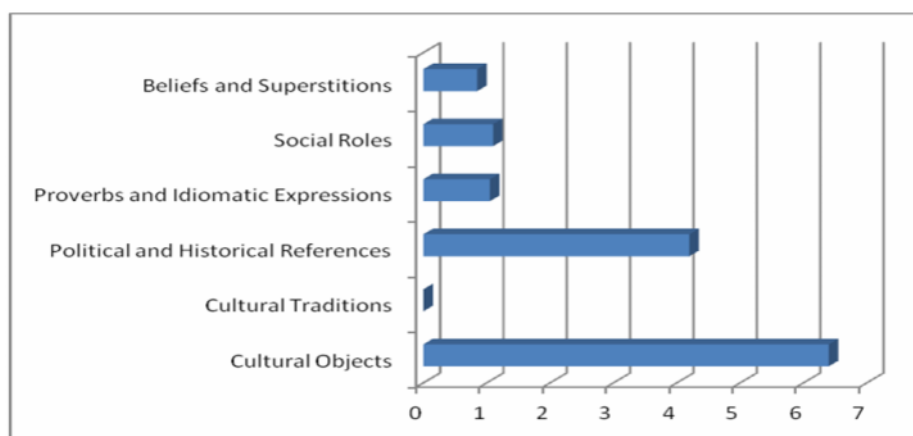


Figure 1. Cultural content analysis: Average number of occurrences per exam

For the geographical analysis, eight regions of the world were identified as categories with the references placed into them accordingly: the West (includes English speaking North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand), the Middle East, Asia, South America, Africa, and the Caribbean. The analysis found 139 references in total with the West coming in at 90 references or 65%. The Middle East was referred to 5 times in the passages, Asia 23 times, South America 14, Africa 6, and the Caribbean only once (see Figure 2).

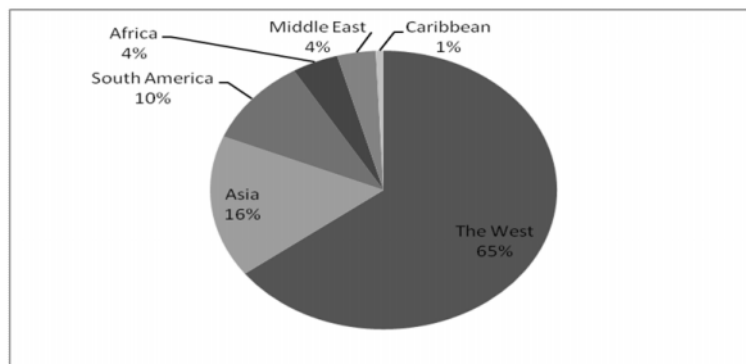


Figure 2. Geographical analysis results

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The data collected from the content analysis clearly shows the existence of cultural bias on the IELTS reading exam. To what degree and how much students are impacted by this depends on the culture and educational background from which they originate. From the perspective of Emirati candidates, however, the bias experienced on topics can be relatively high. Topics that relate to the Inuit and the Arctic Circle, for example, would be particularly unfamiliar to students –since students have had very little exposure to this subject matter. Other unfamiliar topics on the exams relate to religious aspects. Religious objects that are unrelated to Islam and belief systems contrary to Islamic teachings fall into this category. An example of the latter was a passage on the intelligence of ants rivalling that of a human's. In Islam, humans and animals do not hold the same status. Other topics on the exam related to social roles and structures unfamiliar to Emirati students. One such reading highlighted the concept of an entire community participating in the hands-on construction of a road – something unheard of in Emirati culture.

With the geographical analysis showing that only 4% of all places referenced in the reading exams were in the Middle East, with no references made to the UAE, students are bound to experience unfamiliarity in the texts. The interview data from the focus study group confirmed the existence of topic bias and highlighted the difficulties related to the unfamiliarity of topics. An excerpt from the transcripts follows (M stands for moderator):

- 3A: the reading is related to something religious and these kinds of things and... I don't know things the religion in east Asia
- 1A: if the article was about Burj Khalifa, maybe I'll understand most of it...
- 2B: you can read, you must have a knowledge, a background about the topics
- M: and when you have a new idea, how does this make you feel...?
- 3B: You must read it more than one time.
- M: so you don't know anything about [the topic of role theory]?
- 4B: why would we?
- 1D: [the topic of] pollution is familiar to us... but its wasits was a new thing... topic... we won't feel this comfortable
- M: And the topic [of women voting] itself is something you are familiar with?
- 3D/1D: No. No.
- 3D: But we heard about it.
- M: Do you vote personally, each of you?
- 1D: No
- M: Do you have a lot of background on this?
- 5D: Not much...
- 4D: the passage should be in our field... not outside
- M: In your field? Meaning?

- 4D: Like...not medical or something complicated we don't know
M: Is it something that you're familiar with? Street Youth?
3E: No.. because we don't have that kind of program here...but we understand it
M: Ok...let's look at the last reading 'Obtaining Linguistic Data'. What do you think of that title?
Did you know what it meant?
Mix: Ah no..no
1E: Nothing...it's my first time that I heard about it
4E: Me too.
M: How familiar are you with this topic [volcanoes]?
3E: Good because I read ... read about volcanoes before... in high school
4E: Yes.
1E: Yeah... because volcanoes is a general topic that's uh...uh... all the ...all the peoples are talking about. We see it in news and newspapers, TVs and programs so we have a small background

From this excerpt, it is clear to see that students recognize the importance of having background knowledge of the topics on the exam. Unfamiliar topics require students to re-read passages, disadvantaging them in terms of time constraints - a factor students brought up numerous times in the focus group:

- 1A: We don't have enough time for the third one
3A: I didn't even have the time to...
1A: No more time for you to think about it... with a small amount of time, you will freak out
4B: I take much time to read this passage
2B: It will take a long time
7B: [I feel] as they feel
2B: It's difficult for us because it's the 3rd passage and there is no time..
7B: Yeah... I couldn't read at all
2B: And sometimes when you are afraid, you give up... there is no time and you are nervous, you can't read.
1C: Has more academic words so it's more time... you have to deeply concentrate... so it's need time to be solved
3C: I think we need more time to do
5C: We never really had the chance...[to complete passage 3]
M: You need more time?
Mix: Yes...yeah
1C: Maybe 2 hours... 2 hours each
4D: I agree with that... it took a long time.
M: You missed two [questions]? Why?
2D: Because of the time
4D: I missed a lot of them ... the timing and the long passage
3D: I think the time...
4E: I didn't have the time...uh.. much time to understand the paragraph

The aforementioned comments suggest that the unfamiliarity of topics has a two-fold detrimental effect on students sitting the IELTS exam. Not only does it disadvantage them in terms of background knowledge but it also slows them down – both of which can have significant impact on their reading scores. The results of this study are found to contradict the claim of neutrality made by the IELTS Organization³ which states that “The IELTS approach is recognised as being fair, reliable and valid to all candidates, whatever their nationality, cultural background, gender or special needs.”

The IELTS Organization, according to the above statement, views reading as a neutral act. This means they prescribe to the traditional Autonomous Model of Literacy²⁵. This model sees reading as *only* the application of a set of skills. In this model, cultural assumptions are hidden and passed off as 'neutral'. In Street's Ideological Model of Literacy²⁵, reading is viewed as a social practice instead, one that is deeply embedded in one's culture. In this model of literacy, reading and writing are viewed as social acts and therefore direct expressions of social identity.

If literacy is socially constructed and consequently part of one's identity, then the testing of it, according to Street²⁵, is predisposed to bias. As a result, Street argues against the use of any form of standardized tests. His reasoning is that within any given standardized exam, there are cultural contexts which privilege only a certain few. Willis³⁵ agrees with Street on this point, suggesting that reading comprehension tests in particular are a product of dominant groups in society. Willis contends that these groups embed their own ideas of the world into the tests purposely to further advance their belief systems and culture.

Literacy, Street²⁵ argues, cannot be measured in the form of a standardized test where one size fits all as it differs from one context to another and one culture to another. This, then, would render standardized tests such as the IELTS inappropriate at best and ineffectual at worst – leading us to the inevitable question: how do we measure language proficiency on a mass scale like the IELTS or TOEFL if all exams are naturally riddled with cultural capital? Perhaps the answer is simple. We do not.

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APPENDICES

Table 2. Cultural Content Analysis Results

Test	CO	CT	PH	PE	SR	BS	Total
BK 2-1	3	0	1	1	0	0	5
BK 2-2	1	0	3	1	1	0	6
BK 2-3	6	0	5	2	2	1	16
BK 2-4	5	0	3	4	5	2	19
BK 3-1	5	0	5	1	0	0	11
BK 3-2	7	0	6	0	2	0	15
BK 3-3	10	0	4	0	0	1	15
BK 3-4	3	0	7	1	1	0	12
BK 4-1	7	0	1	0	1	2	11
BK 4-2	3	0	3	4	3	1	14
BK 4-3	9	0	5	0	0	1	15
BK 4-4	5	0	5	1	1	1	13
BK 6-1	8	0	4	1	1	0	14
BK 6-2	6	0	6	0	0	1	13
BK 6-3	7	0	2	0	0	2	11
BK 6-4	2	0	4	0	2	1	9
BK 7-1	9	0	4	2	1	1	17
BK 7-2	14	0	6	0	2	0	22
BK 7-3	10	0	4	2	0	2	18
BK 7-4	8	0	6	1	0	1	16
Total	128	0	84	21	22	17	272
Average	6.4	0	4.2	1.05	1.1	0.85	13.6

Table 3. Cultural Content Analysis Raw Result

Book 2, Test 1			
CO	typhoon	PH	protest
CO	monsoon	CO	a marble
PE	breakneck		
Book 2, Test 2			
CO	poisonous mushroom	PH	decision making forced down
PH	1970s America	PH	1960s Britain
SR	multi-skilled workforce	SR	particular organizational management
Book 2, Test 3			
CO	horse-drawn carriage	PH	a right
CO	a ring road	PH	a democratic community
CO	a tolled highway	PH	Europe 1965
CO	an athletic complex	PH	Europe 1993
CO	a housing estate	PH	1974 America
CO	an entertainment park	PE	to mushroom
SR	welfare	PE	to go through the roof
BS	absence fr. work = problem	SR	staff determines own work schedule
Book 2, Test 4			
CO	a green consumer	PH	1990-1994 Britain
CO	a reading primer	PH	1986 America
CO	the Holy Grail	PH	1989 Canada and America
CO	the Apollo Program	PE	Gone off the boil
CO	Frankenstein	PE	Armchair green
SR	social record of business	PE	Can't see the woods for the trees
SR	ethical spender	PE	See through a darker glass
SR	standard of literacy	SR	teacher's main concern =
SR	teacher's main task =	BS	animal testing is a big issue
BS	atom overshadowing lives of people		
Book 3, Test 1			
CO	fire arrows	PH	pigeon of Archytas 360 BC
CO	basket of fire	PH	13 th century China
CO	arrow as flying <u>saber</u>	PH	18 th century British-Indian conflict
CO	bamboo shaft	PH	19 th century Mexican conflict
CO	egg which moves and burns	PH	1992 US
PE	blind alley		

Book 3, Test 2			
CO	dung beetle	PH	1960's Australia
CO	scrub	PH	1982 US
CO	woodland	PH	1960 – 1985 Denmark
CO	bush fly	PH	1984 New Zealand
CO	buffalo fly	PH	former communist countries
CO	stripes on arm	PH	democratic society
CO	pips on shoulder	SR	woman executive
SR	role of government in environment		

Book 3, Test 3			
CO	coracles	PH	1946 Britain
CO	reed boat	PH	1945 Asia and Africa
CO	kayak	PH	1942 USA
CO	camel trappings	PH	1992 Rio de Janeiro
CO	thatched hut	BS	tribe seen as handicapped
CO	manioc	CO	Mistral
CO	<u>Foehn</u>	CO	siesta
CO	stag		

Book 3, Test 4			
CO	carpooling	PH	a (political) campaign
CO	war chest	PH	to face opposition
CO	ice rink	PH	1991 London
PE	chalk up the pavement	PH	1906 – 1914 London
		PH	Women's Political Union
		PH	a <u>march</u>
		PH	a fight for freedom and equality

Book 4, Test 4			
CO	Michael Johnson	PH	1968 Mexico City
CO	Inuit	PH	western Asia 3000 years ago
CO	snows of Alaska	PH	1950's and 60's in the West
CO	Agatha Christie	PH	1939-1945 World War
CO	Stephen Spielberg	PH	a liberal society
PE	doomsday scenario	BS	to have basic right to healthcare
SR	female athlete		

Book 6, Test 1			
CO	Australian Sports	PH	1996 Atlanta Olympics
CO	snowmobiles	PH	20 th century Europe
CO	igloos	PH	1970s America
CO	Thule people	PH	1985/86 North America
CO	kayaks	PE	canary in the mine
CO	sled	SR	state benefits
CO	Inuit Q		
CO	Inuit		

Book 6, Test 2

CO	indigenous of Tasmania	PH	political lobbies
CO	indigenous of South Africa	PH	democratic process
CO	Gothic word = <u>tachund</u>	PH	pressure groups
CO	<u>Tsimshian</u> language	PH	referendum
CO	canoe	PH	America 1994
CO	World Bank	PH	7th century Europe
BS	the self-reliance of elderly people		

Book 6, Test 3

CO	<u>Lumiere</u> Bros	PH	Paris 1895
CO	cowboy	PH	Italy 1912
CO	fairground attraction	BS	magic
CO	fruit fly	BS	film is most effective art form
CO	hamster	CO	rhesus monkey
CO	squirrel monkey		

Book 6, Test 4

CO	New York musical	PH	intervention campaign
CO	World Bank	PH	1979 <u>Nicagagua</u>
PH	UK 1992	PH	Ireland 1993
SR	National Literacy Crusade	SR	Pupils, parents, staff all make policies
BS	selling <u>pharma</u> requires ethical judgement		

Book 7, Test 1

CO	bats	PH	at height of Roman Empire
CO	fireflies	PH	the industrial revolution
CO	reservoirs	PH	1965 Japan
CO	faith healing	PH	1980 US
CO	aqueducts	PE	pinprick
CO	classical musicians	PE	phantom limb
CO	baroque musicians	SR	government ensures some for all
CO	Silva mind control	BS	mammalian are ancestors of ours
CO	faith healing		

Book 7, Test 2

CO	typhoon	CO	sea loch
CO	wooden pagoda	CO	donkey for transport
CO	<u>Toji</u> Temple	CO	wheelbarrow
CO	Buddhism	PH	1995 Hanshin earthquake
CO	tall pine tree	PH	1968 Japan
CO	<u>shinbashira</u>	PH	826 Japan
CO	tightrope walker	PH	6th century China
CO	skylark	PH	taxes
CO	lapwing	PH	1985 Tanzania
CO	corn bunting	SR	<u>gov.</u> role essential to sustainable farming
CO	hedgerow	SR	communities <u>participate</u> road construction

Book 7, Test 3

CO	Inuit	PH	France 20,000 years ago
CO	Aleut	PH	20 year period in N. America
CO	Navajo	PH	N. Asia migration 14,000 years ago
CO	Apache	PH	1990 Strasbourg
CO	Pima-Papago	PE	jingle
CO	Maya	PE	green lung
CO	Ticuna	BS	ants are like humans
CO	Na-Denes		
CO	Amerind		
BS	N.E. Asia is believed to be origin of New World people		

Book 7, Test 4

CO	sledges	PH	1999 Alaska
CO	hieroglyph	PH	1980 Los Angeles
CO	pyramid at Saqqara	PE	hanging in the air
CO	adobe roofs	BS	preferring peace and quiet
PH	Egypt 3000 years ago		
PH	1250 BC China		
PH	200 years ago Aleutian Islands		
PH	1940- 1959 Alaska		