

The Proliferation of IELTS Preparation Industry of Pakistan

Natasha Memon
Sumera Umrani

Abstract

This study examines the growth of the private English language institutes offering preparation for high-stakes International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in Pakistan. In Pakistan, as elsewhere, IELTS has assumed great significance on account of its gate-keeping function in emigration, higher education abroad and professional registration. Demand and candidature grow daily. However, specific conditions that pertain in Pakistan, mainly political instability, and major disparities in wealth and development, have a particular effect on the role of IELTS in the country.

The current study employs a qualitative approach and conducts an in-depth face-to-face survey of 20 IELTS preparation institutes of Pakistan. The survey was supplemented by informal conversational interviews with 20 IELTS test-preparers from two different institutes (one local and one international). The survey of the private English Language Teaching industry in Pakistan showed a radical expansion of IELTS preparation courses. Courses, although relatively expensive, are very short and most test-preparers enter them with lower English proficiency than is appropriate for IELTS. The test-preparers have high expectations from the course regarding improvement of their English proficiency which are generally not met. Disappointed test-takers hold some beliefs that their IELTS course and test will be of benefit to them in Pakistan. We argue that because public education is not meeting the demand for English, IELTS is now perceived as a route of English education and general certification, and a badge of middle class status if not actual material gain. These findings have implications for providers of state education in Pakistan. They need to address the lack of publicly funded English education and English qualifications.

Key Words: ELT industry, Impact, Gate-keeping, Systemic, Badge.

1. Introduction

The IELTS is an international standardised test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers (IELTS, 2001, p.2). IELTS measures both academic and general English language proficiency, and therefore consists of both an 'Academic' and a 'General Training' module, each with four components: Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. Students who take the IELTS are scored in bands from 0-9 (non-user to expert user). Of all the internationally acclaimed English language proficiency tests (such as Test Of English as a Foreign Language, Test Of English for International Communication and so on) IELTS enjoys a high status as one of the most widely taken international English language proficiency tests as it is accepted by tertiary institutions, immigration authorities and professional associations around the world (Coley, 1999; Davies, 2008; Green, 2006; Hyatt and Brooks, 2009; Merrifield, 2012; Merrylees, 2003; and O'Loughlin, 2011). There is heightened awareness of IELTS, as a consequence of its gate-keeping function in these areas, and the test has assumed enormous significance in Pakistan.

The increasing demand for IELTS has led to proliferation of IELTS preparation courses in Pakistan. The IELTS preparation courses offered by private English language centres in Pakistan are part of a broader privatisation of English Language Teaching in South Asia (Billah, 2010; Hawkey, 2006; and Moore, Stroupe, and Mahony, 2012). The offer

General English courses as well as preparation for the IELTS exam. Due to lack of availability of research in this field, there are no statistics available on the number of institutes and the number of test-preparers. Only Coleman (2010) estimates that there are 256 centres in Pakistan, but we suspect that this number does not include the numerous informal neighbourhood tutors found in abundance throughout the major cities of Pakistan. No research to date has been conducted into the private English language-teaching sector which has been on the increase for more than two decades. There is a gap in the existing body of IELTS impact literature which this study aims to fill from a South Asian context.

2. Literature Review

Read and Hayes (2003) in their two-phase study surveyed language schools in New Zealand which included both private language schools (independent commercial enterprises) and teaching centres belonging to public universities. Their survey aimed to find out about the nature of courses offered by these schools for the preparation of international students for the Academic module of IELTS. They mailed questionnaires to 98 language schools throughout New Zealand to collect information about the types and lengths of courses offered, a brief profile of their students (focusing on their motivations for taking the test, and their perceptions of it), the teaching materials used by these schools, and a profile of their teachers (qualifications, experience and so on). In total 78 language schools returned the questionnaires with responses which, according to Read and Hayes (2003), showed a high level of co-operation from the schools and their teachers. The questionnaires were supplemented by follow up interviews with 23 teachers of IELTS preparation courses chosen randomly from the sample of 78 centres. These interviews provided detailed information about the ways in which courses were conducted and the impact of the test, as perceived by teachers, on students' overall preparation for academic study at tertiary level.

Through the survey of 78 institutes, Read and Hayes (2003) found that the majority of the New Zealand centres were private language schools, and that they had mainly Asian students enrolled on their courses. 60 centres reported that they mainly offered IELTS preparation courses, while a few centres had courses like EAP and TOEFL preparation. Read and Hayes suggested that this indicated a strong preference for the IELTS test in New Zealand, and a subsequent wide availability of IELTS preparation courses to international students in the country. These schools had been preparing students for five years or more. The schools mentioned that their students were mainly motivated to take the test in order to gain admission to tertiary institutions, with a small number of candidates interested in immigration and professional registration. Read and Hayes discovered through teacher interviews that nearly half of the centres used a specific assessment procedure to screen students for their IELTS preparation courses and some of the institutes reported using IELTS test tasks for screening and admitting applicants who showed some degree of variation within the required 4.5 to 5.5 band score.

Some teachers confirmed that students at intermediate level were accepted on to the course, while some accepted students only at upper intermediate level. Some language schools also had to accept lower level students. Read and Hayes explained that:

Some schools operating on a commercial basis in a competitive environment found it necessary to accept lower level students into an IELTS course to avoid losing them to another school, in which case teachers had to cope as best as they could (2003:164).

The majority of the language schools reported having a separate IELTS course with a median length of 50 hours, while a very few reported having only six hour, part-time courses, just to familiarise the students with the test tasks. The profile of IELTS teachers in these centres suggested that many had certificates such as CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults), and some had experience of teaching, while a few others were selected on the basis of their knowledge of IELTS. Read and Hayes therefore reported that ‘IELTS preparation is generally entrusted to well-qualified and experienced teachers’ (2003:165). The teachers tended to use IELTS preparation materials in classes where the focus was primarily on practice of the test. The IELTS test was mainly preferred to TOEFL in New Zealand by both students and teachers who had positive views about it, considering it to be the best proficiency test according to its suitability for academic study.

Hawkey (2006) argues that the “washback” and impact issues are complex in nature and require a range of approaches. Hawkey’s IELTS research seeks answers to questions on the “washback” and impact of the test on the IELTS test-taking population, classroom activities in IELTS-related classes, IELTS teaching materials (including textbooks), and other users of the test. The pre-survey (of more than 300 IELTS centres worldwide) collected data on centres administering IELTS, their course duration, contacts, numbers, teachers, and the main IELTS textbooks. A pre-survey questionnaire was sent to over 300 centres and other test venues worldwide. The purpose of the questionnaire was to get updated information on the current courses for language tests, dates and durations of such courses, the numbers and nationalities of students, teacher strength and the textbooks and other materials used by these centres. This data helped informed the choosing of IELTS centres for the main data collection phase of Hawkey’s (2006) study. The numbers foreseen for Phase 3 were a case study sample of around 40 centres, representing IELTS test taker nationality and language populations. The pre-survey results suggested that most centres surveyed (83%) run courses for IELTS preparation (these were mixed centres like university centres, British Council and IDP Education Australia centres, and other types of language teaching institutions). Some centres also offer preparation for TOEFL, TOEIC and other Cambridge ESOL exams. These centres offer the preparation courses for different durations (1-2 weeks, 3-5 weeks, 6-8 weeks, 9-12 weeks, 13-16 weeks and longer). These centres have different numbers of students enrolled in their courses. The pre-survey provided a useful list of IELTS preparation course textbooks they used. On the basis of this pre-survey, appropriate centres were selected for the third phase of the IELTS impact study. The phases of Hawkey’s IELTS impact study included both face-to-face and distance data collection, depending on the location of the centre. The reason was to avoid disruption at the target institutions. For the IELTS impact study, centres were selected according to the pre-survey results of more than 300 institutions.

3. Research Methodology

We discussed in the introduction of this study that the overall aim of the study is to examine the growth of private English language centres offering preparation for the IELTS exam. In order to achieve this overarching aim, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What types of private English language institutes are available in Pakistan?

RQ2: What are the differences between private local and international institutes?

To recapitulate, the data for the present study was collected using face-to-face surveys, followed by informal conversational interviews with test-preparers of two institutes. Below we will discuss each of these methods individually and the ways of data analysis.

3.1 Face-to-face survey of the private institutes

We outlined in the introduction of this study that General English and IELTS preparation courses in Pakistan are only offered by private language centres. There are no state-owned language centres or institutes typically associated with universities in Pakistan which offer these courses as is mostly the case in developed countries. There has been a significant growth of these centres in Pakistan since 1990 and today they are very noticeable, but to date there is no published literature in Pakistan on the growth of private English Language centres, and in order to fill this gap, we have conducted a survey of these language centres to obtain a broad overview of teaching institutes in Pakistan. We suspect that this is where IELTS is having the greatest impact financially, both on test-preparers and the test preparation providers. Being a part of Pakistani society, we know the context very well. We had background knowledge and information about the IELTS preparation industry. Our prior knowledge of these institutes, and information gathered through newspapers, websites and blogs, could have been sufficient to form the backdrop. Conducting face-to-face surveys in the institutes was a conscious step to avoid any bias regarding these institutes and to ensure objectivity in the data collection procedure. This way we were able to avoid preconceptions about these institutes.

The majority of the private English language centres are locally owned, whereas a few are international franchises, thus we have two broad categories; locally owned and internationally owned private institutes. In comparison to Hawkey (2006) and Read and Hayes (2003), the present study conducted face-to-face surveys in the private institutes, which is more advantageous than mail, online and telephone surveys as the researcher is able to spend some time (at least 2-3 hours) in each centre gathering information, as well as observing and if possible, speaking to students and teachers. We started our fieldwork with a face-to-face survey of private institutes in Pakistan, which was important for the present impact study in order to establish the following:

- Range of different types of institutes (offering General English and IELTS preparation courses),
- The ratio of local to international providers of these courses.
- The types of courses offered (such as General English, IELTS, TOEFL, and any other courses).
- Duration of their courses.
- Their entry requirements.
- The profiles of their students and teachers (specifically the typical socioeconomic status of their students).
- The fee structure of these providers.

Compared with mail, online and telephone surveys, face-to-face surveys offer significant advantages in terms of the amount and complexity of the data that can be collected (Doyle, 2005). Face-to-face surveys typically offer the highest response rates obtainable. They also offer advantages in terms of data quality, as the researcher has control over the data collection process and environment. If the respondent finds a question to be confusing or ambiguous, they can ask for clarification which would not be possible with a mail survey (Doyle, 2005). In the present context of the study, there are some particular difficulties with mail or online surveys; for example,

electricity failure for about 12-14 hours is very common which would delay filling out online surveys. Also, most of the institutes do not have either computer or internet connections so online questionnaires could not be used. Mailing questionnaires was also not considered a reliable way to gather information as people would either not fill in the form or post it back to the researcher in self-addressed stamped envelopes. Therefore, face-to-face surveys best fit the purpose of the study to gather information from the private institutes.

In the present context, it was practically difficult to conduct a survey of these private institutes because the institutes do not allow access to the researchers and they are reluctant to share any information. We managed to access the institutes by showing official letters from the University of Edinburgh and sometimes by using personal contacts. The survey was carried out in Karachi and Hyderabad over a two-month period. Our data collection cities are representative of tier 1 and tier 2 cities in Pakistan: Karachi is the largest city in Pakistan, is the capital of the province of Sindh, and representative of tier 1 cities in the country. Hyderabad, on the other hand, is the second largest city in Sindh province, and representative of tier 2 cities. Before conducting this survey, the relevant information regarding these institutes (such as locations, opening hours, and contact numbers) was gathered for some thirty-seven centres, through newspaper advertisements, their websites, internet blogs and street billboards. Some centres were not appropriate for inclusion due to their remote location or, for security reasons travelling in their neighbourhood areas was risky for a lone woman, and some other institutes did not allow access, so ultimately we included twenty private centres through 'stratified random sampling'; fifteen from Karachi and five from Hyderabad. The chosen sample of institutes (N=20) for face-to-face surveys are representative of a larger group of institutes (local and international) which are prevalent in cities like Karachi and Hyderabad.

We had a very limited access of these centres which were included for survey. For example, they did not allow me to see their classrooms, observe any IELTS preparation classes or to speak with their teachers regarding test preparation materials and methods. Stratified sampling involves dividing the population into homogenous groups, each group containing subjects with similar characteristics (Gray, 2009). We mentioned earlier that there are two broad categories of institutes in Pakistan: local and international institutes. The international institutes do not have any sub-groups, so we only divided the local institutes into different sub-groups (e.g. neighbourhood tutors, chain institutes and so on) and then randomly chose institutes from the different strata. These constituted a representative sample of private institutes offering General English and IELTS preparation courses in Pakistan.

The information from the chosen institutes was gathered via informal conversational interviews with the administration staff. None of the language centres permitted me to record the interviews. This did not affect the data collection as we used an information sheet which made it convenient to fill in all the relevant information in appropriate boxes during the interview. The main purpose of these face-to-face surveys was to collect information about these centres rather than eliciting attitudes so the verbatim quotes are not so important for these interviews. Furthermore, we also made detailed notes immediately after conducting interviews, so there was no issue with not tape recording these interviews. As discussed above, administering questionnaires like Hawkey (2006) and Read and Hayes (2003) was not a reliable method, therefore gathering information through informal conversational interviews was the most suitable method in the present context. Interviews are

particularly useful for getting in-depth information around the topic (Kvale, 2007). For example, with interviews we had the opportunity to probe or ask follow up questions unlike questionnaire surveys. In each interview with the administration staff, we took notes on: location, name of the institute, types of courses offered, duration of General English and IELTS preparation courses, placement test, classroom setup, average number of students, tuition fees, teaching materials and other additional information. Most of the administration staff preferred to speak to me in Urdu, while only a few people provided information in English. It is mainly because the administrative staff is neither well-educated nor fluent speakers of English. We spent almost 45 hours gathering information from the centres, spending an average of 2 hours at each one. Before gathering any information, we visited most of the centres more than once to contact their owners/managers to gain access to collect the data. We were able to speak with these owners only for about 10-15 minutes explaining them about our research and getting their consent to conduct a survey. To do this, we sometimes had to wait for an hour or so due to their busy schedules. The consent form detailed all relevant information about my research, assuring confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any stage. Once we received their consent, we had to visit some of the centres more than once due to the busy schedule of their administrative staff or for certain other reasons (such as electricity failure, and unplanned strikes).

We mentioned earlier that we were not allowed to record the interviews conducted with the administration staff at the private centres. We sometimes noted things in English, for example the fee structure, and duration of their classes. But any other information, we noted in Urdu. To analyse the face-to-face surveys, we initially translated any information which was written in Urdu as most of the administration staff preferred to speak in Urdu. We then prepared Microsoft Excel Spreadsheets and filled in the information for every participating institute in the relevant boxes. The information was broadly categorised under the type of institute in the presentation of findings (Doyle, 2005).

3.2 Informal conversational interviews with IELTS test-preparers

We conducted informal conversational interviews with twenty IELTS preparation students at two IELTS preparation centres from the chosen sample of institutes from face-to-face surveys. After conducting the face-to-face survey of private institutes, we wanted to find out the opinions or feelings of the students regarding their preparation course. We employed informal conversational interviews to further reduce any subjectivity in this research (Gray, 2009).

The interview guide for the students was prepared using Kvale's (2007) question types including: introductory questions, follow-up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, direct questions, indirect questions and interpreting questions. We started the interview with a short briefing session where we told the respondents about the purpose of my interview. The respondents were then informed about their anonymity and their right to withdraw from the interview at any point (the consent form was then signed by all the participants). Next, we told them generally about the questions to be covered, and asked their permission to record the interview. We assured them that the recordings would only be handled by me and that they would be transcribed and then deleted. All of the respondents gave their approval for using a recorder. Throughout the interview, we also used a combination of probes to obtain more information from the respondent, for instance asking the respondent to

further explain, or clarify, a previous utterance (Ary et al., 2006), and pauses of at least 5 seconds, to give the respondent space to keep talking, or to think about the question posed (ibid, 2006). After the interviews we spent some time taking down notes about our immediate thoughts about the interview.

The students were invited to discuss their overall impression of the preparation course, such as the duration of the course, teaching methods, materials used in the classroom, the environment of the institute, fee structure, their satisfaction with the course, and their expectations about their IELTS results. An informal conversational interview scheme was designed to achieve a balance between the freedom that the participants required to voice their opinions and my own research pursuits (Gray, 2009). The interviews enabled me to gain insight into the participants' understanding of their own experience and the teaching/learning process. At the end of the interview, we also invited the participants to raise any issues related to their IELTS preparation course. Each participant was interviewed separately in an empty classroom, or a café in the language centre for about 5-7 minutes.

4. Findings of the study and Discussion

4.1 Face-to-face survey results: types of private institutes in Pakistan

The survey of private institutes was conducted to find out about the types of preparation courses available in Pakistan and the differences between these institutes. Private English language institutes in Pakistan differ according to the courses they offer and the social classes they cater for. Some of the private centres offer a wide range of General English language courses at different levels, Business English courses, as well as preparation for international exams like IELTS, TOEFL, GRE, GMAT and SAT, and local exams like the Central Superior Services of Pakistan. Some of the centres also exclusively offer IELTS preparation courses, while some others offer preparation for entry tests for private universities in Pakistan along with the IELTS preparation courses. The majority of English language institutes claim to make learners proficient English users within a stipulated time, and charge them heavily for doing so. Most of the institutes cater for people of less elite socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, and thus large numbers of institutes are found in low-income residential areas, whereas very few are located in high-income residential areas. These institutes are mostly owned by local Pakistanis, but a small number are international franchises. The two types can be broadly categorised as:

- Locally owned private institutes.
- Internationally owned private institutes.

Within the broad category of locally owned institutes, there are a number of different types. First of all there are centres which are owned by a single individual who is commonly known as a neighbourhood tutor. The second type of private institutes are established in an office/commercial space and a third type has more than one branch. Figure 1 below shows the division of locally owned private institutes. Each of these institutes will be further discussed individually in the subsequent sections below.

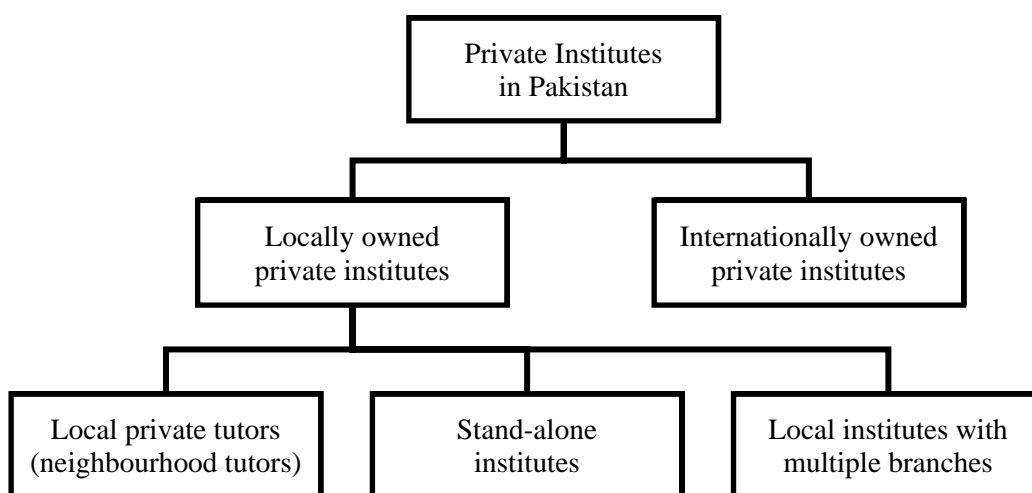


Figure 1 Types of private institutes in Pakistan

4.1.1 Local private tutors/Neighbourhood tutors

In figure 1 above, the first category of local institutes comprises self-employed tutors. The centres are owned by one person, who is also usually the sole tutor at the institute, but who will typically employ some administrative staff. There is a large number of these local private tutors in the low-income residential areas of Karachi and Hyderabad, whereas they are never found in high income areas. These institutes are set up in the proprietor's small flat (usually consisting of one bedroom) or small bungalow. Such institutes typically offer IELTS preparation alone. Students interested in a General English language course or Business English course are also accepted by these tutors but they are encouraged to attend IELTS preparation classes to improve their English. None of these tutors have a placement test which shows that, due to the fierce competition in the market, they accept everyone applying for their course. The class comprises 12-15 students or more, depending on the number of admissions. The private tutors offer IELTS preparation classes of various lengths; some of them for five hours in total, some for one week and others for one month.

These institutes are not very well equipped; classrooms have chairs and a whiteboard, but no audio-visual facilities. Courses are not very expensive (charging roughly 5000 PKR, US\$ 51) and are therefore easily affordable for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds (lower class). All private tutors tend to have a similar fee structure. The students look for the most reasonable price on the market, and they are easily attracted by tutors offering them a slight discount (typically 100 or 200 PKR, US\$ 1-2). The institutes are usually attended by people who live nearby because their mobility is very limited. Some examples of private tutors in the city of Karachi and Hyderabad include Sir Raja Amir, Sir S.M Imran, Sir Rymenz, Sir Faisal, Sir Yousuf, Sir Aslam, Sir Naeem and Sir Panday. These are only a few examples of such tutors, who are found in abundance all over Karachi and Hyderabad in low-income residential areas.

Some of the tutors also replace their names with a more American or British-sounding one to present themselves as native English speakers. These tutors offer a free demonstration class, in which they attempt to convince potential clients that only by preparing with them will they achieve high IELTS band scores. Some of the neighbourhood tutors also offer incentives like free IELTS preparation books and CDs or fee discounts. All such institutes in Pakistan are unregistered, do not pay tax, and are therefore unchecked by the law.

The private tutors offering English language classes and preparation for international exams like IELTS and TOEFL advertise in local English and Urdu newspapers (such as, The Dawn, Daily Times, The News and Jang), on billboards, as well as on different websites. In table 2 below, we have presented information about all the private tutors surveyed in Karachi and Hyderabad. These tutors' classes are well attended and there is stiff competition for new business between them in the private English Language Teaching market.

Name of the Tutor	Location	Courses offered	Duration of their IELTS courses	Fee structure of IELTS courses	Any incentives
Sir Raja Amir	G.I Town Karachi	IELTS preparation	5 hours	5,000 PKR (US\$ 51)	Free IELTS material
Sir S.M. Imran	G.I Town Karachi	IELTS preparation	One month (24 hours)	5,000 PKR (US\$ 51)	No
Sir Faisal	G.I Town Karachi	IELTS preparation	One week (8-10 hours)	5,000 PKR (US\$ 51)	Free consultancy for UK visa
Sir R.M Farooq	G.I Town Karachi	IELTS preparation, General English, Business English	IELTS for one month (24 hours)	5,000 PKR (US\$ 51)	No
Sir Vicky	Malir Town Karachi	IELTS preparation	One month (24 hours)	5,000 PKR (US\$ 51)	Free IELTS CDs
Sir Rymenz	G.I Town Karachi	IELTS preparation	One month (24 hours)	5,000 PKR (US\$ 51)	Free IELTS books
Sir Riyan	Latifabad Hyderabad	IELTS preparation	One month (24 hours)	4,000 PKR (US\$ 41)	No
Sir Panda	Old city Hyderabad	IELTS preparation	One month (24 hours)	3,000 PKR (US\$ 31)	No

Table 2 Comprehensive information about local private tutors

The information presented in table 2 above shows that private tutors mostly offer IELTS preparation alone, except for Sir R.M Farooq who also offers General English and Business English courses. They typically offer an IELTS preparation course over a month (meeting three times a week, for 24 hours in total). An exception is Sir Raja Amir who claims to prepare students within the shortest possible time of 5 hours. Their fee structures are almost the same, with a few exceptions. The growth of these centres suggests that IELTS preparation courses are in greater demand in low-income residential areas. They are mostly attended by extremely low proficiency students, so it is unlikely that their students would get the required IELTS scores to study abroad. Even if any of these students do manage to get above a 4.0 band score, they do not have the resources to go abroad. There is no information available about what the remainder do with their IELTS certificate when they do not manage to go abroad.

4.1.2 Stand-alone institutes

Within this same category of locally owned institutes, there are some centres which have a dedicated building with at least three or four classrooms, an administrative

office and a small staff room. These institutes cater primarily for lower middle class people but sometimes also attract people from the lower class. Students from the local neighbourhood can easily access these centres. These institutes have very deceptive names like Anglophile, British Academy, The American Centre, British English Language Learning, Brit-Pak school, and The American Communication Council to name just a few. They also, like the private local tutors, offer a free demonstration class. Classrooms are furnished simply and very few of these institutes are equipped with audio-visual facilities for learning English. Some of them offer English language courses (for one month or longer), while others only offer preparation for IELTS and TOEFL. They charge almost double or more for their IELTS preparation compared to the private tutors. The staff members are not highly qualified. They are university or college graduates (in any subject) and they are not required to provide any English language certificate or degree related to English language teaching. They usually have 12-15 students per session but sometimes the classes are crowded, with 20 or more students (depending on the uptake), as, like the private tutors, there is no admission or placement test. These institutes are better known than those of the individual tutors because of their tall and prominent buildings, and their names, which show their apparent affiliation with American or British institutes. These institutes also advertise in local newspapers and on billboards. Unlike private tutors, these institutes have websites where they provide course information. We surveyed four institutes in this category: The American Centre (TAC), Anglophile and Pak-British institutes in Karachi and the British English Language Learning (BELL) in Hyderabad. The information gathered from these institutes is summarised in table 3 below.

Name of the institute	Location	Courses offered	Duration of their IELTS courses	Fee structure of IELTS course	Any incentives
The American Centre (TAC)	PECHS Karachi	IELTS preparation, GE, Business English	Six weeks (36 hours)	12,000 PKR (US\$ 123)	Free IELTS books
Pak-British Institute	Milir Cant	IELTS preparation	One month (24 hours)	10,000 PKR (US\$ 100)	No
Anglophile	G.I Town	IELTS preparation	Six weeks (36 hours)	10,000 PKR (US\$ 100)	No
British English Language Learning (BELL)	Saddar Hyderabad	IELTS preparation	Three months (80 hours)	25,000 PKR (US\$ 256)	Free IELTS books

Table 3 Comprehensive information of stand-alone institutes

It can be noticed in table 3 above that there is a variation in the duration and fee structure of the language centres in this category. Due to their relatively high fees compared to the private tutors', they are also attended by a few people from the upper middle class. These institutes, like the private tutors, also make exaggerated claims and guarantee high scores to their test-preparers in newspaper advertisements. Due to the high enrolment of people with low-proficiency in English and similar limitations in teaching as the private tutors, it is unlikely that the test-preparers will go abroad,

due to financial constraints and/or not attaining the required IELTS scores, similar to their counterparts attending private tutors. Below we will discuss the third category of locally owned institutes.

4.1.3 Local institutes with multiple branches

The largest types of local institutes are those which have at least three or four branches in one city, and sometimes they may have a branch in other cities as well. Institutes like Domino English Learning Centre, Anees Hussain, Anees Hassan, Aptech, Alpha Institute, Innovative Learning Centre and Parlance all fall within this category. They are mainly attended by upper middle class people, with some clients from the lower and lower middle classes. These types of institutes are mostly located in low-income residential areas of Karachi and Hyderabad, but can occasionally be found in expensive areas as well. They offer English language courses, Business English, IELTS and TOEFL preparation classes like many other local institutes. They have, in their buildings, some classrooms, a reception area, a waiting room, an administration room, and a staff room. Such institutes commonly advertise in newspapers and on billboards. Unlike private tutors and local private centres, they do not offer any incentives or free demonstration classes. These institutes provide comprehensive information on their websites as well. They have a placement test for their General English and Business English courses, but, similar to other categories of local institute, there is no test for their IELTS preparation course. There is no maximum limit on the intake per session, and classes usually have between 12 and 15 students but occasionally more (20 or above), depending on the number of admissions. The teachers at these centres are also quite similar to the private tutors and those in the stand-alone institutes in terms of their qualifications. Some of the better attended institutes surveyed, which fall into this category, are presented in table 4 below.

Name of the institute	Number of branches	Location	Courses offered	Duration of their IELTS courses	Fee structure of IELTS courses
Domino English learning centre	5	Karachi	General English and IELTS preparation	One month (24 hours)	15,000 PKR (US\$ 150)
Innovative English learning centre	3	Karachi	General English and IELTS preparation	One month (24 hours)	11,000 PKR (US\$ 123)
Alpha institute	3	Hyderabad	General English and IELTS preparation	Two months (40 hours)	15,000 PKR (US\$ 150)
Anees Hussain	5	Karachi and Hyderabad	Entrance tests for local universities and IELTS preparation	Two months (40 hours)	16,000 PKR (US\$ 160)
Pakistan American Cultural Centre (PACC)	3	Karachi and Hyderabad	General English and IELTS preparation	Two months (40 hours)	7,000 PKR (US\$ 70)
Aptech	3	Karachi, Hyderabad and Lahore	IELTS, Computer courses	Two months (40 hours)	14,000 PKR (US\$ 140)

Table 4 Comprehensive information of private institutes with multiple branches

It can be seen in table 4 above that these institutes have a number of branches, which can be found in the same or in other cities, and also that they all offer other, different courses as well their IELTS preparation courses. Their fee structure is slightly higher than the second category of private institutes except for the PACC institute which offers the IELTS preparation course for the cheapest price (7,000 PKR, US\$ 71) which is only slightly higher than the fee charged by the private neighbourhood tutors. The PACC course is therefore mainly attended by lower middle class with a few students from the lower class. As mentioned earlier, the majority of students attending these centres belong to the upper middle class and therefore tend to be slightly more proficient than students attending the other two types of local institutes. They have a thin chance of getting a band score of above 4.0, to meet the requirements for going abroad. Some of the students might also be able to find funds of their own while others look for scholarships to go abroad. In the next section, we will discuss the second main category of private institutes which are those owned by international franchises.

4.1.4 Internationally owned private institutes

The second category of institutes, which are internationally owned, are very rare in Pakistan and are found only in big cities like Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore, with one or two branches in each. In Karachi there are three internationally owned institutes, namely, Berlitz, Inlingua, and Queen's Language Centre. These institutes have all been established very recently in Pakistan (after 2000). They are located in high-income residential areas of Karachi. Two international institutes were surveyed and the information regarding these is presented in table 5 below.

Name of the institute	Number of branches	Location	Courses offered	Duration of their IELTS courses	Fee structure of IELTS courses
Berlitz (American franchise)	2	Sh.Faisal, Clifton Cantt	General English course, IELTS and TOEFL preparation, Arabic, and French, and call centre training	Two months (40 hours)	22,000 PKR (US\$ 223)
Inlingua (Swiss franchise)	1	Zamzama (near Clifton Cantt)	General English course, IELTS and TOEFL preparation and French.	Two months (40 hours)	25,000 PKR (US\$ 253)

Table 5 Comprehensive information of internationally owned private institutes

The international private institutes offer a General English course which is regarded as a stepping stone to IELTS and is offered to those who fail to attain a pass mark in their placement test for the IELTS preparation course. The administration staff in these institutes explained that the majority of the students on their General English courses are aiming to move on to the IELTS preparation course. These internationally owned institutes have a limited intake of students (10-12 students per class), so their classes are never crowded like some of the locally owned institutes. Inlingua is slightly more expensive than Berlitz, but both of them would be too

expensive for lower middle class families. These institutes are largely attended by people belonging to elite families (those of landlords and businessmen). A few are upper middle class, but they can only afford to study there by doing part-time jobs.

The classrooms in the international institutes are air-conditioned, and well-decorated with good quality furniture. Their classrooms are well equipped with multimedia technology and a CD player, facilities rarely found in locally owned institutes. Other facilities provided at these centres include free photocopying and printing on campus and standby generators to cope with electricity failure which is a major problem in most of the cities in Pakistan. They possess computer labs for their students to improve their listening skills and practise online material. The faculty members of the internationally owned institutes are all postgraduates in different subjects, some of them in linguistics, and are therefore highly competent English speakers. Sometimes they also recruit native speakers of English for their General English course. A full training is provided to all their teachers after recruitment as the centres have their own syllabus and teaching methods, especially for the General English course. These institutes run their sessions from morning to evening, attracting housewives in the mornings, college and university students in the afternoon and professionals in the evening. The students attending these institutes come from a better educational and financial background compared to students attending the private, locally owned institutes. Therefore, these students have a relatively high chance of achieving their required band scores and have sufficient funds to go abroad.

The findings from the survey of private English language institutes suggest that the majority of them are owned by local Pakistani people and found in the low-income residential areas of Pakistan. There is no limit on student intake in the lower end private institutes whereas international institutes like Berlitz only take 10-12 students per session. Due to the tough competition, these local institutes do not have any placement test for IELTS which contrasts with the survey results of Read and Hayes (2003) where students were only admitted to an IELTS preparation course in New Zealand if they achieved around a 5.0 band score. Fierce competition means that these language centres have to accept lower level proficiency students (below 5.0 band score) in order to avoid losing them to other language schools. Read and Hayes (2003) also reported some language schools accepting lower proficiency students in New Zealand in a competitive environment. The situation is similar in Pakistan but on a much larger scale as it is very common for most of the institutes to accept students with a low proficiency level (those achieving below a 5.0 band score) in order to avoid losing them to other private centres.

Candidates belonging to lower-middle or lower income groups with limited proficiency in English find it difficult to emigrate, mainly because of limited sources of funding. The majority of Pakistani IELTS preparation teachers in locally owned institutes are not well qualified and experienced compared to those found in other parts of the world such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Elder and O'Loughlin, 2003; Green, 2007; Read and Hayes, 2003).

4.2 Interviews with IELTS test-preparers

We conducted informal conversational interviews 20 test-preparers chosen from two different private institutes (PACC; a local institute and Berlitz; an international institute). This further helped to understand the differences between the private local and international institutes. It was a short interview session where we briefly asked students about their satisfaction levels with the IELTS preparation course and their

perception about their improvement during the course. Students were also encouraged to discuss anything relating to the IELTS preparation class (like classroom setup, the duration of the course and the fee structure). The questions related to these topics helped to find out about their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with any of the elements of the course.

4.2.1 Students' views about their IELTS preparation course

Berlitz students' comments showed an overall satisfaction with the preparation they received, with three or four students completely dissatisfied with the course. At PACC, however, more students demonstrated a lack of satisfaction with the preparation course. The following examples illustrate that the Berlitz students were generally satisfied with the materials and methods employed by the tutor, as the students said:

Masoom: I am happy with Berlitz course, I think tutor is good and she is very helpful. It was difficult for me to study at home because I find not much time but when I took admission here I come to study here, so I hope I will get my required band in IELTS.

Hiba: Berlitz is the best institute to prepare for IELTS. In terms of teaching, course, methodology, and syllabus – it is one of the best institutes. The tutor was very helpful, co-operative and the course was good. I enjoyed studying at Berlitz.

Despite their overall satisfaction, the following students at Berlitz complained about the fees and the short duration of the course:

Amir: It was good to study at Berlitz. I like teaching of our tutor. But still I am not perfect to take the test. I don't know what can I do. I think tutor should give extra classes free of cost to the weak students so we can improve. I am not able to pay more money because the fee was very expensive now I can't get again admission. So I don't know what to do but maybe I will prepare at home.

Assad: The preparation course is okay. I think it is not a extraordinary institute. The fee is very high for their air conditioner classrooms and good furniture. I can prepare at home if I want. I just don't find to do the practice but my English is good.

Nikhat: I have benefitted from the IELTS programme. The speaking and reading sections were sufficient for us. Writing sessions were quite satisfactory but there was not enough time for practice of listening section which started near the end of class sessions. I think our basic problem at listening is to understand foreign accent and to follow the flow. I think the tutor was competent and very cooperative. I would like to say that the Berlitz class sessions have helped in brushing up my existing capability but I have not felt any significant improvement in my proficiency level. The days of IELTS class sessions are not sufficient and this should be increased.

The few comments above from the test-preparers at Berlitz suggest that they were mostly satisfied with the preparation course, except they felt that the duration of

the course was insufficient, and in Amir's case that the fee was too expensive. He is a rare example of student from a lower middle class background attending Berlitz. His performance is relatively low on all the four components of the test and that is why he wanted extra classes free of charge. We also spoke with the IELTS preparation students at PACC who were not very satisfied with the course. Their chief complaint was that they expected to be taught English grammar in the IELTS preparation class, as they were weak in this area. They also felt that the practice they received from PACC was insufficient, and that they would be unable to achieve their desired band score. Two of the test-preparers said:

Ayaz: I hoped that I will learn English in IELTS class but the tutor did not give focus on grammar. I think it is not good to take admission in IELTS because sir never check my essays. So I should complete English language course first and then study IELTS. I think I waste my money. Wish I have prepared at home or some other centre.

Aisha: Our teacher is good but he speak sometime in Urdu. My grammar is very weak and I think I will learn grammar but I not learn it. I will not get my band in IELTS so I will again practice at home with my husband and then I will do the test because it is very costly test.

These students at PACC did not comment on the individual skills practised in the course, but their overall dissatisfaction was linked to the lack of grammar practice. The comments of the test-preparers at PACC correspond to those of their tutor who mentioned that the students had expectations of learning English grammar on the IELTS preparation course. It is interesting to note that the tutor at Berlitz did not focus on grammar teaching, and none of her students expressed dissatisfaction with this. It was clear from these interactions that most of the students at Berlitz were fluent English speakers, due to their English-medium education and use of English at work in some cases. They mainly joined Berlitz to become familiar with the test format, to do some test practice and to learn about effective time management during the IELTS examination, and the different types of test tasks. The students at PACC probably complained about the absence of learning basic grammar skills because of their low level of proficiency in English. Students like Maria commented on the short duration of the course and the material used in the class by saying: 'The practice was not very helpful because it was very little time. The Cambridge book is also very common so I don't think it is sensible to study here. I have prepared some other place I wish'. The following two students showed some sort of satisfaction with the PACC course:

Mubina: The IELTS course was okay. Of course the fee they take they give same preparation. If it was very expensive institute then the teacher was wonderful and the standard was very high but in this price the course was fine. The tutor was helpful, I have not improved my English but I have learned what comes in the examination of IELTS.

Levin: The tutor was nice and I think it's good to practice here. I don't have problem in English but I just wanted to learn the techniques and the format of the test. And I think I have learned from PACC. The institute is not very expensive. It is fine.

Levin's comments reflect his having taken the IELTS preparation course with the aim of learning about the test and doing some practice, rather than to learn English or to improve his grammar skills. Out of the eight students at PACC, he was the only student who commented on this, which could be because of his better English proficiency and better performance compared to those of his classmates. In this way he was similar to the Berlitz students, whose main aim on the course was to prepare for the test and who were therefore satisfied, whereas those at PACC, who had come with an expectation of learning grammar, were dissatisfied.

4.2.2 Students' perceived improvement

Not every student discussed their perceived improvement, as some of them were unsure about their rate of progress. Masoom from Berlitz was persuaded that he was improving, claiming: 'Tutor says that I am improving and I also feel much better now after finishing the course'. Masoom's tutor repeatedly told him that he had made significant improvement during the course and in the mock-test.

Nikhat was another student at Berlitz who was working full-time in a university, was a regular student and actively participated in the class. She always did very well in the tests set by the tutor. She said that: 'Berlitz class sessions have helped in brushing my existing capabilities but I have not felt any significant improvement in my proficiency level'. She complained about the small amount of time devoted to practising this part of the test. Overall her comments suggest that she did not think she benefitted a great deal from the preparation course. Kanwal from Berlitz expressed dissatisfaction with her progress: 'I think I have not much improved. I am trying to get high band score but I do not think I will be able to'. Sumera is another Berlitz student who did not show satisfaction with her progress: 'I do not think I have improved maybe because I missed few classes and because of not enough practice at home'.

Naresh from PACC showed no signs of progress saying: 'I have no improve a lot here so it is not very good at practicing IELTS'. Wasim said: 'I am not satisfied with the course and I think I will not get good result in my IELTS'. Wasim's comments suggest that he did not improve, and he expressed no satisfaction with the preparation course. My results indicate, however, that he showed consistency, or even a slight improvement in two of the components. Aisha did not feel she had made any progress: 'I will not get my band in IELTS that I want I think, so I have again practice at home with my husband'.

As mentioned earlier, Levin showed greater satisfaction with PACC's IELTS preparation course and he claimed to have improved from the practice at PACC: 'I have learned from PACC, the practice of IELTS is fine for me'. The perceptions of all of these students about their progress showed lack of satisfaction which could be due to the fact that the improvements made were quite small and so perhaps were not perceived as being significant. Some of the students felt satisfied with the preparation they received, whereas some other students remained completely dissatisfied with the course and lacked confidence about attaining their required band scores. The results align with Read and Hayes (2003) where most test-preparers were not satisfied with their courses. Read and Hayes argue that the students mainly seek to gain admission to an IELTS preparation course in the hope of improving their IELTS band scores. This suggests that there is a mismatch between students' expectations and their achievements on the course.

5. Conclusion

This study dealt with the detailed discussion of a survey of private English Language Teaching institutes in Pakistan, providing useful information about the nature of the private English language teaching industry, distinguishing between different types of institutes, the courses offered, course duration and fee structure. There is a range of private institutes which aims to cater for different sections of society. The majority of the institutes that have sprung up cater for low-income candidates with little experience of English-medium education in the second- and third-tier cities in Pakistan; many are local neighbourhood tutors. These small businesses co-exist alongside international franchises, which cater for test-takers with higher incomes and some degree of English-medium education. The private (both local and international) institutes attract substantial numbers of clients. The growth of IELTS test-preparers has resulted in economic opportunities for IELTS test preparation providers. IELTS, therefore, has had a significant financial impact on both test-preparers and test preparation providers.

Based on this broad survey of private institutes, it can be deduced that the teaching methods, resources, and IELTS practice at international institutes are better than the local ones like PACC. International institutes attract better English speakers due to their screening; they admit more proficient speakers from the outset. The interviews further revealed that the students enrolled at Berlitz mostly had their expectations met regarding the preparation course and indicated their satisfaction. Students at PACC were disappointed by the preparation course, as they mainly expected to learn basic grammar due to their low proficiency in English.

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