

## IELTS vs. Linguaskill Cambridge Exams: Similarities & Differences

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### Abstract

For many years, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has been a dominant high-stakes test of English proficiency for fulfilling emigration, education, and employment purposes. Linguaskill Cambridge Assessment, on the other hand, is a newly developed computer adaptive test based on language skills used in real-life situations providing a quick, flexible evaluation of English abilities for meeting various goals. Both exams have their importance, usage, and sets of principles. This study aims to compare IELTS with Linguaskill focusing on the similarities and differences between the two tests. To this end, scrutinizing the literature, first, a brief background on each test is offered in the sections entitled “IELTS introduction” and “Linguaskill introduction” respectively. Then, in the method section, according to the comprehensive studies of related studies as the methodology, through outlining the way the study is conducted, the qualitative descriptive nature of this research is pointed out. Subsequently, both IELTS and Linguaskill tests are explained in detail regarding test format, test content, type of questions, etc. Afterward, in the discussion section, the findings of the study are indicated by comparing the two exams and elaborating on the similarities and differences. Finally, considering all of the identified patterns, a conclusion is reached offering the necessary implications and recommendations for conducting further studies.

*Keywords:* IELTS, Linguaskill, similarities, differences, computer adaptive test

### **Research Questions**

Over the years Language testing proficiency has developed various kinds of tests in response to the different demands, situations, and progress in technology and science of language assessment. Considering a lot of test varieties, it is obvious that choosing the right kind of tests for each individual and organization's purpose requires a need analysis and study of the available tests to gain the necessary knowledge to identify the kind of test suitable for a specific purpose. Regarding this current need, to fill the existing gap in the literature, in this study, the literature on the two exams of IELTS and Linguaskill is reviewed thoroughly to introduce the IELTS and Linguaskill tests. Subsequently, both exams are fully explained and compared in terms of the major principles and involved factors. In so doing, the following two questions of this research are answered;

What are IELTS and Linguaskill exams?

What are the similarities and differences between IELTS and Linguaskill exams?

### **Review of Literature**

In the following paragraphs, general background to the two exams of IELTS and Linguaskill are introduced and addressed in detail under the title of "IELTS Introduction" and "Linguaskill Introduction" respectively.

#### **IELTS Introduction**

As an International market leader in Language proficiency assessment, with more than 3 million tests taken each year in over 140 countries, IELTS is the world's most popular English test designed during the 1980s by experts in English language assessment at the British Council, Cambridge English Language Assessment, and the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP) in order to evaluate the English language proficiency

of candidates who are not from English-speaking countries and have to demonstrate the requisite language skills to study, live or work where English is used as the language of communication (British Council; Cambridge Assessment English; Manhattan Review, 2019). Over 10,000 organizations worldwide accept IELTS as evidence of language ability for higher education and migration. IELTS is recognized globally and delivered locally. It is available up to 4 times per month and 48 times per year at over 1200 test centers around the world. Test questions are designed based on authentic materials by testing specialists in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US (British Council; Cambridge Assessment English; Manhattan Review, 2019).

There are two versions of the IELTS: Academic, General Training. Test takers can choose between IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training, depending on their academic or professional purposes, or visa requirements. As a task-based test, both versions of IELTS assess the four language skills: Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. They are both accurate and relevant assessment of language skills which covers the full range of proficiency levels, from non-user to expert use. The total test time is 2 hours and 45 minutes for both Academic and General Training version. In General Training and Academic versions, the listening and speaking sections are the same but the writing and reading sections are different for each version (British Council; Cambridge Assessment English; Manhattan Review, 2019).

### **Linguaskill Introduction**

Linguaskill, a modern computer adaptive test, has been newly launched by a group of experts in Cambridge Assessment English (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019). The origin of Linguaskill goes back to the early 1990s when the development of the first computer adaptive test was influenced by the advent of technology into language testing proficiency (Wainer, Dorans, Flaugher, Green, & Mislevy, 2000) and also in response to a need for an online, quick,

and easy to use test. It has been evolved into Linguaskill which covers the demand for current e-generation of candidates by making the testing process innovative, flexible, individualized, and efficient (Rezaie & Golshan, 2015). Linguaskill tests the language simultaneously at many levels of analysis reliably and accurately due to the involvement of advanced artificial intelligence technology in its computer auto marking method. Linguaskill's revolutionary testing technology not only is as reliable as human evaluation, but it is also devoid of subjective and contextual elements involved in human evaluation (Cambridge English Authorised Platinum Centre, n.d.).

Linguaskill is empowered by over 100 years of experience in assessing English competences and it has been globally recognized by organizations, employees, educational institutions and individual learners around the world who need to assess the level of English communication skills for various purposes. It has been trialed by speakers of over 40 languages, from 50 countries around the world, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of results. Linguaskill has been embraced by the language learning communities in some countries such as Switzerland, Poland, Russia, Mexico, etc. (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019).

Linguaskill is online, adaptive, multilevel, and module in that it evaluates candidates of a wide range of language abilities with graded questions that are matched to their level of ability and it can test 1-4 skills of speaking, writing, reading and listening depending on the need of individual candidate or organizations. There are also two test options, Business, and General so that the best type of test that is suitable for each organization or individual can be chosen. Linguaskill General is for daily English usage. Linguaskill Business is for English used in business or settings of cooperation (Intercambio Idiomas Online, 2019).

### **Method**

This is a qualitative and descriptive method of study as it provides a comprehensive account of the subject of the study by describing the reasonable and eclectic combination of the acquired data from the literature (Nassaji, 2015). By doing so, it presents a true picture of the similarities and differences between IELTS and Linguaskill.

In the following sections, going through the collected data from studied papers, the content and format of each test along with the major principles and factors involved in both tests are described in two subsections entitled IELTS exam and Linguaskill exam respectively; based on which the similarities and differences of the two tests are outlined in the discussion section; at the end, conclusion is drawn by inclusive consideration of the stated issues presenting suggestions for further studies.

### **IELTS Exam**

There are two IELTS modules: Academic and General Training. The IELTS Academic test is developed to evaluate the English language abilities of prospective university students. The IELTS General Training test is designed for immigration and employment purposes. Both IELTS exams evaluate candidates on all four language skills of Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. The total test time for both versions is 2 hours 45 minutes. The examination is held over two separate days, the Listening, Reading, and Writing components of the test are always taken after each other and with no break in one session. Speaking test is taken in a separate session, up to 7 days either before or after the test date (Manhattan Review, 2019). In terms of content, format, level of difficulty, and scoring, IELTS General Training and Academic are similar. However, the two modules are different in Writing and Reading tests. The Academic test covers topics suitable for entering university. The General Training test includes topics based on

general interest. The IELTS Listening and Speaking tests are the same in both versions of IELTS (Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2018). Table one illustrates the different and similar points between Academic and General Training in brief. The format and content of the IELTS including its four components are outlined in separate sections below the table;

Table1. Comparison of IELTS Academic & General Training

	Academic IELTS	General Training IELTS
Listening	Exactly the Same	
Speaking	Exactly the Same	
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 long reading passages.</li> <li>• Related to materials found on different academic books in college or university level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 reading sections. First 2 sections have 2-3 smaller texts. Section 3 has one long passage.</li> <li>• Smaller and easier than the academic reading passages.</li> </ul>
Writing	Task 1: Graph summarizing. (min 150 words) Task 2: Essay Writing. (min 250 words)	Task 1: Letter Writing. (min 150 words) Task 2: Essay Writing. (min 250 words)

Note. The table derived from the Quora website.

**Listening task.** This section comprises four tasks, with ten questions for each. It takes 30 minutes (plus 10 minutes to transfer the answers). A variety of question types are used, chosen from the following; multiple-choice, matching, plan/map labeling, form completion, note completion, table completion, chart completion, sentence completion, short-answer questions.

**Section one.** Two speakers are having a conversation about everyday social subjects such as travel arrangements.

**Section two.** A person is speaking about everyday social subjects like local facilities.

**Section three.** Two main speakers are talking about educational, training subjects; for example, a discussion between two university students.

**Section four.** A person is speaking about an academic subject (British Council; Cambridge Assessment English; Manhattan Review, 2019).

**Reading task.** The Reading section has three texts with 40 questions and lasts 60 minutes; there are different questions, such as multiple-choice, short-answer questions, identifying information, identifying writer's views, labeling diagrams, completing a summary using word taken from the text and matching information/headings/features in the text/sentence endings.

**Texts in IELTS Academic.** There are three reading texts, which come from books, journals, magazines, etc. Texts are appropriate to candidates entering undergraduate or postgraduate courses or pursuing professional registration. Texts vary from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical.

**Texts in IELTS General Training.** The first section contains two or three factual texts about daily life in an English-speaking country such as hotel advertisements. The second section contains two short factual texts focusing on work-related issues, e.g., applying for jobs, company policies. The third section contains one longer text on a topic of general interest. Texts are authentic and taken from notices, advertisements, documents, books, magazines, etc. (British Council; Cambridge Assessment English; Manhattan Review, 2019).

**Writing task.** The Writing section has two tasks that last 60 minutes. In the first task, candidates write at least 150 words in about 20 minutes. In the second task, candidates write at least 250 words in about 40 minutes.

***IELTS Academic writing task.*** In the first task, candidates describe a graph, table, chart or diagram. In the second task, candidates discuss a point of view, argument or problem. Depending on the task, candidates may be required to present a solution to a problem, present and justify an opinion, compare and contrast evidence, opinions, and implications, and evaluate and challenge ideas.

***IELTS General Training writing task.*** In the first task, candidates write a letter in response to a given everyday situation. For example, writing to an accommodation officer about problems with your accommodation, writing to a new employer about problems managing your time. In the second task, candidates write an essay about a topic of general interest; for example, whether smoking should be banned in public places (Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2018).

**Speaking task.** The speaking test is a face-to-face interview between the candidate and an examiner. The speaking test contains three sections.

***Section one: introduction and interview (4–5 minutes).*** Candidates may be asked about their home, family, studies, hobbies, and interests in taking the IELTS exam as well as other general topics such as clothing, computers and the Internet.

***Section two: long turn (3–4 minutes).*** The candidate is given a task card about a particular topic. He has one minute to prepare to talk about this topic. The candidate is then expected to talk about the topic for 2 minutes, after which the examiner may ask one or two questions.

*Section three: discussions (4–5 minutes).* The third section involves a discussion between the examiner and the test taker. The questions are related to the theme which they have already spoken about in section two (British Council; Cambridge Assessment English; Manhattan Review, 2019).

### **Linguaskill Exam**

Linguaskill computer adaptive exam evaluates all four language skills: Listening, Reading (combined) Speaking, Writing. As a modular online test, Linguaskill is flexible and gives choice about the skills to assess so that one skill, a combination of skills or all of them can be assessed in one session or different sessions. Linguaskill is available in two different versions: Linguaskill General, Linguaskill Business. Linguaskill General tests English used in daily life, making it suitable for university admission and recruitment for non-business professions. For example, where the employee needs strong English skills to perform their role effectively but does not need specific business terminology. Test topics are about studying and working, making plans, travel, and technology. Linguaskill Business tests English used in business and corporate settings and is most suitable for recruitment in organizations where employees are expected to be familiar with the language of business. It suits large or small organizations operating on an international scale. Test topics include the buying and selling of products or services, the office, business travel and human resources (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019).

The Reading and Listening tests are adaptive in that there are not a fixed number of questions. According to the candidate's answer to the previous question, the next question is chosen by the computer (Weiss, 2004). The test finishes when the candidate has answered enough questions for Linguaskill to identify their level accurately. Therefore, for Linguaskill reading and listening, there is no time limit either, rather it is variable and lasts about 60 to 85

minutes. Reading and Listening module are auto marked and the results are provided instantly. The Speaking module is taken using a computer with a microphone and headphones. Candidates' responses are recorded and assessed by examiners. This part lasts about 15 minutes. Speaking test results are available within 48 hours. For the Writing module, Candidates are required to input answers using a computer keyboard which lasts 45 minutes. Answers are marked automatically by the computer using artificial technology. Results are available within 12 hours. For the administration of the test, it is simply required to order tests through an online test platform and run them on demand. All needed are a computer, internet connection, a microphone and a set of headphones. No specialist software or equipment is necessary (Cambridge English Authorised Platinum Centre, n.d.).

**Reading tasks.** There are five reading tasks with different questions as follows;

***Read and select.*** Candidates read a notice, diagram, label, memo or letter having a short text and choose the sentence or phrase that most closely matches the meaning of the text. There are three possible answers.

***Gapped sentences.*** Candidates read a sentence with a missing word and select the correct word to fill the gap. There are four choices for each gap.

***Multiple-choice gap-fill.*** Candidates choose the right word or phrase to fill the gaps in a text. There are four choices for each gap.

***Open gap-fill.*** Candidates read a short text in which there are some missing words and write the missing word in each gap.

***Extended reading.*** Candidates read a longer text and answer a series of multiple-choice questions. The questions are in the same order as the information in the text.

**Listening tasks.** Linguaskill tests listening skill through two types of tasks as follows;

***Listen and select.*** Candidates listen to a short audio recording and answer a multiple-choice question with three options.

***Extended listening.*** Candidates listen to a longer recording and answer a series of multiple-choice questions based on it. The questions are in the same order as the information they hear in the recording (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019).

**Writing tasks.** Candidates are required to write two types of texts as follows;

***Email.*** Candidates read a short prompt, usually an email. They use the information in the prompt and the three bullet points to write an email of at least 50 words to a private audience. Candidates should spend about 15 minutes on this.

***Short text.*** Candidates read a short text outlining a scenario and respond using the information in the scenario and the three bullet points. Candidates will write at least 180 words to a wider audience and may be asked to produce a variety of text types (e.g., review, article, web post). Candidates should spend about 30 minutes on this.

**Speaking tasks.** There are five types of tasks to assess speaking skill as follows;

***Interview.*** Candidate answers eight questions about him/her and his/her background/experience/ plans (e.g., what's your job?). The first two questions are not marked.

***Reading aloud.*** The candidate is required to read aloud eight sentences.

***Long turn.*** The candidate is given a topic (e.g., practical skills) to talk about for one minute. The candidate is given prompts about the topic and 40 seconds in which to prepare.

***Long turn with visual information.*** The Candidate is given one or more graphics to talk about for one minute, in the form of leaving a voice message for a friend. The candidate also has one minute in which to prepare.

*Communication activity.* The candidate gives their opinion on five questions related to one topic (e.g., technology and the internet). The candidate has one minute in which to prepare from the scenario and from prompts which the questions will be about (Intercambio Idiomas Online, 2019).

### **Discussion**

Going through the existing literature about IELTS and Linguaskill exams, studying the background of each exam, categorizing and putting together the obtained data about the principles and the involved elements in both exams were all carried out in an eclectic, logical way as it is required in a qualitative and descriptive research (Nassaji, 2015). This led to finding answers to the first question of this study and gaining insight into what IELTS and Linguaskill exams are; In doing so, similar and different patterns were identified which provided the answers for the second question of the study. As the findings indicate, the purposes for which each exam has been developed are almost different according to the different demands, situations, time, etc. So, the two exams are considered to be almost of different kinds. Although there are some general similarities between the two exams due to the self-evident fact that they are both English language exams assessing the same skills and an almost similar range of English language ability, the differences between them are significant as the following table indicates the result of comparing the two exams. The findings are elaborated in the following paragraphs after the provided table; first, similarities are stated, then the points of differences are pointed out one by one, each in a specific paragraph.

Table 2. Comparison of IELTS and Linguaskill Tests

	<b>IELTS</b>	<b>Linguaskill</b>
<b>Owned by</b>	IDP, British Council, Cambridge Assessment English	Cambridge Assessment English
<b>Testing Administration Mode</b>	Paper-based & Computer-based	Computer-based
<b>Testing Paradigm</b>	Linear	Adaptive (reading & listening tests)
<b>Length</b>	2 hours & 45 minutes	Variable in reading & listening about 60 to 85 minutes In writing & speaking 45 and 15 minutes respectively
<b>Test Sections</b>	Listening, Reading, Writing, & Speaking are delivered in order. (speaking is taken separately in another session)	Listening, Reading(combined), Writing, & Speaking Linguaskill is <i>module</i> ; one skill, a combination of skills or all can be taken in one session or different sessions
<b>Speaking Delivery</b>	Face to face with an examiner	Delivered using a computer with a microphone and headphones
<b>Marking Method</b>	Marked by expert human examiners	Auto marked by computer( empowered by AI for auto marking of speaking & writing)
<b>Scoring Scale</b>	A band score of 0-9	Cambridge English score scale from 82 to 180 aligned with the CEFR from below A1 to C1 or above
<b>Location &amp; Date</b>	Date & location are already set in advance of exam administration	No fixed location & date Available on demand
<b>Test Types</b>	Academic & General Training	General & Business
<b>Test Usage</b>	Limited usages; Employed for education, employment and emigration purposes	A wide variety of usages, e.g., used for admission, placement, graduation, training, course placement, etc.
<b>Test Report Time</b>	The results of paper-based & computer-based IELTS are available within two weeks and 5-7 days respectively	The results for reading & listening are available immediately after the exam. Results for the Writing are available within 12 hours and for the Speaking within 48 hours.

Note. Data for comparing the two exams are driven from the British Council, Cambridge Assessment English & Manhattan Review (2019).

**Points of Similarities between IELTS and Linguaskill**

Concerning similarities, both IELTS and Linguaskill are available in two test versions. Both tests all four language skills of Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking, except in the case of Linguaskill, there is an option of assessing one skill or a combination of skills since Linguaskill is modular. They are both multilevel tests in that they cover multiple levels of the CEFR in one test (see Appendix A) and they are used to finding out the levels of mixed-ability groups of students; therefore they are not pass or fail exams either. Furthermore, Cambridge English Assessment is involved in the development of both exams except that the British Council and the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP) are involved in the development of the IELTS as well. In both the IELTS and Linguaskill speaking test, there is an interview in the first section with almost similar topics. The third part of the Linguaskill speaking test can be perceived to be similar to the second part of the IELTS speaking test in that both require the candidate to speak about a given topic after having a preparation time. The fifth part of the Linguaskill speaking test can be considered to be almost similar to the third part of the IELTS speaking test as well since both require the candidate to communicate, discuss ideas. In terms of reading, the similarities between the two exams just lie in the kind of multiple-choice and gap-filling questions. Also, the second part of the writing test is roughly equal in both exams as it requires the candidate to write a longer text. Finally, in the listening test, IELTS and Linguaskill are alike only in the multiple-choice kind of questions.

**Points of Differences between IELTS and Linguaskill**

There are two main distinctions between the two tests which have set them apart and brought about other differences, highlighting the fact that as a modern test which has been newly launched in response to development in technology and demands of new generation for an on-

demand personalized test, Linguaskill is significantly different in many aspects from IELTS which as an established International test has been employed for many years to meet education, emigration and employment purposes in English-speaking countries.

In the following sections, first testing administration mode and testing paradigm are elaborated as the main distinctions then other differences are addressed, most of which are derived from these two distinctions.

**The difference in testing administration mode.** Testing administration mode refers to the kind of media through which the test is delivered to test takers. There are two different modes of testing administration: traditional paper and pencil administration method, computer-assisted (electronic) method (Manip Ther, 2010). IELTS exam is delivered through both methods of testing administration mode but for years; IELTS has been administered just by paper and pencil method. As compute-based testing has become extremely prolific in the last 10-15 years, recently IELTS has been also delivered through computer-assisted methods. In contrast, as an adaptive auto marked test, Linguaskill is required to be just delivered through the computer.

**The difference in the testing paradigm.** Converting the method of testing administration mode from a traditional paper and pencil method to the computerized method led to the formation of two types of testing strategies which are called testing paradigms. The testing paradigm includes linear and adaptive kinds of testing (Suvarov & Hegelheimer, 2014). In Linear tests, the same set of test items is administered in the same order to all test takers who receive a given test form. However, in adaptive tests, different test questions are administered according to the candidates' level of English ability. Each question is selected by the computer, based on a candidate's answer in the previous questions. If a candidate gives the right answer to the given question, the computer will choose a harder question. If a candidate gives a wrong

answer to the given question, the computer will select an easier question. The test will continue until it has a satisfactory measurement of a candidate's level of ability or a maximum number of questions have been asked (Khoshsima & Toroujeni, 2017).

Taking into account the different testing mode and testing paradigm, there are two major kinds of computerized testing strategies: (a) "fixed-length linear conventional tests" that are constructed by selecting a fixed set of items for administration to a group of individuals (b) "Adaptive computer tests" that are developed adjusting the test items to the English level of each candidate. In Linguaskill, as a computer adaptive test, not only the mode (medium) of administration transforms from paper to computer, but also the test algorithm turns from linear to adaptive which allows the possibility of presentation and administration of test items adjusting to individual pace and performance level of candidates (Rezaie & Golshan, 2015). Therefore, the adaptive test is also called tailored testing (Madsen, 1991). In contrast, IELTS is either linear computerized test or linear paper and pencil based test since in IELTS, the same set of test items are delivered in the same order for all the candidates and the medium of test administration mode is through computer or paper and pencil.

**The difference in speaking.** IELTS speaking test consists of three parts but the Linguaskill speaking test consists of five parts. The second part in Linguaskill speaking test which requires the candidate to read eight sentences aloud doesn't exist in IELTS speaking and the fourth part which gives the candidate one or more pieces of information (chart, graph or sheet) and requires him to analyze and talk about it for one minute (1 minute to prepare), doesn't exist in IELTS either. While the IELTS speaking test lasts 11-13 minutes, the Linguaskill speaking test lasts about 15 minutes.

**The difference in listening.** Unlike the IELTS listening test that consists of four tasks, the Linguaskill listening test has two tasks. While the IELTS listening test includes monologues and conversations, the Linguaskill listening test consists of extended listening and listening for selecting. Also, the two tests differ in the type of questions except for multiple-choice questions. Whereas the IELTS listening test has 40 questions and lasts 30 minutes (plus ten minutes to transfer the answers to the answer sheet), the Linguaskill listening test has no fixed number of questions and the fixed time limit.

**The difference in writing.** In writing tests, the difference lies in the first task. In IELTS Academic, A graph, table, chart or diagram is presented to the test takers and are asked to describe, or explain the information and in IELTS general the test takers are given a situation and required to write letter inquiring information, or describing that situation, however; in the Linguaskill writing test, the candidate needs to write an email. Whereas the first part of IELTS writing lasts 20 minutes in both Academic and General versions, the first part of the Linguaskill writing test lasts 15 minutes. The minimum number of the required words in IELTS writing for the first part is 150 words but the minimum number of words required in the first part of Linguaskill writing is 50 words.

**The difference in reading.** Despite the reading test of IELTS which includes 40 questions and lasts 60 minutes, in the reading test of Linguaskill, there is no fixed time allocation and the fixed number of questions since the reading module in Linguaskill is an adaptive test. Also, there are three passages in IELTS reading but four different texts and sentences in Linguaskill reading.

**The difference in the number of questions and timing.** Linguaskill reading and listening as adaptive tests stand against the IELTS exam in terms of needed time and number of

questions. Computer-adaptive tests are variable and relatively short in terms of the number of items involved and the time needed (Madsen, 1991) In contrast to IELTS which has fixed time limit and number of questions, Linguaskill is a Flexi-level test that adjusts the questions to the level of candidates and eliminates the needed time for students to answer numerous questions that are too difficult or too easy for them. The test is automatically terminated when the examinee's ability level has been located so fewer test items are required to reach a more accurate estimate of the test takers' language proficiency and subsequently less time is needed (Olsen, Maynes, Slawson, & Ho, 1989). IELTS Speaking and writing exams last 11-13 and 60 minutes respectively. But Linguaskill Speaking and Writing exams take about 15 and 45 minutes respectively.

**The difference in usage.** As a modern newly developed test, Linguaskill has not been as much recognized in the world as IELTS, which has been accepted as evidence of English language proficiency by over 10,000 organizations in more than 140 countries (IDP, 2019). But in comparison to IELTS which is required for university admission, career and immigration purposes, Linguaskill has more variety of usages, some of which are as follows;

Linguaskill is employed by Higher Education Institutions to assess language levels on admission, course placement on entry to course, progress measurement or graduation (to make sure that students meet course exit requirements). It is required by Employers who need their employees to work with other colleagues or customers from all around the world and also employers use Linguaskill to recruit employees with the right level of language ability. It is taken to get the result as an indicator of language ability in a CV as well (Geranpayeh, 2019).

**The difference in locations and test dates.** The location and date for the IELTS exam are already set. IELTS is administered in over 1,200 locations on 48 test dates each year, with the

Academic version available on all 48 dates per year and the General Training version available on 24 dates. It is offered four times a month in each test center (British Council, 2019).

In contrast, Linguaskill is available on demand. Due to its online flexible structure, there are no set dates or locations for Linguaskill. Rather than relying on timetables set by external providers, organizations or individuals, everyone can order test via online test platform and run Linguaskill by the means of a computer, internet connection, a microphone, and headphones; wherever and whenever they choose to schedule a session (Cambridge English Authorised Platinum Centre, n.d.).

**The difference in scoring & result report.** While IELTS is marked at the test center by a minimum of two trained examiners whose work is closely monitored to ensure the highest level of accuracy and fairness possible, Linguaskill marking is carried out by computer auto markers. The Linguaskill writing and speaking tests are marked using artificial intelligence known as automaker AI-driven technology without the need for a human examiner (British Council; Cambridge Assessment English; Manhattan Review, 2019).

In comparison to IELTS test report form which provides IELTS band score from 0-9 for each of the four skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) and an overall band score of all four skills scores rounded to the nearest half-point (see Appendix B for more information on IELTS scoring), Linguaskill provides a more detailed, easy to understand result report. Besides presenting scores on the Cambridge English Scale (Appendix C) for each tested skill, the result is aligned with full CEFR level descriptors — the international standard for describing language ability. An overall CEFR score and an overall Cambridge English Scale score, which is an average of the individual scores, are also reported when more than one language skill is assessed. A short description of the meaning of each score in terms of English language ability is provided.

CEFR level descriptors indicate how Linguaskill result is compared to international standard and also what candidates can be required to do at their level (Intercambio Idiomas Online, 2019). This kind of diagnostic feedback indicates a summary of each candidate's overall level and results for performance in each tested language skill helps with identifying the candidates' points of strengths and weaknesses at a glance (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019).

The result of paper-based and computer-delivered IELTS are available within two weeks and 5-7 days respectively. However, with the support of technology, automated feedback is provided for the Reading & Listening modules of the Linguaskill exam immediately. Results for the Writing module are available within 12 hours and for the Speaking module within 48 hours (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019).

IELTS results are available in just one form but in Linguaskill, Candidates' results are available at two forms (see Appendix D for samples of test forms); an Individual Test Report and a Group Report which is for easy comparison of language ability across a whole organization or other groups (Intercambio Idiomas Online, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

By and large, regarding the comprehensive comparison carried out in the present study, IELTS and Linguaskill differ in many respects, though sharing general similarities. Unlike IELTS, Linguaskill is an adaptive, online, modular and innovative automarked test, implicating that compared to IELTS, Linguaskill is more flexible (being modular, one skill or a combination of skills is taken in one session or different sessions), convenient (being online, it is on-demand anytime, anywhere), quicker (being adaptive, it reduces test length and being automarked, it reports test results faster), secure, and cost-efficient (being online & adaptive, it produces personalized tests reducing a chance of cheating & saves on production & administration costs).

On an individual scale, as a candidate deciding on which test to take, one should consider the purposes for which each test is developed. In the case of applying for universities or jobs which require IELTS as proof of language ability, one should sit for IELTS; otherwise, for organizations, schools, universities demanding Linguaskill as evidence for language proficiency, one has to take Linguaskill exam. For purposes other than these, when there is no requirement for any specific exam from any system, one can opt to take either test. But as an individualized test, Linguaskill is the appropriate option that is available on-demand for a variety of purposes.

On a local scale, IELTS has been delivered conventionally by different local centers over years for fulfilling limited purposes so the process of IELTS administration has already been confirmed and settled worldwide. But as a modern technology-driven test, Linguaskill is not as widely recognized and accepted as IELTS, though it has been employed by individuals and organizations for various purposes. For this reason, for appropriate local administration of the test, many issues should be considered; addressing all of which is beyond the scope of this study. As an example, one of the requirements for the local administration of Linguaskill is to raise the awareness of the stakeholders and test-takers of the technologies empowering Linguaskill. They may not be familiar with the concepts of computer-adaptive testing and automated scoring by artificial intelligence. Thus, the science behind the test is to be demystified to ensure appropriate application of the test and its positive impact on language teaching and learning (Xu, 2019).

From the research community standpoint, Unlike IELTS, the literature on Linguaskill is, in general, scarce and its qualities have not been scientifically disclosed. Due to the fact that Linguaskill has been influenced by artificial intelligence in technology and by the principle of learner centeredness in language assessment, both of which left almost unnoticed in the current literature, Linguaskill is an area with great potential for future research.

In this regard, the findings of this study are significant in language assessment research since it has taken an initial step into implying the effect technology has on language assessment through comparing Linguaskill with IELTS and bringing to the fore the differences between them. Other relevant studies can be conducted. For instance, this study can be replicated comparing IELTS and Linguaskill with respect to learner-centered assessment. Also, Linguaskill and IELTS can be compared regarding their effect on the learning outcome. As another example, for contributing to the appropriate wide-scale local administration of Linguaskill, different studies can be conducted targeting the effect of one of these factors on the implementation of Linguaskill in the local areas, such as the effect of test-takers' computer anxiety, prior testing mode and paradigm preference and computer familiarity, etc., (Khoshsima & Toroujeni, 2017).

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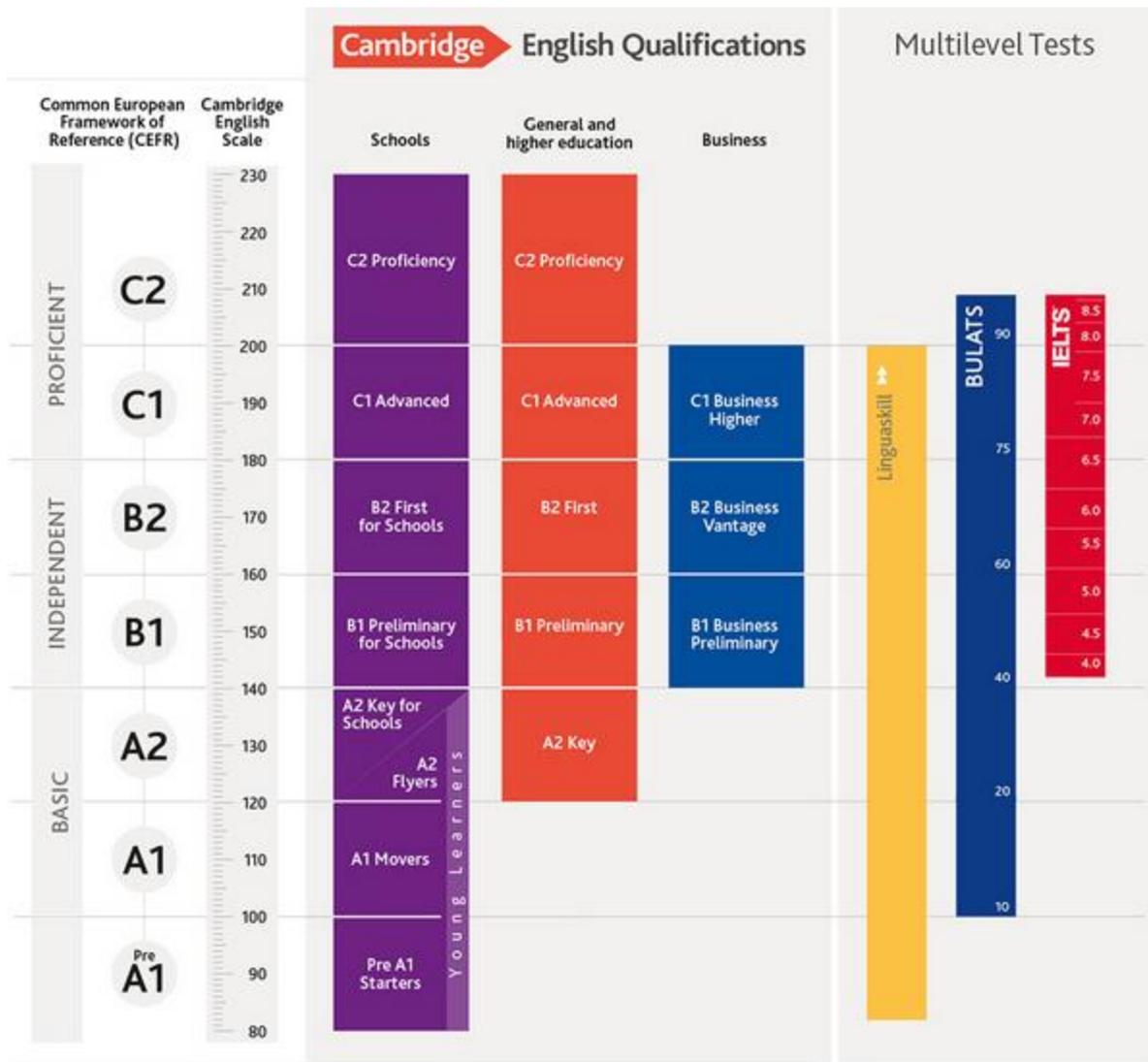
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## Appendix A

### Multilevel Tests

For some tests, it is not required to have a fixed ability level to pass. There is no pass or fail in such tests, rather there is only reported a score which is related to a level on a proficiency scale. These are called multi-level tests. Multi-level tests are primarily a measurement tool, used for purposes such as admission, placement, recruitment, etc. Therefore, Linguaskill and IELTS are both multilevel and are by no means pass or fail exams as indicated below;



## Appendix B

### The IELTS Scoring

All four modules of the IELTS Exam are weighted equally. The overall band score is calculated by taking an average total score of four modules. For example,

Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
7.5	8.0	7.0	7.5	7.5

- $7.5 + 8.0 + 7.0 + 7.5 = 30$  (Total of all the four modules)
- $30 / 4 = 7.5$  (Average of the total score)

#### IELTS Listening Marking

For the listening test, which contains 40 questions, the approximate band scores can be calculated using this table.

Band Score	9	8.5	8	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5	5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5
Score / 40	39-40	37-38	35-36	32-34	30-31	26-29	23-25	18-22	16-17	13-15	10-12	8-10	6-7	4-5

#### IELTS General Reading Marking

For the general reading test, which contains 40 questions, the approximate band scores can be calculated using this table.

Band Score	9	8.5	8	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5	5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5
Score / 40	40	39	37-38	36	34-35	32-33	30-31	27-29	23-26	19-22	15-18	12-14	9-11	6-8

### IELTS Academic Reading Marking Schemes

For the Academic reading test, which also contains 40 questions, but is more difficult, the approximate band scores can be calculated using this table.

<b>Band Score</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Score / 40</b>	39-40	37-38	35-36	33-34	30-32	27-29	23-26	19-22	15-18	13-14	10-12	8-9	6-7	4-5

### IELTS Writing Marking Schemes

The two writing questions are marked out of 9 according to the following criteria:

- Task Achievement
- Coherence and Cohesion
- Lexical Resource
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy

### IELTS Speaking Marking Schemes

The speaking test is also marked out of 9 according to the following criteria:

- Fluency and coherence
- Lexical resource
- Grammatical range and accuracy
- Pronunciation

## Appendix C

### The Cambridge English Scale

The Cambridge English Scale is a range of scores (82-180+) used for reporting the results of Cambridge English exams including Linguaskill. This scale makes it easy to compare performance as the alignment of the Cambridge exams to the CEFR, to IELTS and each other is clear. For more detailed information about the Cambridge English Scale, click on the link below;

<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/167506-cambridge-english-scale-factsheet.pdf>

CEFR Level	Score
C1 or above	180+
B2	160 – 179
B1	140 – 159
A2	120 – 139
A1	100 – 119
Below A1	82 – 99

Linguaskill assesses English language ability from below A1 to C1 or above of the CEFR and reports scores from 82 to 180 on the Cambridge English Scale.

## Appendix D

### The Test Report Forms of IELTS & Linguaskill

For a sample Linguaskill test report form click on the link below;

<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/399862-linguaskill-test-report-form-for-individual-candidate.pdf>

For a sample of Linguaskill group report form click on the link below;

<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/399863-linguaskill-group-report.pdf>

For a sample of IELTS test report form click on the link below;

[https://www.queensu.ca/bisc/images/Article\\_and\\_Module\\_Images/Documents/IELTS-for-UKVI---Correct-form-and-incorrect-form.pdf](https://www.queensu.ca/bisc/images/Article_and_Module_Images/Documents/IELTS-for-UKVI---Correct-form-and-incorrect-form.pdf)