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A Comparison of Writing Performance of Iranian IELTS Candidates Facing Chart Topics vs. Table Topics in Academic Writing (Task1)

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The present study aimed at investigating whether academic IELTS candidates perform differently in writing on either a chart topic or a table topic of the IELTS writing task 1 with regard to the four IELTS writing marking criteria i.e. task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammar range and accuracy. The study adopted a mixed methods approach. To this end, 45 candidates participated in the study. In the beginning, the participants were asked to write on a chart topic of the IELTS writing task 1. After 10 days, the same groups of participants were given a table topic of the IELTS writing task 1. All their papers were then marked and analyzed quantitatively in accordance with IELTS writing task 1 descriptor. Next, paired-samples statistical analyses were run to find out how they performed. The results revealed that the participants' writing performance on a chart topic was significantly higher than a table topic in terms of task achievement, lexical resource, and grammar range and accuracy scores. Concerning the qualitative side of this study, there was a significant difference between candidates' performance in chart and table topics with respect to task achievement and lexical resource. However, the results did not manifest any significant differences between candidates' performance getting chart and table prompts in terms of coherence, cohesion, and grammar range and accuracy.

Keywords: academic IELTS writing task 1, coherence and cohesion, grammar range and accuracy, lexical resource, task achievement

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INTRODUCTION

According to Lan (2015), IELTS plays an important role in many people's lives. It involves critical decisions such as admission to universities or immigration. The IELTS writing tasks are designed to be communicative and contextualized for a specified audience, purpose, and genre. This highlights the growing focus of second language writing research on genres/task.

IELTS is structurally available in two modules: academic and general training. Each module is designed for specific goals. The IELTS academic module is designed to assess candidates' abilities with respect to communicative dimensions of language. According to Harvey and Nancy (1999), this communicative dimention is an assessment tool designed to aid teachers, educational experts, and other service providers to assess peoples' communication skills. The IELTS general module is designed to fulfill the expectation of candidates intending to immigrate to English-speaking countries to pursue either vocational purposes or academic programs.

IELTS has rapidly grown to be one of the most prominent tests of language competence in the world. In its writing test, in particular, task 1, a four-criterion descriptor is used to measure candidates' written performance on a scale of 1 to 9 (9 being a near-native performance). The four writing marking criteria include:

1. Task Achievement (TA)
2. Cohesion and Coherence (CC)
3. Lexical Resource (LR)
4. Grammar Range and Accuracy (GRA)

This research study hinges on all the four marking criteria in question designed in the form of an official band descriptor. It is worth noting that the academic IELTS writing encompasses two tasks including task1 that concerns writing a report on a given set of data and task 2 which pertains to writing an academic essay on a given topic.The current study takes the writing task 1 into account. The topics in this part are mainly comprised of two types, namely a pictorial set of data i.e. charts and also a numerical set of data including tables.

The reason behind conducting this research topic was actually based on problems regarding task1 reported in the main researcher's IELTS classes. In this regard, Dornyei (2007) holds that a salient feature of good researchers is that they have a sincere and robust interest in the topic under study. He maintains that good researchers are always after something that they find fascinating or enigmatic or about which they have a guess.

Based on the researcher's experience in teaching IELTS preparatory courses, candidates often find it difficult to write on table topics when asked to look at tabulated numbers to figure out a pattern and to prepare a report. This issue formed the foundation of this study. That is, we intended to investigate if IELTS candidates write reports differently facing either of these two topics. By 'differently', we mean the quantitative and

qualitative differences in their writing performance in terms of the four writing marking criteria in question.

The results of the study may contribute to the way IELTS trainers approach the instruction of the IELTS academic writing task 1. They may need to develop two distinct methodologies based on the type of task i.e. chart or table topics. This study can shed light on why and how these two writing tasks should be taught in the classroom. The possible outcomes of this study might raise awareness of teachers concerning the instruction of the writing task 1.

Therefore, the present study aimed at addressing the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic in terms of task achievement?
2. Is there a significant difference between the performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic in terms of coherence and cohesion?
3. Is there a significant difference between the performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic in terms of lexical resource?
4. Is there a significant difference between the performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic in terms of grammar range and accuracy?
5. What qualitative differences are there between the performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Weigle (2002), writing once viewed primarily as the domain of the well-educated is now essential for everyone. In an EFL setting, writing has become more important and the process of learning to write in another language also implies that learners need to know structures and the lexicon of the language (Weigle, 2002).

The IELTS test is of paramount importance in universities all over the world. In Australia, for example, it is considered as the only test accepted by universities and is often called the 'preferred' test (Coley, 1999). The IELTS test is one of the English language proficiency tests in which all the four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing are tested separately. The academic writing test requires IELTS candidates to perform two tasks within 60 minutes. In task 1, examinees are required to write a short description of data and clues given in the form of a chart, table, etc. In task 2, examinees are presented with an argument or proposition. They are assessed on their ability to write an essay using that argument or proposition. (UCLES, 2006).

Regarding writing skill scoring procedures, Schoonen (2005) holds that the evaluation of writing skill is an arduous and demanding task. One reason is that the task results might be impacted by different facets of writing assessment. Factors including writing

proficiency, task topic, language use and content, and the way through which such factors are assessed, may affect task results.

Some studies have explored the effect of task type on IELTS candidates' writing performance (e.g., Ahmadi & Mansoordehghan, 2014; Lan, 2015; O'Loughlin & Wigglesworth, 2003). To start with, Ahmadi and Mansoordehghan (2014) compared the effect of task 1 and task 2 of IELTS writing modules on test-takers' writing performance. They found that there was no significant difference between test-takers' performance conducting these tasks. On the other hand, Lan (2015) found that when the test requires a low-demanding task such as task 1, i.e., graphic description, test takers perform significantly better in terms of accuracy. On the other hand, a high-demanding task yields more complex texts with lexical variations and grammatical subordinations. Similarly, O'Loughlin and Wigglesworth (2003) found that simpler tasks which require less information for processing elicit more complex structures.

It is believed that visual arts and writing play equally significant roles in creating meaning in student's performance (Olshansky, 1994; Trainin, Andrzejczak & Poldberg, 2006). Trainin et al. (2006) applied the Vygotskian cognitive hypothesis attempting to find this relationship. The hypothesis assumed that visual arts helped for a wide range of expressions. The cognitive functions which were required in writing were developed efficiently through this hypothesis. Children could improve the quality of their writing making them more coherent. Furthermore, they could develop the skills needed to write from these pictures. Later, they conducted a study whose results were in conformity with this theory. Their findings indicated that students who used visual representations produced organized and coherent writing.

In a study by Norris, Mokhtari, and Reichard (1998), the picturing writing process was applied in classrooms where students were asked to create pictures before starting to write for the task in the pre-writing stage. The results indicated that students who used the picturing writing process performed better than those who were asked to write without the use of picturing writing and consequently they obtained higher scores in all the four measures of writing achievement i.e. length of sentences, number of words, overall writing grade, and coherent ideas.

Conducting a qualitative study, Lok (2014) investigated the impact of visual arts in writing for students. The results of the study supported the incorporation of the visual arts into the writing curriculum. At first, an interview was conducted with teachers in order to gather their ideas about the incorporation of visual arts into writing. The participants expressed their opinions concerning visual arts integration into writing through written correspondence. Results showed that the integration of visual arts in writing had a significant effect on the improvement of writing skill and students' motivation. An investigation into how visual arts integration could influence writing yield fruitful results too. Effective strategies and drawbacks regarding the integration of visual arts into the writing curriculum were also reported by the participants. The results and data of this study can raise teachers' awareness and understanding of the effects of visual arts integration into writing.

Similarly, Ghaedsharafi and Bagheri (2012) carried out a study to examine the effects of audiovisuals, audio, and visual presentations on EFL learners' writing skills. First, the researchers piloted their study before carrying out the research. Thus, 45 male and female EFL learners at an English language Institute in Shiraz, Iran aged from 23 to 38 were selected randomly out of advanced-level language learners who were also divided into three groups of 15. Audiovisual materials included three documentaries, i.e. stress, superstition, and nature. The texts of the very documentaries were used as the visual or reading materials and the listening forms of the same documentaries were utilized as the audio materials. Once before each mode of presentation and after, the students had to generate writings about the topics. Then two raters scored the writings out of nine based on the IELTS writing marking criteria. Inter-rater reliability was calculated between each set of scores. The results of the post-writings showed that the audiovisual group performed better than the audio group and the audio group performed better than the visual group.

Moreover, Randle (2010) conducted a study focusing on how integrating visual arts and the writing process enhance the fourth-grade students' creative writing quality. Three writing conditions were used in this qualitative inquiry including open-ended textual story prompts, fine art images as story prompts, and student-created artwork as story prompts to motivate students to write creatively, as well as student interviews, artifact analysis, and field observations. The results showed that open-ended prompts both textual and visual lead to more imaginative storylines, coherent sentences structure, and organized character development than the comparison writing condition using a highly-scripted writing prompt. The advantages of using visual arts and art production in the prewriting process included heightened student investment in the end product as well as greater student engagement in the writing process. Another benefit of visual arts-writing integration was its potential in helping students develop certain skills that are necessary for their daily lives. The findings of the research revealed that image and text often worked together to motivate children to become critical and reflective thinkers (Bussert-Webb, 2001; Carger, 2004; Leigh, 2012; Tranin, et al., 2006).

Furthermore, another study performed by Tajzadeh, Jahandar, and Khodabandelou (2013) shed some light on the matter at hand. The aim of their study was to investigate the impact of visual presentation on Iranian intermediate EFL writing ability. The main question of this study was to find out whether visual presentation could improve writing skill of Iranian learners of English at an intermediate level. For this reason, 30 junior undergraduate students participated in this experiment. The control and experimental groups were selected randomly. The findings revealed that the experimental group performed better and scored higher in writing after being taught a visual presentation in the class. It is worth mentioning that with regard to the studies performed on the IELTS academic writing, no research to date has touched upon the effects of chart and table topics on IELTS candidates' writing performance.

METHOD

Design

A mixed-methods approach design was employed for the current study; one which is the synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative modes. It is a quan-qual design in which a part of data was collected quantitatively followed by the qualitative collection and analysis of the data. Based on the number of research questions, there were four pairs of scores. Quantitatively, each pair was compared separately to see if there was a significant difference between them.

As for the qualitative side of the study, in the fifth research question, writings were broken down into the sentences they were comprised of. Next, the main researcher went through each line pinpointing all major types of errors exhibited in Tables 9,10,11, and 12. The purpose was to see if there were any qualitative differences between the two sets of performances.

Participants

The participants of this study included 45 (19 males and 26 females) IELTS candidates who intended to take the test of IELTS in the future. It was a natural sample. In order to have a natural occurrence in the data collection, no placement test was administered and even the number of male and female candidates was not controlled. The study intended to work with a natural sample, one that is in many ways similar to that of the real test of IELTS. A MOCK IELTS test was administered exactly like IELTS in the Safirelian IELTS House located in Bushehr, Iran. Finally, the tests were scored based on the IELTS writing task 1 band descriptor (Appendix C).

Instruments

The two instruments employed in this study were two task types namely, charts (Appendix A) and tables (Appendix B) topics in the IELTS academic writing task 1 which were part of the full-length MOCK IELTS test. These tests were extracted from "IELTS Cambridge" book written by IELTS examiners (2018). Following the time limit given in IELTS, they were given 20 minutes to write a report of at least 150 words for each task.

This study made use of tests designed by IELTS examiners for the success of IELTS candidates worldwide. The assumptions about these pre-constructed tests are two- folds: They are reliable, that is candidates without practice effect probably achieve the same score. The reasoning is that candidates must write a report on the information they see. They must produce a piece of writing which reflects their writing ability. Secondly, as IELTS examiners are the designers of such instruments, these tests are deemed valid.

Data Collection Procedures

The examinees participated in a full-length MOCK IELTS test. Although all the candidates were familiar with the IELTS test, the procedure of how to write the report was explained to them very briefly prior to the tests.

There were one chart and a table in this MOCK IELTS test. It did not contain much numerical data. What candidates were required to do here was to describe the chart and table. They did not need to analyze the data. For example, they were not required to give reasons why the figure was high or low. In the same way, their opinions were not required.

The first test included task 1 with a chart topic which required the candidates to write a report within 20 minutes exactly like the IELTS test. At the end of the first session, they were told that the data of this test would be used in research while their names would be kept confidential. After 10 days' interval, the second test was administered to the same candidates. However, this test included task 1 with a table topic which required them to write a report again within 20 minutes as is the case in a real test of IELTS. It is worth mentioning that after the test, the examinees were informed of the purpose of the study. They all contented that the data of these tests could be used for research purposes.

After completing the two tests, all papers related to task 1 were photocopied and the original papers were returned to the institute where the test was held. The institute did not allow the researcher to use the original papers. It only allowed him to photocopy them. He decided to scan and remove the names of participants. Codes were then applied instead of their real names.

Finally, the two types of tests were scored by two IELTS trainers who used IELTS writing task 1 band descriptor. Then all the four pairs of scores were compared using paired samples *t*-test statistics in the SPSS.

Data Analysis

The two types of tests were scored using the IELTS writing task 1 band descriptor. The purpose was to see the participants' performances on the two versions of the tasks. The data collected from the scorings and analyses were fed into SPSS software. This research collected both qualitative and quantitative data.

The first scorer was an experienced IELTS trainer who had experience working with the descriptor. First, the reports were scored by this rater. Upon 10 days, the same rater marked the performances again. That was how the intra-rater reliability was controlled. Next, a second-rater who was also a professional IELTS trainer with the practical knowledge of the descriptor marked the reports twice like the first rater. Then the intra-rater reliability of the second-rater was controlled. Based on the results, inter-rater reliability was calculated.

Later, the sets of scores were compared using paired samples *t*-test. It is worth mentioning that based on the number of research questions; there were four pairs of scores. Each pair was compared separately to see if there was a significant difference between them.

Concerning the qualitative phase of this study, the reports were broken down into sentences they were comprised of. Next, all the sentences were analyzed and major types of errors were identified. The purpose of this part was to find qualitative differences between the two sets of performances.

FINDINGS

In order to compare the two sets of scores of chart and table topics, a paired samples *t*-test in the SPSS was run and the following results were obtained.

Task Achievement

To check if there was a significant difference between performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic in terms of task achievement, a paired samples *t*-test was run. Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the descriptive statistics and the paired samples *t*-test, respectively. An acceptable significance level was considered $p < .05$.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of IELTS Candidates' Task Achievement Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Task achievement (Table topic)	45	4.00	6.50	5.1889	.64216
Task achievement (Chart topic)	45	4.50	7.00	5.4333	.53936
Valid N (list wise)	45				

Table 2
Paired Samples *t*-test to Compare IELTS Candidates' Task Achievement in Task 1 Facing a Table or a Chart Topic

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	TA (Table topic) TA (Chart topic)	-.24444	.44750	.06671	-.37889	-.11000	-3.664	44	.001

According to Table 2, there was a significant difference between the participants' performance in task 1 facing a table or a chart topic (sig. = .00). Based on the results of the descriptive statistics presented in Table 2, the IELTS candidates performed better in task 1 with a chart topic (mean= 5.4) than a table topic (mean= 5.1).

Coherence and Cohesion

To answer the second research question i.e. "is there a significant difference between performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic in terms of coherence and cohesion?", a paired samples *t*-test was performed to compare the participants' performance in these two types of task 1. Table 3 presents the results of the descriptive statistics of the participants' coherence and cohesion scores in task 1.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of IELTS Candidates' Coherence and Cohesion Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Coherence and cohesion (Table topic)	45	3.50	6.00	4.8556	.67101
Coherence and cohesion (Chart topic)	45	3.50	6.00	4.9444	.63266
Valid N (list wise)	45				

Table 4
Paired Samples *t*-test to Compare IELTS Candidates' Coherence and Cohesion Scores in Task 1 Facing a Table or a Chart Topic

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	CC (Table topic) CC (Chart topic)	-.08889	.44324	.06607	-.22205	.04428	-1.345	44	.185

Following Table 4, there was not any significant difference between IELTS candidates' coherence and cohesion scores in task 1 facing a table or a chart topic (sig.= .18).

Lexical Resource

In the next step, to answer the third research question i.e. "is there a significant difference between performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic in terms of lexical resource?", a paired samples *t*-test was run. The results of the descriptive statistics and the paired samples *t*-test are presented in Tables 5 and 6, respectively.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics of IELTS Candidates' Lexical Resource Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lexical resource (Table topic)	45	3.50	6.00	4.6778	.60449
Lexical resource (Chart topic)	45	4.00	6.50	4.9556	.68109
Valid N (list wise)	45				

As depicted in Table 5, the participants' lexical resource mean scores in task 1 facing table topic and chart topic turned out to be 4.67 and 4.95, respectively.

Table 6
Paired Samples *t*-test to Compare IELTS Candidates' Lexical Resource Scores in Task 1 Facing a Table or a Chart Topic

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	LR (Table topic) LR chart topic)	-.27778	.52824	.07875	-.43648	-.11908	-3.528	44	.001

The results of the paired samples *t*-test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the participants' lexical resource mean scores in task 1 facing table topic and chart topic (sig.= .00). According to the mean scores presented in Table 5, the participants gained higher mean scores in task 1 with chart topic (mean= 4.95) than table topic (mean=4.67).

Grammar Range and Accuracy

The fourth objective of this study was to examine if there was a significant difference between performances of Iranian IELTS candidates' writing task 1 facing a table and a chart topic in terms of grammar range and accuracy. To this end, a paired samples *t*-test was employed to compare the participants' grammar range and accuracy scores in task 1 with table topic and chart topic. Tables 7 and 8 demonstrate the pertaining results.

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics of IELTS Candidates' Grammar Range and Accuracy Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Grammar range & accuracy (table topic)	45	4.00	6.50	5.0556	.65905
Grammar range & accuracy (chart topic)	45	4.00	7.00	5.2556	.63624
Valid N (list wise)	45				

As presented in Table 7, the participants' grammar range and accuracy mean scores in task 1 facing table topic and chart topics were table topic 5.05 and 5.25, respectively.

Table 8
Paired Samples *t*-test to Compare IELTS Candidates' Grammar Range and Accuracy in Task 1 Facing a Table or a Chart Topic

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	GRA (Table topic) – GRA (Chart topic)	-.2000	.62523	.09320	-.38784	-.01216	-2.146	44	.037

Tables 7 and 8 exihibit that the participants (sig. = .03) performed significantly better in terms of grammar range and accuracy in task 1 facing chart topic (mean= 5.25) than table topic (mean=5.05).

Qualitative Differences between the Chart and Table Topic

As it paertains to this phase of the study, the reports were broken down into sentences they were comprised of. Next, all the sentences were analyzed and major types of errors were identified. Task achievement was the first criterion that was checked. Then, inaccurate information, irrelevant information, format issues (introduction, overview, body paragraph) and the average number of words were identified. As shown in Table 9, the candidates only did well in terms of the average number of words in a chart topic.

Table 9
Comparison of Chart and Table's Task Achievement

Code	Task Achievement	Chart	Table
1	Inaccurate information	37	42
2	Irrelevant information	6	8
3	Format issues (introduction, overview, body paragraph)	5	6
4	The average number of words	168	145

In part two, the candidates' 'cohesion and coherence were investigated. The main researcher went through each line pinpointing implicit or explicit topic sentences, accurate use of cohesive devices, clear use of referencing, and incoherent sentences. As Table 10 shows, there was not any significant difference between candidates' performance in chart and table topics in terms of cohesion and coherence.

Table 10
Comparison of Chart and Table's Cohesion and Coherence

Code	Cohesion and Coherence	Chart	Table
CC1	Implicit or explicit topic sentences	41	47
CC2	Accurate use of cohesive devices	344	320
CC3	Clear use of referencing	311	295
CC4	Incoherence sentences	73	86

In part three, the candidates' lexical resource was investigated and less common lexical items, spelling errors, and word formation errors were identified. As it is depicted in Table 11, there was only a significant difference between less common lexical items in the two sets of performances.

Table 11
Comparison of Chart and Table's Lexical Resource

Code	Lexical Resource	Chart	Table
01	Less common lexical items	143	79
02	Spelling errors	181	192
03	Word formation errors	72	69

In the last part, complex structures, accurate complex structures, punctuation errors, and grammatical mistakes were examined in relation to grammar range and accuracy. As

Table 12 shows, there were not any qualitative differences between the two sets of performances. In fact, there was not any significant difference between a chart and a table regarding the candidates' grammar. This section is visually summarized in Table 12.

Table 12
Comparison of Chart and Table's Grammar Range and Accuracy

Code	Grammar Range and Accuracy	Chart	Table
001	Complex structures	94	82
002	Accurate complex structures	85	73
003	Punctuation errors	196	202
004	Grammatical mistakes	217	210

DISCUSSION

According to the results of the first research question, the participants' writings in two tasks were significantly different. The examinees performed better in task 1 with a chart topic than a table topic. These findings were consistent with other studies in the field acknowledging that task type impacts writers' performance. One possible explanation for this given by Mickan and Slater (2003) implies that the specification of a particular type of task determines test-takers' choice of linguistic elements for their answers. The findings revealed that task type significantly affected task achievement.

According to Randle (2010), there is overwhelming support for the use of visual arts in the classroom to encourage creative writing and improve academic achievement.

Olshansky (1994) identified the integration of visual arts as a motivator for students, Likewise, Trainin, et al. (2006) further discussed the integration of visual arts into writing to develop problem-solving skills, self-expression skills, and their imagination.

The results of the second research question showed that there was not any significant difference between examinees' coherence and cohesion scores in both table and chart topics. Regarding the results of the third and fourth research questions, the IELTS candidates performed significantly better in terms of lexical resource, and grammar range and accuracy in task 1 facing chart topic than table topic. In lexical resource, the researcher could notice the strength of the effect of charts on the candidates' minds. The candidates used much more complex lexical items in chart topics than in table topics. This qualitative gap was very large. When the candidates looked at the chart topic, more difficult words came to their mind but when they looked at the table topic, they had difficulty in finding less common words.

Olshansky (2006) suggested that by integrating the visual arts into writing, students find the writing task easier. This was reflected in his research anecdote where he found that using visual arts helped students with a lot of the thinking and planning required in writing. Using visual arts as a guide in writing had an impact on students' engagement as well as their success. The positive impacts of visual arts integration into writing on students' engagement were especially noted for students who struggled with writing. Teachers noticed that struggling students were more involved in integrating visual arts.

In fact, visual arts helped them move forward and make the writing process easier to manage.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The imagination of tasks by IELTS candidates seems to affect their performance. That is, if the task topic does not help learners to visualize , their performance will be weaker, and this visualization affects their performance in the IELTS exam. As was shown, there was a significant difference between scores, as the candidates performed differently. In fact, they differed in task achievement, lexical resource, and grammar range and accuracy. The effect of task topic was obvious here; the score that the candidates achieved might not be indicative of their writing performance score, but it may represent the score that the task topic has imposed on them.

A qualitative look in task achievement demonstrated that those presented with the chart topic like the ones who had the table topic made inaccurate sentences, but the number of inaccuracies of information was less than those made in the table topic reports. This implies that chart topics are more digestible for candidates' minds. That is, when candidates see the table, they see numbers and do not have a picture to visualize; they cannot even produce sufficient ideas for writing.

The differences were insignificant with reference to coherence and cohesion. Looking at numbers, we realize that those assigned with chart topics considered a topic sentence for each body paragraph more successfully than those given table topics. Although the results did not show significant differences, those who had the chart topics did better in employing implicit or explicit topic sentences, accurate use of cohesive devices, and clear use of referencing. The number of incoherent sentences was fewer for those assigned with chart topics. In actuality, the statistics were not similar, but there were small differences between them in terms of quality.

Based on the results of this study, Iranian candidates appeared to be more adept in writing task 1 with chart topics. More specifically, participants' performance on task 1 with a chart topic was significantly better than a table topic in terms of task achievement, lexical resource, and grammar range and accuracy scores. The results lend support to the use of visual arts in the classroom as an effective tool to enhance students' creative writing abilities.

The implications of this study are manifold. First of all, in preparing students for the test of IELTS academic writing task 1, IELTS trainers can provide descriptive feedback on their students' papers in respect of the four writing marking criteria after administering sample writing tests.

Another implication of the study concerns material developers. Books written on writing task 1 should keep IELTS candidates abreast of the IELTS writing descriptor. Samples should be provided to them giving detailed explanations which help candidates enhance their writing scores. Every sample printed in such books should come with an analysis of the content of reports in relation to the four writing marking criteria. This would further candidates' understanding of the writing process.

If numbers are instrumental in candidates' scores, the question is to what extent do numbers impact scores of those who are not good at mathematics? That is, how much can those who are endowed with mathematical intelligence profit from the tasks which contain numbers e.g. table topics? What will happen to those candidates who are not good at mathematics? The implication is that it is necessary for instructors to spend more time explaining table topics in IELTS classes to teach learners how to make sense of the numerical topics. That is, they teach learners who are not good at mathematics and are confused with numbers on how to imagine numbers or draw a series of shapes on the paper.

Although the study has reached its aims, there were some inevitable limitations. First, we did not have access to IELTS examiners. Therefore, two professional IELTS trainers with about 16 years of work experience were involved in our study.

Second, this study was not a multinational one. It only concerned Iranians' IELTS candidates. In fact, we did not have access to IELTS candidates from other countries. Thus, Iranian IELTS candidates were selected for the stuy.

Finally, given the time constraints, it was not possible to interview the IELTS candidates to see how they learned the IEELTS task 1 and how they were instructed by their teachers.

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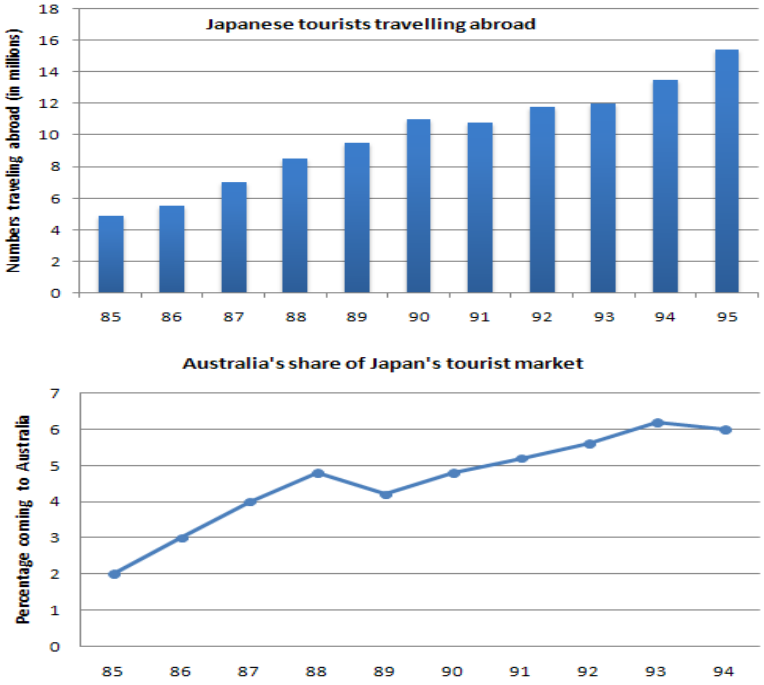
Appendix A

IELTS Academic Writing Task 1/ Chart Writing

» You should spend about **20** minutes on this task.

The charts below show the number of Japanese tourists traveling abroad between 1985 and 1995 and Australia's share of the Japanese tourist market.

Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information shown below.**»** You should write at least **150** words.



Appendix B

IELTS Academic Writing Task 1/ Table:

» You are advised to spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The tables below give information about sales of Fair-trade-labeled coffee and bananas in 1999 and 2004 in five European countries.*

» You should write at least **150** words.

Coffee	1999 (millions of Euros)	2004 (millions of Euros)
UK	1.5	20
Switzerland	3	6
Denmark	1.8	2
Belgium	1	1.7
Sweden	0.8	1

Bananas	1999 (millions of Euros)	2004 (millions of Euros)
Switzerland	15	47
UK	1	5.5
Belgium	0.6	4
Sweden	1.8	1
Denmark	2	0.9

***Fair-trade:** a category of products for which farmers from developing countries have been paid an officially agreed fair price.*

Appendix C (Band descriptor)

IELTS

WRITING TASK 1: Band Descriptors (public version)

Band	Task achievement	Coherence and cohesion	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
9	• fully satisfies all the requirements of the task • clearly presents a fully developed response	• uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention • skilfully manages paragraphing	• uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features, rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'	• uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'
8	• covers all requirements of the task sufficiently • presents, highlights and illustrates key features/ bullet points clearly and appropriately	• sequences information and ideas logically • manages all aspects of cohesion well • uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately	• uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings • skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation • produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation	• uses a wide range of structures • the majority of sentences are error-free • makes only very occasional errors or inappropriacies
7	• covers the requirements of the task • (A) presents a clear overview of main trends, differences or stages • (GT) presents a clear purpose, with the tone consistent and appropriate • clearly presents and highlights key features/bullet points but could be more fully extended	• logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout • uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use	• uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision • uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation • may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation	• uses a variety of complex structures • produces frequent error-free sentences • has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors
6	• addresses the requirements of the task • (A) presents an overview with information appropriately selected • (GT) presents a purpose that is generally clear; there may be inconsistencies in tone • presents and adequately highlights key features/ bullet points but details may be irrelevant, inappropriate or inaccurate	• arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression • uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical • may not always use referencing clearly or appropriately	• uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task • attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy • makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication	• uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms • makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication
5	• generally addresses the task; the format may be inappropriate in places • (A) recounts detail mechanically with no clear overview; there may be no data to support the description • (GT) may present a purpose for the letter that is unclear at times; the tone may be variable and sometimes inappropriate • presents, but inadequately covers, key features/ bullet points; there may be a tendency to focus on details	• presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression • makes inadequate, inaccurate or over-use of cohesive devices • may be repetitive because of lack of referencing and substitution	• uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task • may make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader	• uses only a limited range of structures • attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences • may make frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty; errors can cause some difficulty for the reader
4	• attempts to address the task but does not cover all key features/bullet points; the format may be inappropriate • (GT) fails to clearly explain the purpose of the letter; the tone may be inappropriate • may confuse key features/bullet points with detail; parts may be unclear, irrelevant, repetitive or inaccurate	• presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response • uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive	• uses only basic vocabulary which may be used repetitively or which may be inappropriate for the task • has limited control of word formation and/or spelling; • errors may cause strain for the reader	• uses only a very limited range of structures with only rare use of subordinate clauses • some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty
3	• fails to address the task, which may have been completely misunderstood • presents limited ideas which may be largely irrelevant/repetitive	• does not organise ideas logically • may use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas	• uses only a very limited range of words and expressions with very limited control of word formation and/or spelling • errors may severely distort the message	• attempts sentence forms but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate and distort the meaning
2	• answer is barely related to the task	• has very little control of organisational features	• uses an extremely limited range of vocabulary; essentially no control of word formation and/or spelling	• cannot use sentence forms except in memorised phrases
1	• answer is completely unrelated to the task	• fails to communicate any message	• can only use a few isolated words	• cannot use sentence forms at all
0	• does not attend • does not attempt the task in any way • writes a totally memorised response			

(A) Academic | (GT) General Training IELTS is jointly owned by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. Page 1 of 1