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Investigating the relationship between

intensive English language study and band score gain
on IELTS

International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Research Reports 2003: Volume 4

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Abstract: This exploratory study examines the relationship between intensive English language study and band score gains on the IELTS (International English Language

Testing System). Specifically, it investigates the progress of a sample of 112 students from non English-speaking backgrounds enrolled in intensive English language courses at one of four different language centres in Australia and New Zealand. Progress is gauged in terms of score gains on the academic module of the IELTS which was administered at the beginning and end of a 10-12 week period of intensive English language instruction. Pre- and post-study questionnaires were administered to all participating students and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 18 students sampled according to their level of gain at the post-test session. Interviews were also conducted with administrators and teachers at each of the participating institutions in order to elicit information about a) the learning environment and b) the factors they saw as critical in determining the English language progress of EAP (English for academic purposes) students in general and of those chosen for in depth interviewing in particular. Data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Regression analyses were undertaken to investigate the relationship between a range of personal, instructional and environmental variables extracted from the student questionnaire and score gains on the IELTS over the three-month period. In addition, narrative vignettes were produced for the sub-set of 18 students drawing on their own self-reports, as well as information supplied by their teachers. The results revealed that students made variable progress in English during the three month period with an average gain of about half a band overall. The greatest gains were in listening, whereas reading skills were somewhat less amenable to improvement. A range of factors were found to be linked to improved scores on the test, but these varied considerably from one skill to another. Implications are drawn both for students intending to sit the IELTS and for the institutions where they undertake their English language instruction. Avenues for further research are also identified.



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