

Reconsidering IELTS Scores in Vietnamese College Admissions: Links to Academic Success Factors

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Article Information

Received: August 12, 2025
Revised: August 28, 2025
Accepted: September 10, 2025
Online: September 19, 2025

Keywords

College Admission
IELTS
Predictive Validity
Vietnam

ABSTRACT

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has been accepted as a college admission requirement in Vietnam since 2017. However, its use in college admissions surged significantly after the Ministry of Education and Training's 2023 decision to recognize IELTS scores for high school graduation. This study investigated whether IELTS scores at college admission were related to three factors associated with academic success in higher education: psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in key learning skills. The research involved thirty-six first-year Vietnamese college students who were divided into three groups based on their admission IELTS scores: below 5.5, 5.5 to 6.5, and above 6.5. Analysis of variance revealed no significant differences in the academic success factors among these IELTS groups at admission. The study also examined whether a College Readiness course designed to enhance these academic success factors yielded different outcomes across the IELTS groups. While students improved in course outcomes, these gains generally did not differ significantly among the three IELTS groups, particularly six weeks after the course ended. These findings, combined with the limited research on IELTS score predictive validity in Vietnam, suggest two implications: first, there is a need for more comprehensive research on how IELTS scores relate to academic success factors in the Vietnamese context; and second, institutions may need to reconsider the weight given to IELTS scores in their college admissions processes.

INTRODUCTION

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has been a popular test among high school and college students in Vietnam who plan to study abroad ([Dang & Dang, 2021](#)). This English proficiency exam is commonly required for international students seeking admission to academic programs worldwide, especially in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada ([Read, 2022](#)). Since 2017, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Vietnam has revised college admission policies, allowing universities to consider students' academic profiles as a basis for student recruitment ([Pham & Sai, 2020](#); [Training, 2017](#)). Therefore, many higher education institutions in Vietnam have incorporated IELTS as part of their admissions criteria, resulting in an increased interest in this standardized English language test among Vietnamese domestic students despite just a few of these institutions using English as a medium of instruction. The impact of IELTS has grown significantly in

Vietnam's academic landscape, particularly following MOET's decision to accept IELTS scores for high school graduation in 2023 ([L. Nguyen & Duong, 2023](#); [Tú & Luu, 2024](#)).

During the 2023 and 2024 admissions seasons, more than 100 out of approximately 450 universities in total in Vietnam, including the top 40, announced the inclusion of IELTS in their admissions criteria ([Thanh & Nguyen, 2024](#); [V, 2023](#)). This approach provides a significant advantage to students with IELTS scores, making it more challenging for others to compete in college admissions. Given that performance on this exam has the potential to open or close doors to college opportunities, it becomes crucial to investigate the extent to which IELTS scores can correlate with students' potential for academic success in college for domestic students.

Several studies have explored the predictive validity of IELTS scores for the academic performance of students from Vietnam and other Asian countries. For example, [Dang & Dang \(2021\)](#) investigated the predictive relationships between IELTS scores and Vietnamese international students' subsequent academic performance at U.K. universities and found a positive and significant correlation between these factors. Similarly, [Woodrow \(2006\)](#) found that IELTS scores were moderately predictive of academic achievement in the first semester of study for 82 international students, primarily from Asia, pursuing postgraduate programs in an Australian university. However, these studies focused on students who studied abroad and used English as the medium of instruction. Thus, the importance of attaining high English proficiency levels might vary from that of domestic students pursuing undergraduate programs in Vietnam, where the primary language of instruction is Vietnamese. To date, no published studies in Vietnam or elsewhere have examined the predictive validity of IELTS scores concerning domestic students' academic success, even though these English test scores have been widely used in college admission in Vietnam. Therefore, this study aims to examine whether statistically significant differences exist in the average psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in key learning skills among three IELTS score groups (below 5.5, 5.5–6.5, and above 6.5) at three different points in time: pre-intervention (at admission), immediately after the College Readiness course, and six weeks after the course.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Success

The term "academic success" is widely used in educational research and assessment within higher education, but its definition varies as people view success differently. This study adopts [York et al.'s \(2015\)](#) expanded definition of academic success that goes beyond traditional measures like grade point averages (GPAs) and includes elements reflecting students' learning progress. A systematic review of academic success factors showed that psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in skills for effective learning are three factors strongly correlated with college students' academic success ([Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022](#); [Shengyao et al., 2024](#)). Therefore, in this predictive validity study, due to time and data access constraints, I measured the relationships between students' IELTS scores at admission and these academic success factors instead of their GPAs or other long-term metrics like retention rate or graduation rate.

This study contributes to the discussion on the relevance of using IELTS scores in higher education admission in Vietnam by investigating differences in mean scores on three academic success factors, psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in key learning skills, among three groups of Vietnamese students categorized by their IELTS scores at admission: below 5.5, 5.5 to 6.5, and above 6.5. The study also investigated the impact of a College Readiness course designed to improve these academic success factors on these relationships. Specifically, it explored whether the gains, if any, in these factors at the end of the course differed among the three IELTS groups.

IELTS Exams

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a standardized exam that evaluates the language proficiency of individuals who want to work or study in English-speaking countries. It is co-developed and co-managed by the British Council, IDP IELTS, and Cambridge University Press and Assessment ([IELTS, 2024a](#)). The IELTS test consists of four sections: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Each section is graded on a nine-band system that corresponds to a level of English proficiency. The scores for each section are averaged to calculate a total score. A band score of 4.0 to 5.0 indicates

that the candidate has basic language skills to communicate in familiar situations. A band score of 5.5 to 6.5 demonstrates that the candidate possesses the necessary language skills to live and work independently in an English-speaking country or study at a pre-degree level in English. A band score of 6.5 or higher is typically required for international students to study at the undergraduate or postgraduate level in an English-speaking country ([IELTS, 2024b](#)).

In Vietnam, college admission had traditionally been based solely on the national high school graduation exam scores. Since 2017, under the new college admission policy, some universities have directly admitted students based on the students' IELTS scores, with certain requirements regarding their high school GPAs and graduation test scores. A few schools add from 0.25 to 2.0 points to the students' high school graduation scores if they score 5.5 or higher on the IELTS test. Some other schools convert the IELTS score into an English subject grade with a maximum of 7/10 to even 16/10 for students who score 5.0 or higher, and then combine it with other high school graduation test scores in other subjects ([Vuong, 2023](#)). These policies create a significant advantage for students with high IELTS test scores in the admission process.

Higher education institutions claim that they want to recruit students with high IELTS scores because these scores have demonstrated the students' learning competence and potential for academic success ([An, 2023](#); [Ma & Chong, 2022](#)). However, from the researcher's observation when working as a university lecturer in two different institutions for over ten years, there could also be other reasons behind the desire to admit students with strong English proficiency. The Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam emphasizes the importance of strong English proficiency for college graduates to remain competitive in the global job market ([T. A. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024](#)). As a result, higher education institutions are required to invest in English language training, ensuring that graduate students achieve a certain level of proficiency based on their majors ([M, 2024](#)). By recruiting students with high English proficiency scores, universities can reduce investment in English language instruction while still ensuring graduates achieve strong proficiency. This contributes to quality assurance data on both current students' English skills and graduates' language readiness. In today's job market in Vietnam, candidates with strong English proficiency are in high demand. According to a Jobstreet survey, 95% of Vietnamese employers are willing to offer up to 30% higher salaries to candidates proficient in English ([T, 2021](#)). Graduates with high IELTS scores not only have a greater advantage in securing jobs but also command higher salaries, further enhancing universities' quality assurance metrics for graduate employability. Moreover, enrolling students with strong English proficiency strengthens a university's brand, boosting its appeal in student recruitment and admissions.

College Readiness Course

The College Readiness course was designed to improve academic success among first-year college students in Vietnam by focusing on three academic success factors: psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and skills for effective learning. This is an online course open to all students interested in enhancing their academic success and willing to participate in this experimental study. The curriculum of this course was informed by positive psychology, a rapidly growing field that promotes a strength-based approach to psychological well-being and optimal functioning ([Seligman, 2011](#); [B. W. Smith et al., 2021](#)). The integration of positive psychology into this curriculum is supported by extensive research demonstrating its positive impact on psychological well-being ([Hobbs et al., 2022](#)), ([Brouzos et al., 2023](#); [García-Álvarez et al., 2023](#)), and self-confidence ([Hidayat et al., 2023](#); [Leach, 2021](#)). This 10-session College Readiness course was conducted twice weekly over five weeks through online sessions via Zoom. Mixed-method data analyses of a larger research project, which this study is a part of, have shown that this College Readiness course significantly increased participants' psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in key skills learning ([Hammill et al., 2020](#); [Tarrats-Pons et al., 2025](#)).

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design ([Roger & Révész, 2019](#)). A pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test were conducted to examine whether IELTS scores at admission were associated with differences in academic success factors, namely psychological well-

being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in key learning skills. Participants were grouped according to their IELTS band scores: below 5.5, 5.5–6.5, and above 6.5.

Participants

Fifty first-year college students were recruited through social media and university postings to participate in this College Readiness course online. The recruitment was done through convenience sampling (Golzar & Noor, 2022). Out of the 50 students, 40 completed the course. However, only 36 finished the post-intervention survey, and 32 completed the follow-up survey six weeks later. Most of the participants (66.7%) were from urban areas, and the majority of them were female (77.8%). Regarding IELTS scores, 27.8% of the participants achieved a proficiency score above 6.5, 44.4% scored between 5.5 and 6.5, and the remaining 27.8% scored below 5.5.

Instrument

Three instruments were employed to measure the key academic success factors. First, the PERMA-Profiler was used to evaluate psychological well-being. This instrument was translated and validated in the Vietnamese context, resulting in an 18-item scale with four factors: positive emotion, negative emotion, relationships, and meaning and achievement. Second, the New General Self-Efficacy (NGSE) Scale with eight items was used to measure self-efficacy. Third, the Short Instrument for Measuring Students' Confidence with "Key Skills" (SICKS) was used to assess self-confidence in thinking skills, collaboration, communication, self-direction, and technology use. All instruments were adapted to a 10-point scale and demonstrated validity and reliability in prior studies with Vietnamese students.

Data Collection

Data were collected at three different time points: (1) pre-intervention (at admission), (2) immediately after the College Readiness course (post-intervention), and (3) six weeks after the course (follow-up). Online surveys were distributed via Google Forms to ensure convenience and accessibility. The College Readiness course itself consisted of 10 sessions delivered over five weeks through Zoom.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were computed to summarize the data. One-way ANOVA was employed to test for group differences across the three IELTS groups when assumptions of homogeneity of variance were met. When the assumption was violated, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test was used. Effect sizes (η^2) were also calculated to indicate the magnitude of differences beyond statistical significance.

RESULTS

Psychological Well-Being

Levene's tests for the pre-intervention and post-intervention overall psychological well-being scores and each of the individual well-being factors (positive emotion, negative emotion, relationships, and meaning and achievement) were not significant, indicating that the assumptions of equal variances were not violated. As shown in Table 1, at pre-intervention, ANOVA results showed no statistically significant differences among IELTS groups for any psychological well-being components. However, effect sizes were notable: relationships showed a large-to-much-larger-than-typical effect ($\eta^2 = .15$), while overall psychological well-being demonstrated a medium-to-large effect ($\eta^2 = .11$). Similar medium-to-large effects were also observed for positive emotion ($\eta^2 = .12$), negative emotion ($\eta^2 = .10$), and meaning and achievement ($\eta^2 = .09$). Although not statistically significant, these substantial effect sizes suggest that it could be worthwhile to replicate this study with a larger sample.

Post-intervention results revealed significant differences in several components. Positive emotion demonstrated the strongest effect ($\eta^2 = .27$, $p = .006$), indicating a much larger-than-typical impact. Meaning and achievement and overall psychological well-being showed significant differences ($p = .037$ and $p = .027$, respectively) with large effect sizes ($\eta^2 = .18$ and $\eta^2 = .20$). Relationships exhibited a similar effect size ($\eta^2 = .16$), though not statistically significant ($p = .051$) and negative emotion showed a medium effect ($\eta^2 = .06$), also not statistically significant.

At the six-week follow-up, Levene's tests of all dependent variables were not significant, except for the follow-up negative emotion scores. A Kruskal–Wallis nonparametric test was conducted to test for statistically significant differences between the three IELTS score groups in follow-up negative emotion because there were unequal variances and no significance across groups. The differences among IELTS groups appeared to diminish six weeks after the course, with all components showing small-to-medium effect sizes (η^2 ranging from .03 to .06) with the exception of positive emotion, which had a medium-to-large effect size ($\eta^2 = .08$) and no statistically significant differences. The Kruskal–Wallis nonparametric test for negative emotions also revealed no significant differences ($p = .766$). These findings suggest that the group differences observed post-intervention were not sustained over time.

Table 1. Comparison of Post-Intervention (n = 36) and Follow-Up (n = 32) Psychological Well-being in Different IELTS Groups

| | Psychological Well-Being | F value | Sig. value | η^2 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Pre-Intervention | Meaning and Achievement | $F(2, 33) = 1.60$ | .218 | .09 |
| | Positive Emotion | $F(2, 33) = 2.27$ | .123 | .12 |
| | Negative Emotion | $F(2, 33) = 1.72$ | .193 | .10 |
| | Relationships | $F(2, 33) = .310$ | .053 | .15 |
| | Overall Psychological Well-being | $F(2, 33) = 1.99$ | .153 | .11 |
| Post-intervention | Meaning and Achievement | $F(2, 33) = 3.66$ | .037 ^a | .18 |
| | Positive Emotion | $F(2, 33) = 6.03$ | .006 ^a | .27 |
| | Negative Emotion | $F(2, 33) = 1.12$ | .338 | .06 |
| | Relationships | $F(2, 33) = .327$ | .051 | .16 |
| | Overall Psychological Well-being | $F(2, 33) = 4.03$ | .027 ^a | .20 |
| Follow-up | Meaning and Achievement | $F(2, 29) = .65$ | .530 | .04 |
| | Positive Emotion | $F(2, 29) = 1.20$ | .317 | .08 |
| | Negative Emotion | | .766 ^b | |
| | Relationships | $F(2, 29) = .38$ | .690 | .03 |
| | Overall Psychological Well-being | $F(2, 29) = .66$ | .525 | .04 |

^a *p-values indicate statistical significance*

^b *p-values from the Kruskal-Wallis analysis*

Self-Efficacy

Levene's tests showed that the variances of self-efficacy scores were equal across the three IELTS groups, except for pre-intervention self-efficacy; therefore, the Kruskal–Wallis analysis was conducted to examine the mean differences for pre-intervention self-efficacy, while ANOVA was used to examine the mean differences for post-intervention and follow-up self-efficacy. For pre-intervention, the Kruskal–Wallis test showed no significant differences ($p = .789$) (see Table 2). At post-intervention, ANOVA results showed no significant differences in self-efficacy scores among the IELTS groups ($F(2, 33) = 1.72, p = .195$). However, the effect size was medium-to-large ($\eta^2 = .09$), suggesting that meaningful differences might exist but were not detected due to the small sample size. At the six-week follow-up, differences among IELTS groups further diminished, showing a small-to-medium effect size ($\eta^2 = .05$) with no statistical significance ($F(2, 29) = .68, p = .515$). The decrease in effect size from post-intervention to follow-up suggests that any potential group differences in self-efficacy became less pronounced over time.

Table 2. Comparison of Post-Intervention (n = 36) and Follow-Up (n = 32) Self-Efficacy Scores in Different IELTS Groups

| Self-efficacy | F value | Sig. value | η^2 |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Pre-intervention | | .789 ^b | |
| Post-intervention | $F(2, 33) = 1.72$ | .195 | .09 |
| Follow-up | $F(2, 29) = .68$ | .515 | .05 |

^b p-values from the Kruskal-Wallis analysis

Levene’s tests were conducted on the self-confidence scores for each key learning skill, and the results indicate that the assumption of equal variances was not met for pre-intervention self-confidence in thinking skills. Therefore, the Kruskal–Wallis test was used to compare the self-confidence scores in this area across the three IELTS score groups. One-way ANOVA analyses were conducted with all other variables.

The Kruskal–Wallis and ANOVA results, as presented in Table 3, showed no statistically significant differences in self-confidence scores among the three IELTS groups for any key learning skill at any time point. Pre-intervention, all effect sizes were small to small-to-medium (η^2 ranging from .01 to .04). Post-intervention, self-confidence in collaboration skills had a medium-to-large effect size ($\eta^2 = .09$), though it remained statistically nonsignificant ($p = .217$). Other skills demonstrated small and small-to-medium effects (η^2 ranging from .003 to .05). At follow-up, thinking skills and communication skills showed medium-to-large effect sizes ($\eta^2 = .12$ and $\eta^2 = .11$), though neither reached statistical significance. Other skills exhibited small-to-medium effect sizes, ranging from .03 to .06. These findings suggest that there might be differences between the groups (as indicated by effect sizes), but these differences could not be statistically confirmed.

Table 3. Comparison of Post-Intervention (n=36) and Follow-Up (n=32) Self-Confidence Scores in Different IELTS Groups

| Self-confidence in key learning skills | F value | Sig. value | η^2 |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Pre-Intervention | | .166 ^b | |
| Thinking skills | | | |
| Communication skills | $F(2, 33) = .383$ | .695 | .02 |
| Collaboration skills | $F(2, 33) = .176$ | .839 | .01 |
| Self-direction skills | $F(2, 33) = .358$ | .702 | .02 |
| Using technology for educational purposes | $F(2, 33) = .605$ | .552 | .04 |
| Post-intervention | | | |
| Thinking skills | $F(2, 33) = .41$ | .668 | .02 |
| Communication skills | $F(2, 33) = .06$ | .947 | .003 |
| Collaboration skills | $F(2, 33) = 1.60$ | .217 | .09 |
| Self-direction skills | $F(2, 33) = .84$ | .443 | .05 |
| Using technology for educational purposes | $F(2, 33) = .70$ | .504 | .04 |
| Follow-up | | | |
| Thinking skills | $F(2, 29) = 2.03$ | .150 | .12 |
| Communication skills | $F(2, 29) = 1.73$ | .196 | .11 |
| Collaboration skills | $F(2, 29) = .47$ | .631 | .03 |
| Self-direction skills | $F(2, 29) = .931$ | .405 | .06 |
| Using technology for educational purposes | $F(2, 29) = .99$ | .384 | .06 |

^b p-values from the Kruskal-Wallis analysis

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the predictive validity of IELTS scores for domestic Vietnamese college students by examining their psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in key learning skills. The results showed no statistically significant differences across IELTS groups at admission in these academic success factors. While some improvements in psychological well-being were observed immediately after the College Readiness course, particularly in positive emotion, meaning and achievement, and overall well-being, these effects did not persist six weeks later. For self-efficacy and self-confidence, no significant group differences were found at any time point. Overall, the findings suggest that IELTS scores at admission are not reliable predictors of these dimensions of academic success among domestic students in Vietnam.

Prior studies on IELTS predictive validity have primarily focused on international students studying in English-speaking contexts. Relevant research reported significant positive correlations between IELTS scores and subsequent academic achievement among Vietnamese international students in the United Kingdom ([Dang & Dang, 2021](#); [N. H. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022](#)). Similarly, another relevant research found that IELTS scores moderately predicted first-semester academic performance ([Gagen & Faez, 2024](#); [Woodrow, 2006](#)). These findings suggest that in environments where English is the medium of instruction, higher IELTS proficiency provides students with an advantage in managing coursework, understanding lectures, and producing academic outputs in English.

However, the present study diverges from these findings by examining Vietnamese domestic students, who primarily study in Vietnamese. The absence of significant differences in psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence across IELTS groups indicates that language proficiency measured by IELTS does not directly translate into stronger academic readiness in a non-English academic environment. This contrast underscores the contextual nature of predictive validity, what holds for international students abroad may not apply to domestic students whose educational environment relies on their native language.

In addition, limited published research has examined IELTS in the domestic Vietnamese context, despite the increasing reliance on IELTS for college admissions. The current study, therefore, addresses a critical gap by providing evidence that challenges the assumption of IELTS as a universal predictor of academic success. By doing so, it adds nuance to the global literature on standardized language tests, showing that their predictive power may vary significantly across different linguistic and educational settings.

Theoretically, the findings can be understood through a multidimensional framework of academic success, which highlights that student achievement extends beyond test scores to encompass psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and confidence in essential learning skills ([Tang & Zhu, 2023](#); [York et al., 2015](#)). In contexts like Vietnam, where the medium of instruction is Vietnamese, the alignment between English language proficiency and daily academic demands is weak. Therefore, while IELTS may measure English language competence, it does not capture the broader psychosocial and cognitive resources that underpin students' success in their domestic higher education environment.

This interpretation also resonates with theories of self-efficacy ([Li, 2020](#)) and positive psychology ([Carr et al., 2021](#)), which emphasize the role of confidence, resilience, and emotional well-being in shaping academic outcomes. The lack of association between IELTS scores and these factors in this study suggests that academic performance in Vietnamese universities may be more strongly influenced by students' motivation, coping strategies, and social support than by their English test scores. Such findings challenge the assumption that English proficiency is a universal prerequisite for academic achievement.

Furthermore, these results open an important discussion about the construct validity of IELTS in non-English academic settings. If IELTS was originally designed to assess readiness for study in English-speaking contexts, its use as a predictor of success in Vietnamese-language universities may represent a form of construct-irrelevant variance. In other words, IELTS scores may reflect abilities not directly relevant to the academic demands of domestic Vietnamese higher education, thereby limiting their predictive validity in this context.

The findings raise important questions for policymakers and higher education institutions in Vietnam. The heavy reliance on IELTS scores in admission processes may not accurately reflect domestic students' academic potential, given the lack of predictive validity found in this study. Furthermore,

IELTS preparation and test fees are costly, which exacerbates inequities in access to higher education opportunities. Policymakers should therefore reconsider the weight given to IELTS in admissions and develop more holistic criteria that take into account psychological, social, and academic readiness factors. Universities may also invest in support programs such as College Readiness courses that foster well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence, dimensions more directly linked to academic success.

This study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small ($n = 36$), limiting statistical power and generalizability. Participants were predominantly female and from urban areas, which may not represent the broader student population in Vietnam. In addition, the study measured academic success through psychological and self-related factors rather than long-term indicators such as GPA, retention, or graduation rates due to limited access to academic records. Future research should employ larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs to examine whether IELTS scores predict long-term academic outcomes across different disciplines.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a novel contribution as the first investigation of the predictive validity of IELTS scores for domestic students in Vietnam. While prior research has focused on international students studying in English-speaking countries, this study uniquely examines domestic higher education where Vietnamese remains the primary medium of instruction. By highlighting the limited predictive power of IELTS in this context, the study contributes new evidence to the global debate on standardized English tests in college admissions and provides critical insights for educational policy reform in Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the predictive validity of IELTS scores at admission for Vietnamese domestic students' academic success factors, including psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in key learning skills. The findings provide a straightforward answer to the research question: no significant predictive validity of IELTS scores was identified for these dimensions of academic success. Although some short-term gains in psychological well-being were observed immediately after the College Readiness course, these improvements were not sustained over time, and they did not differ across IELTS score groups. This outcome contrasts with previous research in international contexts, where IELTS has shown moderate predictive value for students studying in English-speaking countries, and it highlights the importance of considering contextual differences when evaluating the relevance of standardized English tests. The novel contribution of this study lies in offering the first empirical evidence from Vietnam focusing on domestic students, thereby filling a critical gap in the literature and challenging the assumption that IELTS scores can universally predict academic readiness. By situating IELTS within the Vietnamese higher education system, where instruction is primarily delivered in Vietnamese, this study demonstrates that test scores may have limited utility as indicators of students' broader academic potential. The findings carry important implications for policy and practice, particularly in relation to equity and access, given the high cost of IELTS preparation and testing in Vietnam. Accordingly, policymakers and higher education institutions should reconsider their heavy reliance on IELTS in admission decisions and move toward more holistic, context-sensitive, and equitable approaches that recognize multiple indicators of student readiness, including prior learning achievements, motivation, and psychosocial competencies.

Funding and Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no funding and conflicts of interest for this research.

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