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LTTC-GEPT Research Reports RG-01

**Examining the Criterion-Related Validity of the
GEPT Advanced Reading and Writing Tests:
Comparing GEPT with IELTS and Real-Life
Academic Performance**

**Cyril J. Weir
Sathena H. C. Chan
Fumiyo Nakatsuhara**

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under the LTTC-GEPT Research Grants Program 2011-2012.

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Foreword

We have great pleasure in publishing this very first *LTTC-GEPT Research Reports*. The study described in this report was funded by the LTTC-GEPT Research Grants for the year 2011 to 2012. Headed by Professor Cyril Weir of University of Bedfordshire, UK, the study investigated the validity of the GEPT Advanced Level Reading and Writing tests, with a focus on the cross-test comparability and the predictive power of the test scores.

The GEPT, developed more than a decade ago by the LTTC to serve as a fair and reliable testing system for EFL learners, has gained wide recognition in Taiwan and abroad. It has generated positive washback effects on Taiwan's English learning and teaching. As the GEPT has reached out to the international academic community with remarkable success over the years, numerous studies and research projects on GEPT-related subjects have been conducted and many of them have been published in the forms of technical monographs and refereed articles in books and journals. In view of the growing scholarly attention on the GEPT, and in order to assist external researchers to conduct quality research on topics related to the test, the LTTC has set up the LTTC-GEPT Research Grants Program, which offers funding to outstanding research projects.

The annual call for research proposals is widely publicized every October, which attracts proposals from all over the world. A review board, which comprises scholars and experts in English language teaching and testing from Taiwan and abroad, evaluates the research proposals in terms of the following criteria:

- the relevance to the identified areas of research,
- the benefit of the research outcomes to the GEPT,
- the theoretical framework, aims and objectives, and methodology of the proposed research,
- the qualifications and experience of the research team,
- the capability of the research outcomes to be presented at international conferences and published in journals,
- the timeline and cost effectiveness of the proposed research.

Complete and more up-to-date information about the GEPT is available at <http://www.lttc.ntu.edu.tw>. Full research reports can be downloaded at <http://www.lttc.ntu.edu.tw/lttc-gept-grants/main.htm>.

We believe that with the consistent contribution from the external research community, the GEPT will continue to refine its quality and achieve wider recognition at home and overseas.



Hsien-hao Liao
Executive Director
LTTC

Author Biodata

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摘要

◆ 研究團隊與研究目的

本研究計劃由知名語言測驗學者 Professor Cyril Weir (Director of the CRELLA at University of Bedfordshire) 主持，比較「全民英檢」高級閱讀/寫作測驗與 IELTS 測驗、以及受試者實際的學術英語能力，檢視「全民英檢」高級的效標關聯效度 (criterion-related validity)。

◆ 研究問題

- 1) 「全民英檢」高級閱讀、寫作成績與 IELTS 閱讀、寫作成績的相關性為何？
- 2) 「全民英檢」高級閱讀、寫作成績與受試者在英國大學學術寫作課堂表現的相關性為何？

◆ 受試者

171 位就讀 University of Bedfordshire 母語為華語的學生；其中 33 人(19.3%)的 IELTS 總成績為 6.5 或 7.0 (CEFR B2~C1)，另有 136 人(79.5%)為 5.0~6.0 (CEFR B1~B2)。本研究的樣本和 IELTS 年報上英國大學國際學生的 IELTS 成績分布情形大致相當，具代表性。

◆ 研究結果摘要

- ✓ 「全民英檢」高級閱讀、寫作成績與 IELTS 閱讀、寫作成績皆呈顯著正相關。但通過「全民英檢」高級比達到 IELTS 相當於 CEFR C1 級的分數(6.5 級分)困難；「全民英檢」高級大致相當於 IELTS 7.0 級分。
- ✓ 「全民英檢」高級閱讀、寫作成績與受試者在英國大學學術寫作課堂表現的相關性高，與受試者 IELTS 成績及其在英國大學學術寫作課堂表現的相關性非常接近，顯示兩測驗皆合理反映受試者在實際學術環境中之表現。
- ✓ 另外，根據受試者問卷結果顯示，「全民英檢」高級閱讀與寫作的試題設計，確實能測驗出受試者在學術閱讀與寫作時所面臨之類似困難 (例如：理解長而複雜的句子、融會貫通跨文本的文意等)。

Abstract

This present study investigates the criterion-related validity of the Reading and Writing components of the Advanced Level GEPT in terms of two types of evidence – cross-test comparability and predictive power. Data were collected from 171 students who were studying on a full-time, collaborative, undergraduate programme at the Business School at a British university. Cross-test comparability evidence was investigated by analysing the relationships between the advanced level GEPT reading and writing scores and IELTS bands, a more traditionally accepted academic proficiency test. Moderate to large correlations were obtained between GEPT total writing scores and IELTS writing bands with a correlation of $r=.432$ ($p<.01$), and between GEPT writing and IELTS reading and writing at a correlation of $r=.503$ ($p<.01$). From this study, it appears that it was harder for the participants to pass the GEPT Advanced writing test than to score 6.5 (indicative as the CEFR C1 level) or above on the IELTS writing test. Regarding GEPT reading scores, a large effect size correlation at $.520$ ($p<.01$) was obtained between GEPT total reading scores (Task 1 and Task 2) and IELTS reading bands. It might be harder to pass the GEPT Advanced reading test than to score 6.5 or above on the IELTS reading test. Finally, a correlation of $.562$ ($p<.01$), with a large effect size, was obtained between the total GEPT reading and writing scores and the average IELTS reading and writing bands. Secondly, the predictive power of the advanced level GEPT reading and writing scores was investigated in terms of test takers' real life academic performance on different writing tasks in their degree course work and examinations. The results show that the GEPT reading and writing scores correlated with the participants' real-life academic performances at $.529$ ($p<.01$), explaining 27.98% variance of the real-life performances. When considered separately, GEPT reading scores correlated with the real-life academic performances at $.499$ ($p<.01$), explaining 24.90% variance, and GEPT writing scores at $.294$ ($p<.01$), explaining 8.64% variance of the real-life performances. A self-assessment questionnaire on academic reading and writing experiences was administered to generate more quantitative evidence regarding how well the GEPT advanced test reflected the test takers' perception of their academic reading and writing abilities. The findings show that the major self-reported academic reading and writing difficulties, such as understanding long and complex sentences, constructing intertextual meaning across texts, writing about complex subjects, using a range of vocabulary, editing the linguistic accuracy of their own texts, were addressed in the GEPT advanced level reading and writing tests.

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1. Scope of the study

In order to help educational institutions to make an informed decision about the advanced level GEPT scores as a measure of international students' academic English proficiency, it is crucial to establish criterion-related validity of the advanced level GEPT test by gathering two types of validity evidence. The first relates to the comparability of the advanced level GEPT scores and those of more traditionally accepted academic proficiency tests. The second relates to the predictive power of the test scores in terms of test takers' real life academic performance.

The aim of the study was to collect such validity evidence for two components of the advanced level GEPT – Reading and Writing – in two stages.

- Stage 1 conducted a cross-test comparability investigation against the IELTS reading and writing tests.
- Stage 2 compared the advanced level GEPT reading and writing test scores with two external measurements: a) the test takers' real life academic performance on writing tasks in their course work and examinations, and b) test takers' self assessment of their academic reading and writing abilities.

It was envisaged that the findings would provide universities intending to adopt the advanced GEPT test with cross-test comparability information and information about how well the advanced GEPT scores could predict the test takers' real life academic performance in their degree courses.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Theoretical support for criterion-related validation

Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive validation framework includes criterion-related validity as a form of external evidence, which is defined as 'a predominantly quantitative and a posteriori concept, concerned with the extent to which test scores correlate with a suitable external criterion of performance with established properties' (Weir, 2005: 35). The comparison between test scores on the test to be validated and the external criterion of performance may be either concurrent or predictive in nature. Concurrent validity is usually examined by 'comparing scores from a given test with some other measure of the same ability of the candidates taken at the same time as the test' (Shaw & Weir, 2007: 229), whereas predictive validity involves comparing the test scores with an external measure of the same candidate some time later, after s/he has taken the test. The external measures can be other test scores, rating by teachers (Alderson, Clapham, & Wall, 1995), candidates' self-assessment (Shaw & Weir, 2007), or candidates' course results (Alderson et al., 1995). The value of validating tests against suitable external criteria has also been advocated by professional testing bodies such as the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) (see ALTE 1998).

2.2 Previous criterion-related validation studies

Although the number of test comparability studies is relatively few, most of them have demonstrated clear results in terms of the level of comparability between two or more tests. Examples include Bachman, Davidson, Ryan, and Choi's (1995) three-year Cambridge-TOEFL comparability study, which compares two high-stake tests – the First Certificate in English (FCE) and TOEFL PBT, and Wu's (2011) study which compares the GEPT reading component with Cambridge ESOL PET and FCE.

On the other hand, the findings of predictive validity studies regarding the correlation between test scores and subsequent academic performance is less conclusive. Cotton and Conrow (1998) and Dooey (1999) have found little or no significant connection between performance on high-stake academic tests and on academic studies. Criper and Davies (1988) found a correlation of .30 between ELTS and academic outcomes. Ten per cent of the variance in the academic outcomes was accounted for by the level of English measured by ELTS.

A number of other studies, however, have generally found moderate positive correlations between high-stake academic test entry levels and Grade Point Averages (GPA) (See for example Hill, Storch & Lynch, 1999; Kerstjens & Nery, 2000).

The inconclusive findings of predictive validity may not necessarily mean that those test results were invalid. Not to mention, the strength of correlations is highly influenced by the range of scores to be correlated each other. More importantly, researchers who use overall academic achievement as the external criterion references should be reminded of the fact that their attempts to link test scores to academic performance, which arguably depends on a

range of factors apart from language proficiency, are questionable. Therefore, in order to achieve more meaningful results of predictive validity, the present study used a variety of more relevant external measures of test takers' performance, for example, their performance on individual written assignments, tests, and examinations on their course work.

2.3 Research questions

Two research questions arise concerning the criterion-related validity of the advanced level GEPT reading and writing tests.

- 1) What are the relationships between the advanced level GEPT reading and writing scores and IELTS reading and writing scores?
- 2) What are the relationships between the advanced level GEPT reading and writing scores and test takers' performance on real life academic tasks at UK undergraduate level?

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Data were collected from 171 students (Chinese nationality, both genders) studying on a full-time collaborative undergraduate programme at the Business School at the University of Bedfordshire. They were doing one of four majors: Business Administration, Advertising and Marketing Communications, Human Resource Management, or Marketing (see details in Tables 1 and 2 below). The current study started when these students joined the university and lasted until they finished the collaborative programme at a period of 12 months.

Table 1: Participating students' gender balance

Gender	Frequency	Per cent
Male	90	52.6
Female	81	47.4
Total	171	100

Table 2: Participating students' majors

Department	Frequency	Per cent
Business Administration	30	17.5
Advertising and Marketing Communications	38	22.2
Human Resource Management	55	32.2
Marketing	48	28.1
Total	171	100

3.2 Administer a demographic questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was administered to 175 students during a language class at the beginning of the term to survey the students' demographic information (gender, department, modules, etc.) and their IELTS overall, reading and writing band scores (see Table 3 for the format and structure of the papers). Four students who did not have IELTS scores were excluded from the study, making the number of participants 171 as described in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 3: IELTS test format and structure

Paper	Task	Task Type	No. of items	Time (mins)
Reading	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading for gist ▪ Reading for main ideas ▪ Reading for detail ▪ Skimming ▪ Understanding logical argument ▪ Recognising writer's opinions, attitudes and purpose 	40	60
Writing	1	Candidates are asked to describe some visual information, and to present the description in their own words (150 words)		20
	2	Candidates are presented with a point of view or argument or problem (250 words)		40

Source: <http://www.ielts.org/teachers.aspx>

3.3 Administer the test tasks

The Reading and Writing papers of the Advanced Level GEPT Test were administered to the 171 students at the beginning of the term (see Table 4 for the format and structure of the papers) under strict testing conditions, following the instruction provided by the LTTC. The writing paper was rated by the LTTC while the reading paper was scored by CRELLA. Reliability of the test results was checked by the institutions respectively.

Table 4: GEPT test format and structure

Paper	Part	Task Type	No. of items	Time (mins)
Reading	1	Careful reading	40	50
	2	Skimming & scanning		20
Writing	1	Summarizing main ideas from verbal input and expressing opinions (250 words)		60
	2	Summarizing main ideas from non-verbal input and providing solutions (250 words)		45

Source: http://www.lttc.ntu.edu.tw/E_LTTC/E_GEPT/Advanced.htm

The primary purpose of the study was to establish the statistical cross-test comparability of the GEPT advanced level reading and writing test against the same papers in IELTS, a more traditionally accepted academic proficiency test. While it was felt that IELTS was the appropriate choice for comparison (it is globally the most commonly accepted metric for university entrance), it is important to bear in mind salient differences in the writing constructs being measured in the IELTS Academic and GEPT Advanced Level tests. With reference to Table 3 and Table 4, IELTS Writing Task 1 only requires test takers to simply describe given, non-verbal information presented in a single figure while GEPT Writing Part 2 requires test takers to summarize the main findings from two figures and discuss possible reasons for the findings and make suggestions. IELTS Writing Task 2 is a writing-only task which requires test takers to write an essay in response to a given topic while GEPT Writing Part 1 is a reading-into-writing task which requires test takers to

summarise the main points of the two given articles and state their own viewpoint. Regarding the reading component, GEPT constrains the time allowance of Part 1 (careful reading) and Part 2 (skimming & scanning) in an effort to measure both expeditious and careful writing skills separately while IELTS has only one time limit for all 40 questions. Such differences in cognitive and contextual parameters are likely to affect the comparison between the two tests.

3.4 Select real-life tasks as the external criteria of test performances

In order to provide a meaningful external criterion reference to the GEPT test, this study compared the participants' GEPT reading and writing test scores with a range of real-life writing assignment, test, and examination scores. Eight module handbooks were collected from the Business School at the University of Bedfordshire. In order to select suitable tasks for comparison, the specification and assessment plan of each module were assessed according to the following criteria:

- enrolment rate of the module (i.e., as modules were selected by the students, a module was considered for inclusion in the study only if more than 50% of the cohort enrolled)
- individual writing assignments only (i.e., no group/collective assignments)
- the types of input source involved
- the response text types required

As a result, two writing assignments, one in-class test and one end-of-term examination from four different modules were selected for investigation. Table 5 summarises these real-life in-course tasks. A follow-up study of the present research will compare comprehensively the contextual features of the GEPT Advanced Level Writing Task 1 and the two selected real-life writing tasks: report and essay.

Table 5: Selected real-life tasks

Module	Task	Brief description	Input
A ¹	Report	Write a report on a given dataset <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the given data - Discuss and justify ways of analysis - Recommendations (2000 words)	Verbal and non-verbal input (e.g. graph, table, chart, diagram, etc.)
B	Essay	Write an essay on a topic with reference to a given stimulus article (5000 words) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summarise issue(s) - Discuss with personal views - Conclusion 	Mainly verbal input (500 to 1500 words)
C	In-class test	Test understanding of core concepts and theories (1 hour) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A few short answer questions 	Nil
D	End-of-term exam	An exam on a case study given in advance (2 hours, no specific word limits) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critically analyse issues presented in the case study - Make recommendations and justify with reasons 	Verbal and non-verbal input (about 2500 words)

3.5 Administer a self-assessment questionnaire

In addition to the above-mentioned research instruments, a self-assessment questionnaire (see Appendix 3) was administered in order to provide further insight into the relationships between the GEPT test scores and the real-life performances. One hundred and twenty-three students² filled in the questionnaire to self-assess their academic reading and writing abilities based on their university learning experiences. The questionnaire was developed from two sources:

- a) the CEFR B2-C1 Reading and Writing self-assessment grid, and
- b) an academic reading experience questionnaire developed in Weir, Hawkey, Green, Unaldi, and Devi's (2009) large scale study on the reading experiences of the first-year undergraduates at a UK university.

Weir et al.'s (2009) study was chosen because participants in the present study and their study shared a similar profile. Questions concerning the most significant difficulties experienced by the undergraduates in Weir et al.'s (2009) questionnaire, which include items regarding *reading complicated subject matters*, *time pressure*, *length of texts* and *finding relevant information*, were adapted in this study. There are a total of 13 items for the academic reading abilities and 16 items for the academic writing abilities.

¹ Due to confidentiality, the module names are anonymised and the actual tasks are not shown in the report.

² 48 students did not enrol on the same module where the self-assessment questionnaire was administered in the second term.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section describes the findings regarding the two research questions of the project:

RQ1: What are the relationships between the advanced level GEPT reading and writing scores and IELTS reading and writing scores?

RQ2: What are the relationships between the advanced level GEPT reading and writing scores and test takers' performance on real life academic tasks at UK undergraduate level?

Regarding RQ1, the participants' proficiency level in English as measured by IELTS will be described (Section 4.1), followed by their writing (Section 4.2) and reading performances on the advanced level GEPT test (Section 4.3) with reference to their IELTS scores. After that, correlation between the GEPT and IELTS scores will be reported (Section 4.4).

Regarding RQ2, the participants' performances on the four selected real-life tasks (two writing assignments, one in-class test and one examination) will be described (Section 4.5), followed by an analysis of the correlation between the GEPT reading and writing scores and these real-life scores (Section 4.6). The participants' self-assessment of their academic reading and writing abilities will be discussed in Section 4.7.

4.1 Participants' proficiency level in English (measured by IELTS)

The 171 participants' IELTS overall, writing and reading bands are described in Table 6 below. All IELTS scores were effective at the time of the study (i.e., within two years of effectiveness, in line with the University's admission policy). Thirty-three participants (19.3%) had an IELTS overall band of either 6.5 or 7.0, and 136 participants (79.5%) had an IELTS overall band of 5.0, 5.5 or 6.0. On average, the participants had an overall IELTS band of 5.93, reading band of 6.11 and writing band of 5.59.

Table 6: Participants' IELTS scores

Band	IELTS (Overall)			IELTS (Reading)			IELTS (Writing)		
	Freq.	Per cent	Total Per cent	Freq.	Per cent	Total Per cent	Freq.	Per cent	Total Per cent
4.5	0	0	0%	2	1.2	1.2%	7	4.1	4.1%
5	2	1.1	79.5%	8	4.7	63.2%	48	28.1	81.9%
5.5	67	39.2		46	26.9		56	32.7	
6.0	67	39.2		54	31.6		36	21.1	
6.5	25	14.6	19.3%	33	19.3	29.2%	17	9.9	13.4%
7.0	8	4.7		17	9.9		6	3.5	
7.5	1	0.6	1.2%	6	3.5	6.4%	1	0.6	0.6%
8	1	0.6		4	2.3		0	0	
8.5	0	0		1	0.6		0	0	
Total	171	100	100%	171	100	100%	171	100	100%

While these figures are higher than the mean band scores of all Chinese and Taiwanese test takers of IELTS in 2010 (see Table 7 below), the participants' CEFR levels suggested by their IELTS bands seem to be lower than those of the candidates that the GEPT Advanced test was originally designed for (i.e., C1 level; see Figure 1 below for indicative IELTS bands at CEFR levels). However, for the purpose of this study, the sampled proficiency range is considered to be appropriate. This is because the sampled range reflects a typical IELTS score distribution of overseas undergraduate students admitted to study at UK universities³, and the results and implications drawn from this study will therefore provide a more realistic picture of the criterion-related validity of the GEPT Advanced test, when the test is used as an admission test for UK universities.

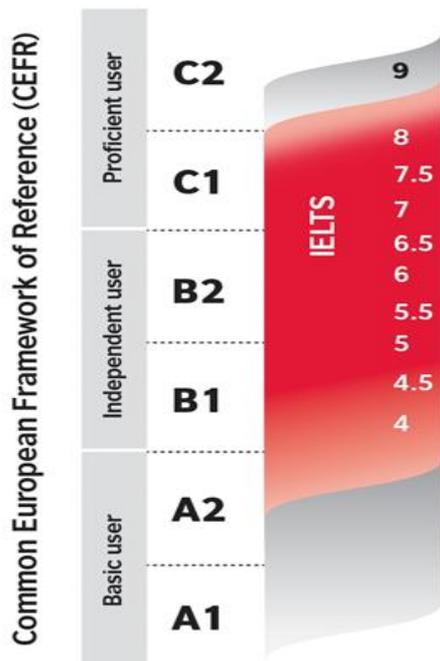
Table 7: IELTS mean band scores

	IELTS (Overall)	IELTS (Reading)	IELTS (Writing)
Current study Participants (2011)	5.93	6.11	5.59
All Chinese 2010*	5.6	5.9	5.2
All Taiwanese 2010*	5.8	5.9	5.4

* http://www.ielts.org/researchers/analysis_of_test_data/test_taker_performance_2010.aspx

Figure 1: Indicative IELTS band scores at CEFR levels

(http://www.ielts.org/researchers/common_european_framework.aspx)



4.2 Participants' performance on GEPT writing tasks

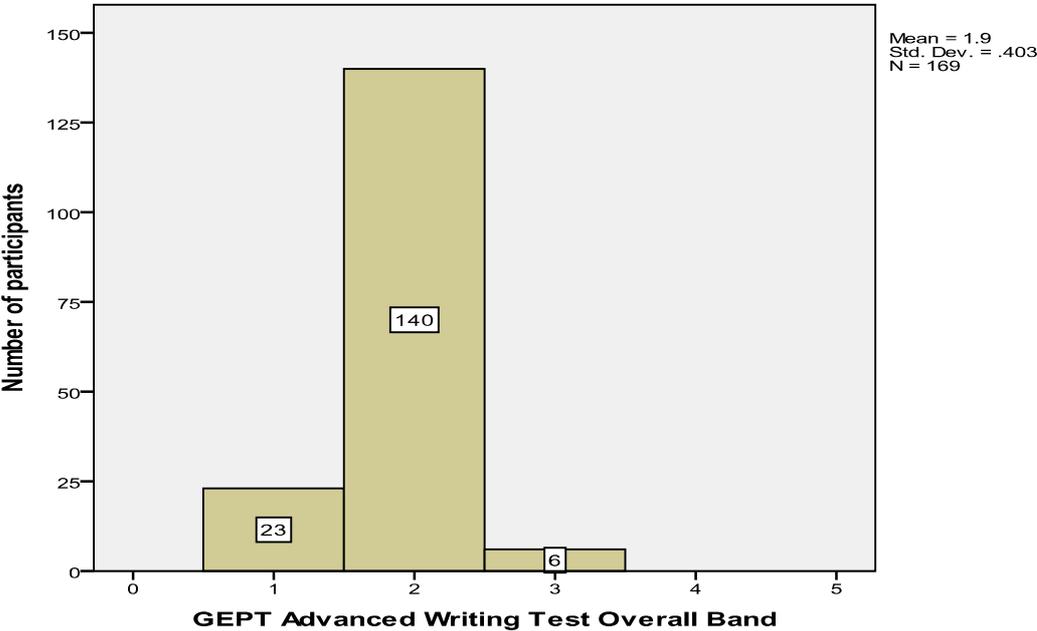
Both Task 1 and Task 2 of the GEPT Advanced writing test are marked using four analytical marking categories: Relevance and Adequacy (RA), Coherence and Organization (CO), Lexical Use (LU), Grammatical Use (GU). Each category is scored from 1 to 5, and the

³ Students with overall IELTS 5.0 and 5.5 were required to complete a 12- or 6-week intensive pre-sessional language course.

total score for each task is therefore 20. A holistic band is then obtained based on the analytical scores, and a holistic band of 3 is the passing band out of the five bands. Holistic Band 3 requires candidates to score at minimum 3 across all four analytical categories.

The histogram in Figure 2 below shows the distribution of the participants' overall band on the GEPT Advanced writing test. Out of the 169 participating students⁴, only six students were awarded a holistic band 3 (i.e., the passing band), and the majority of the participants scored 2. The mean band of the 169 participants was 1.9, with a standard deviation of .401. The fact that while 24 participants had 6.5 or above on IELTS writing test (as mentioned in Table 6 previously), only six of them passed the GEPT Advanced writing test suggests that it might be harder to pass the GEPT Advanced writing test than scoring 6.5 on IELTS writing test.

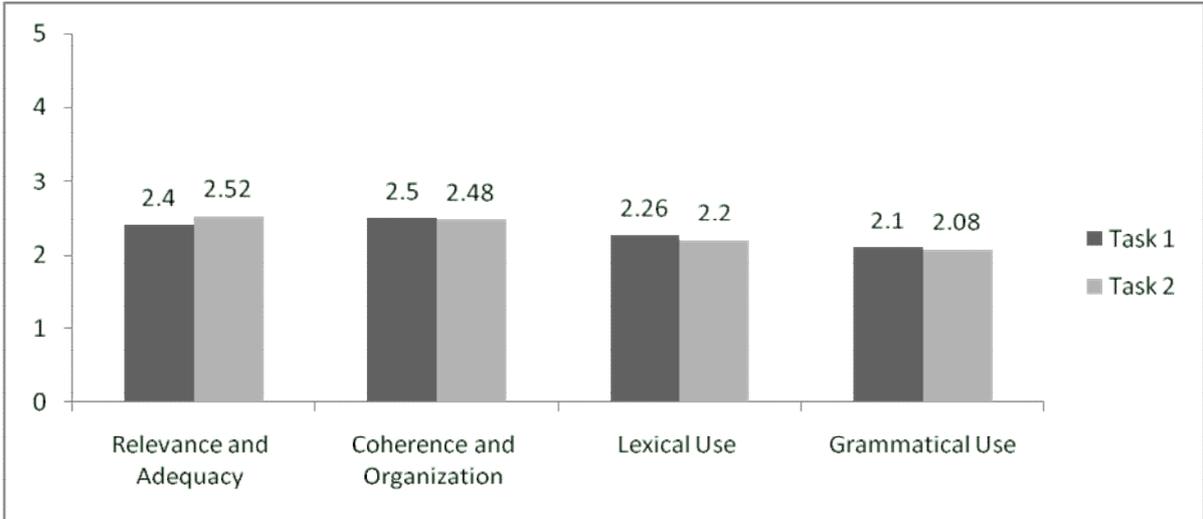
Figure 2: GEPT advanced writing test overall band



As mentioned earlier, each of the writing tasks in the GEPT advanced writing test were scored on four analytical criteria. Figure 3 shows the participants' scores on these four marking categories on Task 1 (Summary from verbal input) and Task 2 (Summary from non-verbal input). It appears that the participants in this study as a whole group performed similarly on both tasks.

⁴ Scores of two participants were excluded from analysis as they did not complete both writing tasks.

Figure 3: Analytical scores on the GEPT Advanced writing test

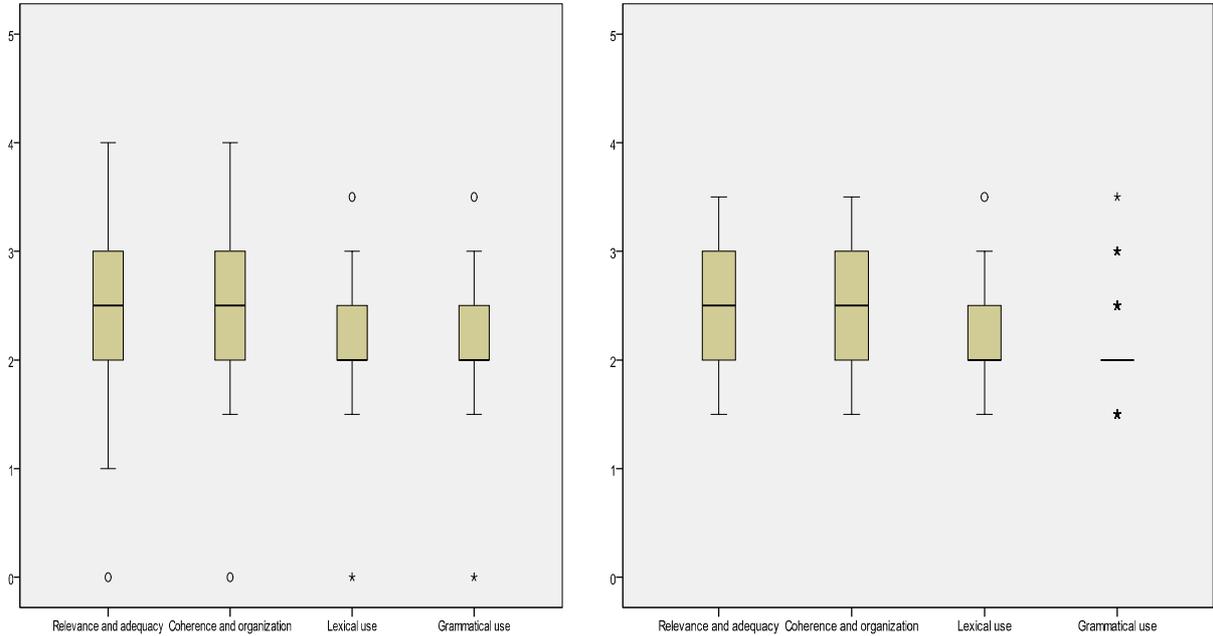


However, the boxplots in Figure 4 below show that, even though with very similar mean scores on the four analytical criteria between the two tasks, Task 1 appeared to be able to elicit a wider range of performances from the participants than Task 2 did, especially on *relevance and adequacy* and *grammatical use*. It should be noted that no participants in this study achieved band 5 on any of the categories on either of the tasks.

Figure 4: Boxplots of the analytical scores on both tasks

Task 1 (Summary from verbal input)

Task 2 (Summary from non-verbal input)



The use of average overall bands does not generate a comprehensive enough picture of the participants' performances on the GEPT Advanced writing test. The total analytical scores on both tasks were, therefore, calculated and analysed. The total scores were also used to analyse the correlations between GEPT and IELTS performances (Section 4.4.1) and between GEPT and real-life performances (Section 4.6.1). As mentioned previously, each of the four analytical criteria is scored from 1 to 5; hence the total score for each task is 20.

As indicated in Figure 5 (Task 1) and Figure 6 (Task 2) below, the participants' mean total analytical score on the GEPT Advanced Writing Task 1 was 9.26 with a standard deviation of 1.67 whereas the mean score on Task 2 was 9.28 with a standard deviation of 1.56. A paired samples t-test showed that there was no significant difference between the mean total analytical scores on Task 1 and Task 2 ($t(169)=-.212, p=.832$).

Figure 5: Participants' performance on GEPT Writing Task 1

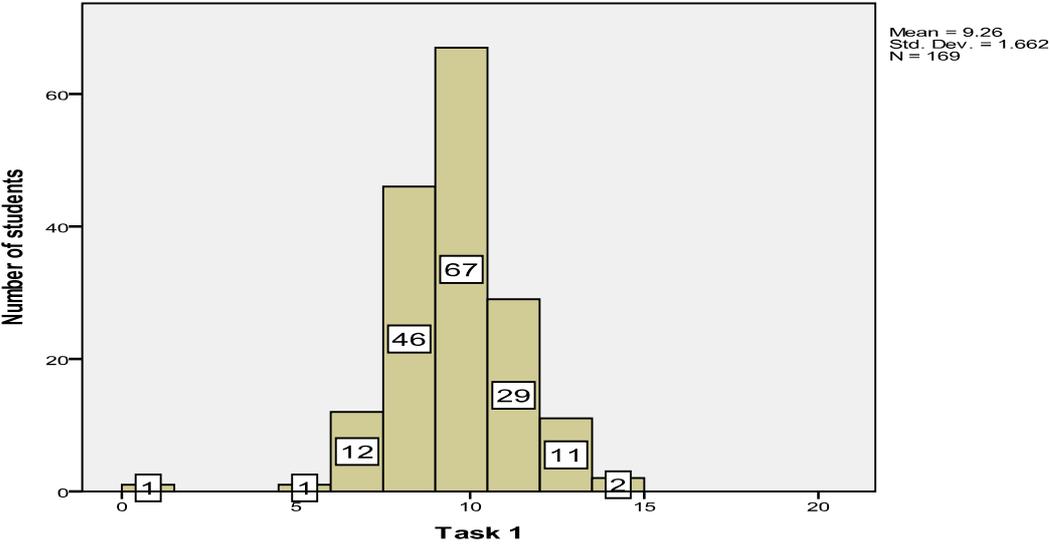
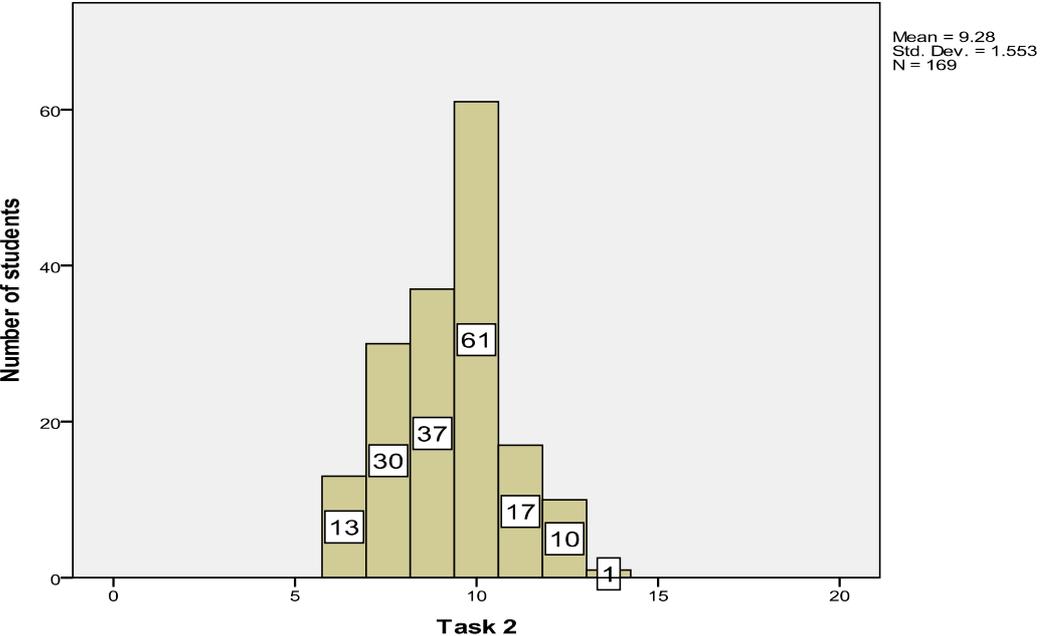


Figure 6: Participants' performance on GEPT Writing Task 2

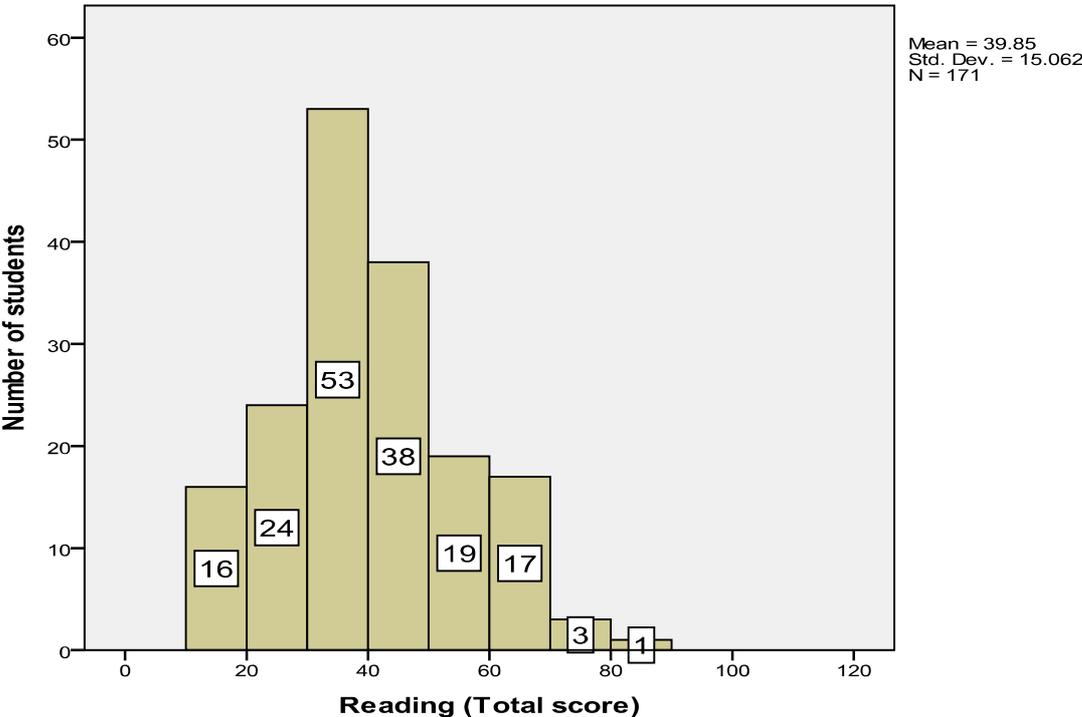


4.3 Participants' performance on GEPT reading tasks

The GEPT Advanced reading paper consists of two tasks: careful reading and skimming & scanning, and there are 20 items on each part. Each correct item receives 3 points, making the total score for each part 60. Out of the sum of the scores awarded on the two tasks (i.e., the total score of 120), the passing mark is 72.

Out of the 171 participating students, only four students obtained a total reading score higher than 72 (i.e., the passing score). The mean total reading score was 39.85 with a standard deviation of 15.06 (for details see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7: Participants' performance on GEPT reading paper (Part 1 and Part 2)



The participants' mean score on GEPT Advanced Reading Part 1 (careful reading) was 17.68 with a standard deviation of 7.91 whereas the participants' mean score on Part 2 (skimming & scanning) was 22.25 with a standard deviation of 10.40. A paired samples t-test indicated that participants in this study performed significantly better on Part 2 than Part 1 ($t(171)=-5.671, p<.01$).

Out of the 171 participants, 61 of them had an IELTS reading band of 6.5 or above (as indicated in Table 6 previously). The very low GEPT reading passing rate obtained in this study seems to suggest, similar to the writing paper, that it might be harder to pass the GEPT Advanced reading test than scoring 6.5 or above on IELTS reading test. This will be further discussed in Section 4.4.2 on the correlation between GEPT reading and IELTS reading performances.

4.4 Correlations between GEPT and IELTS performances

To address Research Question 1 (What are the relationships between the advanced level GEPT reading and writing scores and IELTS reading and writing scores?), correlations between GEPT scores and IELTS bands were analysed. GEPT writing and IELTS will be discussed in Section 4.4.1, GEPT reading and IELTS in Section 4.4.2, and GEPT reading and writing and IELTS will be discussed together in Section 4.4.3.

4.4.1 GEPT writing and IELTS

First of all, the correlation between the participants' GEPT writing bands (1 to 5) and IELTS writing bands (1 to 9) were analysed. As anticipated, the correlation was low ($r=.243$, $p<.01$) due to the limited range of values for both tests.

Therefore, as mentioned earlier in the report, the GEPT total analytical scores were used instead of the overall band. There was a correlation of $.432$ ($p<.01$) with a moderate effect⁵ size between the total GEPT writing scores and IELTS writing bands. When the two GEPT writing tasks were treated separately, there was higher correlation between GEPT Writing Task 2 and IELTS writing bands than between GEPT Writing Task 1 and IELTS writing bands (for details see Table 8 below). This is most likely because the task setting of GEPT Writing Task 2 (Summary from non-verbal input) is comparable to IELTS Task 1 (Describing visual input) (see Tables 3 and 4 for the test format of both tests).

As both tasks in the GEPT Advanced Writing Test involve reading input, it is perhaps reasonable to anticipate a higher correlation between the participants' GEPT writing scores and their average IELTS writing and reading bands. As shown in the last column of Table 8 below, there was a correlation of $.503$ ($p<.01$) between the GEPT writing scores and the IELTS reading and writing bands. And the effect size was large.

Table 8: Correlations between GEPT writing and IELTS performances

		IELTS Writing	IELTS Reading and Writing
GEPT Writing Overall Band	Pearson Correlation	.243**	.383**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000
	N	169	169
GEPT Writing Total Score (Task 1 and Task 2)	Pearson Correlation	.432**	.503**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	169	169
GEPT Writing Task 1 (Total score)	Pearson Correlation	.332**	.401**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	169	169
GEPT Writing Task 2 (Total score)	Pearson Correlation	.467**	.529**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	169	169

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Moderate to large correlations were obtained between GEPT total writing scores and IELTS writing bands ($r=.432$, $p<.01$) and between GEPT writing and IELTS reading and writing

⁵ For effect size, we follow Cohen's (1988) benchmarks: $r=.10$ ($r^2=.01$) is considered small effects, $r=.30$ ($r^2=.09$) is considered medium-sized effects, and equal to or larger than $r=.5$ ($r^2=.25$) is considered large effects.

($r=.503$, $p<.01$) in this study. However, it should be borne in mind that, due to a truncated sample, the narrow score range on the IELTS writing test obviously limits the size of any correlations that might be expected.

In addition, there are three reasons to be somewhat cautious in interpreting this result. First, the participants may have been more familiar with the IELTS tasks than with the GEPT writing tasks (even though they were briefed about the GEPT writing tasks one or two weeks before they did the test).

Second, participating students might not have perceived the GEPT test to be as high-stakes for them as IELTS. The GEPT scores did not affect the university grades while IELTS was used in making decisions about the university entry. It is therefore recommended that further research is undertaken into this issue, though this would represent quite a challenge as the level of test familiarity and perception of stakes are difficult to balance and hold constant across two tests within the same population.

Finally, though it was felt that IELTS was an appropriate choice of reference of comparison given its dominant position as the test of choice for University matriculation purposes (2 million plus candidates), the constructs underlying the GEPT Advanced Level and IELTS Academic were not entirely the same, for example, IELTS Writing Task 2 is a writing-only task while GEPT Writing Part 1 is a reading-into-writing task. It may be the case that GEPT is more construct valid than IELTS as presently conceived but we can only work with tests that are currently available.

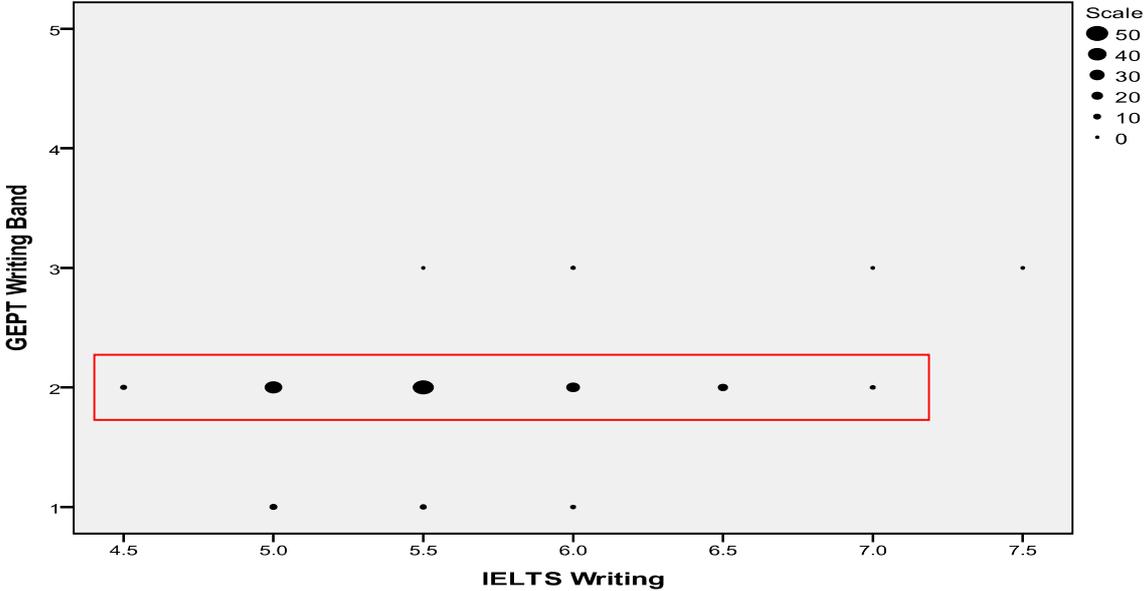
This is a problem which bedevils any cross-test comparability study. Examination boards around the world are experiencing similar difficulties in trying to match their different English language tests to the CEFR. My C1 test may not be the same as your C1 test even though they are used for similar purposes. The problem is compounded in this study by the fact that IELTS is designed to cover a broad range of ability while GEPT Advanced is aimed at a specific level.

Nevertheless, this cross-test comparability study does provide positive evidence of criterion-related validity for the GEPT Advanced Level Reading and Writing Tests against a widely accepted academic proficiency test. If IELTS were more like GEPT or vice versa the correlations may well have been even higher.

In order to examine in detail the relationships between the GEPT writing scores and IELTS bands, different graphs were produced for further illustration. First of all, the scatterplot in Figure 8 shows the pattern of the relationship between GEPT writing bands and IELTS writing bands. As the scatterplot indicates, while most participants scored GEPT writing band 2, their IELTS writing scores ranged from 4.5 to 7. This might suggest that a GEPT band 2 captured performances from participants with a wide range of writing abilities (indicated by their IELTS bands), at least in this study. It seems that an overall GEPT Advanced Writing band 2 might not be very effective in discriminating the writing abilities

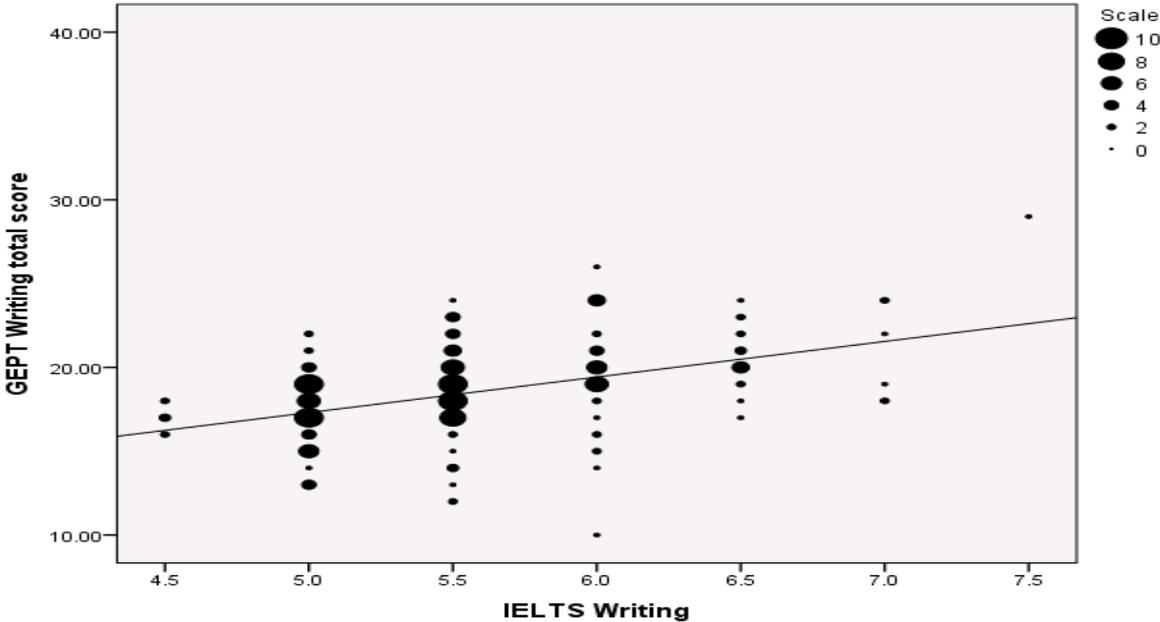
of the participants in this study. It is suggested to further investigate the discrimination power of this band.

Figure 8: Relationships between GEPT writing bands and IELTS bands



In order to better understand the relationships between the GEPT writing and IELTS writing performances, another scatterplot (Figure 9 below) was produced using the total GEPT writing analytical scores ($r=.432, p<.01$).

Figure 9: Relationships between GEPT writing total score and IELTS writing band



As shown in the scatterplot, most of the plots bunch towards the lower end of the GEPT scale while distributing reasonably across the IELTS writing bands. The straight line confirms a positive correlation between the two test scores. However, the performance of participants who obtained IELTS 6.0, which is generally regarded as the University of Bedfordshire entry threshold level, without the need of any pre-session English courses,

did not significantly differ from their counterparts who had IELTS 5.5 ($t(88)=1.404$, $p=.164$).

A contingency table showing participants' GEPT actual total analytical scores and their IELTS writing bands was also produced (see Appendix 1). The six students who obtained an overall GEPT writing band 3 or above had IELTS writing scores 5.5, 6.0, 7.0 and 7.5 respectively. The 34 students who had IELTS writing 6.0 obtained the GEPT total scores ranging from 10 to 26, and the 24 students who had 6.5 or above obtained the GEPT total scores ranging from 17 to 28.5.

Considering both the above scatterplot and the contingency table in Appendix 1, it appears in this study that it was harder to pass the GEPT advanced writing test than scoring 6.5 (indicative as the CEFR C1 level, see Figure 1) or above on IELTS writing test for the participants.

The moderate positive correlations between the GEPT writing total scores and IELTS writing bands can be improved in the following areas:

1. For participants who had IELTS writing 5.0, 5.5 and 6.0, the range of their GEPT writing total scores was widest.
2. Participants who obtained IELTS writing 6.5 did not reach the middle point of the GEPT scale, nor did the participants who obtained IELTS writing 7.0 or 7.5 seem to reach the higher end of the GEPT scale.

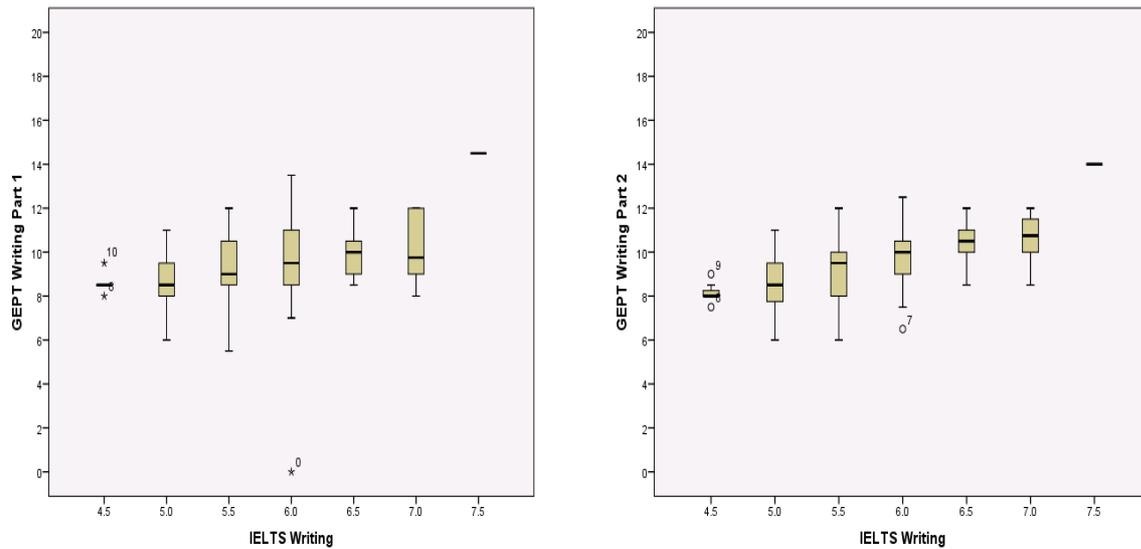
As indicated in Figure 4, most participants across IELTS bands 4.5 to 7.5 scored band 2 or 3 on all the four marking categories on both GEPT writing tasks. This evidences an unexpectedly uniform performance by the participants in this study across all four marking categories. The limited range of the level of students in the study (78.4% at bands 5.5 and 6.0) may have contributed considerably to this.

When considering the two tasks in the GEPT advanced writing test separately, boxplots were produced to show the participants' GEPT scores (range and mean of the group) across each IELTS band. It appears that scores on Part 2 (summary from non-verbal input) correlated slightly more closely with the IELTS writing bands than Part 1 (summary from verbal input) (see the median in each box in the boxplots in Figure 10). For both tasks, the medians of GEPT total analytical scores range from 9 to 14. The ranges occupy only one-third of the GEPT scale. This is probably due to the GEPT Advanced Writing aiming at a higher level of writing proficiency.

Figure 10: Relationships between GEPT Writing and IELTS Writing

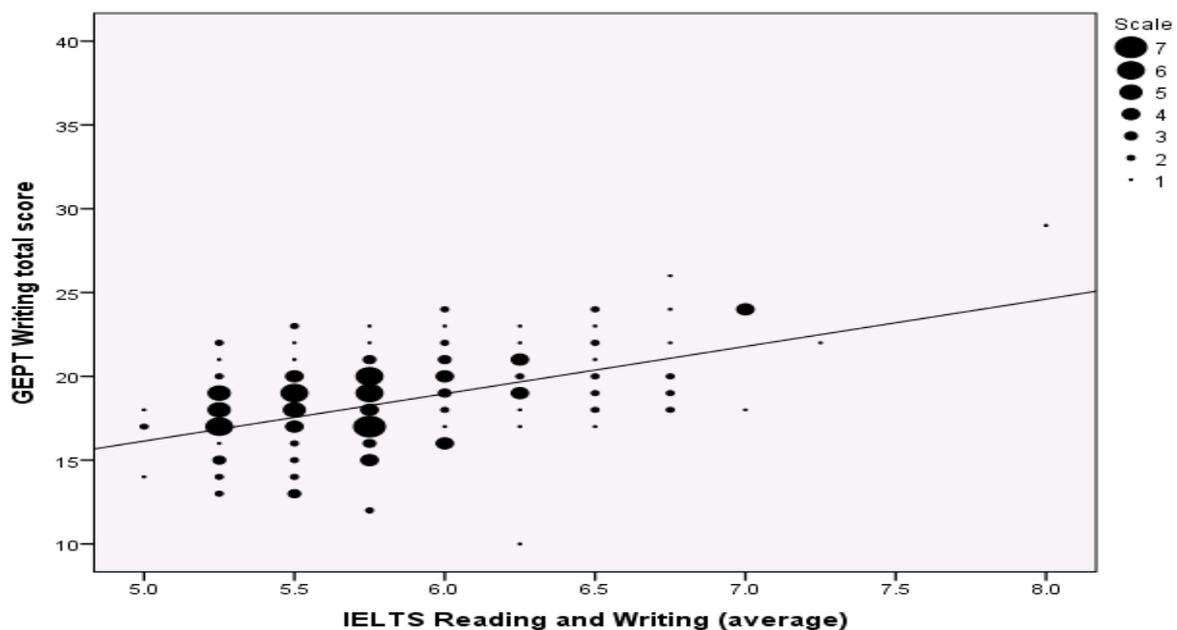
Part 1 (Summary from verbal input)

Part 2 (Summary from non-verbal input)



As shown in Table 8 earlier, the correlation between GEPT writing total analytical score and the average IELTS reading and writing bands ($r=.503$, $p<.01$) was higher than that between GEPT writing and IELTS writing. The scatterplot in Figure 11 below illustrates their relationships. While participants' average IELTS reading and writing bands range from 5.0 to 8.0, the majority of the plots bunch along the range of GEPT scores 10 to 25. The straight line confirms a positive correlation between the two test scores.

Figure 11: Relationships between GEPT Writing total score and IELTS Reading and Writing



It is worth noticing that even when considering IELTS reading and writing together, the performance of participants who obtained IELTS 6.0 was not significantly different from their counterparts who had IELTS 5.5 ($t(87)=-0.91$, $p=.928$). Further research is needed to examine the demands of the two Advanced GEPT writing tasks imposed on the candidates. A follow-up study by Weir, Chan, and Nakatsuhara (forthcoming) will examine the

linguistic and cognitive demands of Advanced GEPT Writing Task 1 – summary from verbal input.

4.4.2 GEPT reading and IELTS

The participants' GEPT total reading scores (Task 1 and Task 2) correlated with their IELTS reading bands at .520 ($p < .01$), with a large effect size. The correlation between GEPT Reading Task 1 and IELTS bands was better than that between GEPT Reading Task 2 and IELTS reading bands, both with moderate effect size (for details see Table 9 below).

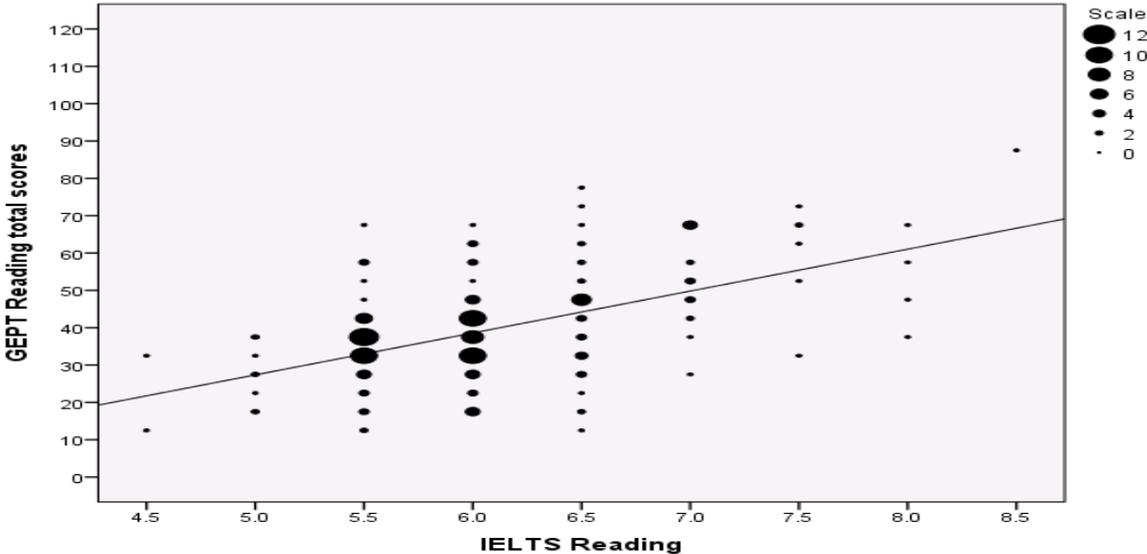
Table 9: Correlation between GEPT Writing and IELTS performances

		IELTS Reading
GEPT Reading Total Score (Part 1 and Part 2)	Pearson Correlation	.520**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	171
GEPT Reading Part 1 (Total score)	Pearson Correlation	.464**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	171
GEPT Reading Part 2 (Total score)	Pearson Correlation	.399**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	171

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The scatterplot in Figure 12 below shows that there was a steady positive correlation between the GEPT reading and IELTS reading performances. The plots spread across IELTS reading band 4.5 to 8.5 and GEPT reading total scores 10 to 90.

Figure 12: Relationships between GEPT reading scores and IELTS reading bands



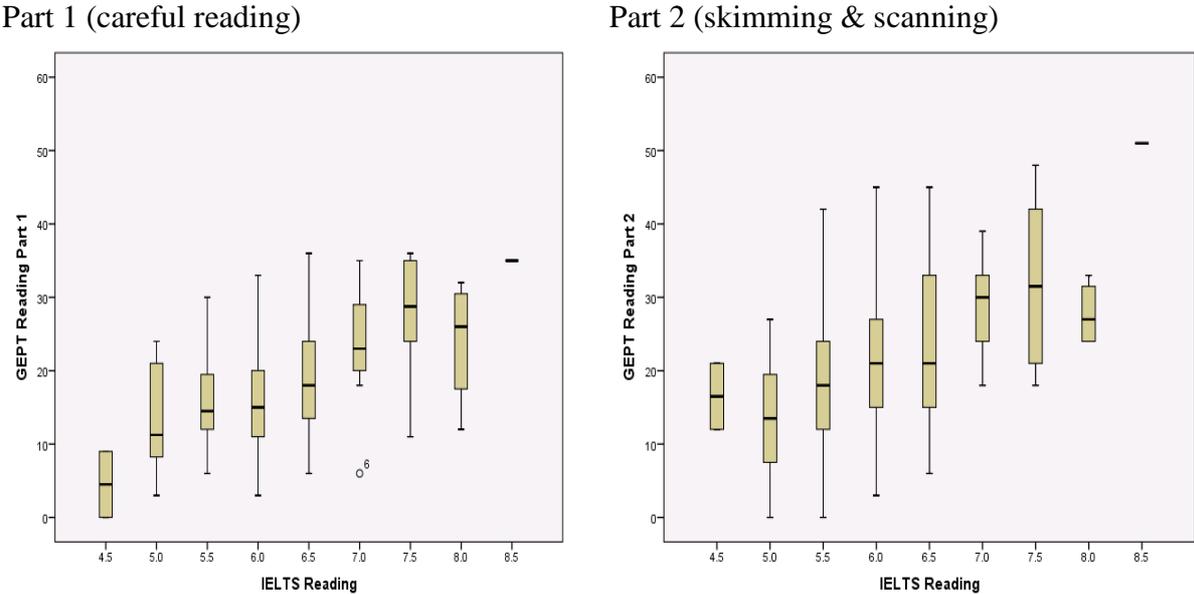
Nevertheless, there are a few points worth attention. Firstly, the range of the GEPT reading scores was largest for participants who had IELTS 6.5. Three contingency tables showing participants' GEPT total analytical scores and their IELTS reading bands were produced (see

Appendix 2). Thirty-three students had IELTS reading scores of 6.5 but their GEPT reading scores ranged from 12 to 78. For the 23 participants who had IELTS reading 7.0 or 7.5, their performances on the GEPT reading test did not appear to be distinctively better than their counterparts who had IELTS 6.0 or 6.5, though with narrower ranges.

Similar to the GEPT writing scale, the higher end of the GEPT reading scale (90 to 120) was not reached by the highest proficiency group who had IELTS 8.0 or above (n=5). This could be because participants in this study were less familiar with the GEPT test. However, there is also a possibility that the level of the GEPT reading was too demanding for undergraduates. But due to small sample size for these two groups, further evidence is needed. In addition, as mentioned in Section 4.3, out of the 61 participants who had IELTS 6.5 or above, only four of them obtained an overall GEPT reading score 72 or above (i.e., the passing standard). Their IELTS reading bands were 6.5, 7.5 and 8.5 respectively.

When considering the two reading tasks separately, as mentioned in Section 4.3, the mean scores that participants in this study obtained on Part 2 (skimming & scanning) (mean= 17.68) was significantly better than the mean score on Part 1 (careful reading) (mean= 22.25).

Figure 13: Relationships between GEPT Reading and IELTS Reading



The boxplot on the left in Figure 13 above shows that participants in this study were able to reach only two-third of the total scale on Part 1 (careful reading) while some participants scored more than 40 on Part 2 (see the boxplot on the right). The two boxplots also show that, in general, participants' abilities in skimming & scanning varied more than their careful reading abilities, especially the IELTS 5.5, 6.0 and 6.5 groups. It is interesting to notice the big gap between the IELTS 8.0 and IELTS 8.5 groups on Part 2 (skimming & scanning). But due to small sample size for these two groups, further evidence is needed to draw a conclusion.

4.4.3 GEPT reading and writing and IELTS

The next step was to consider the reading and writing scores together. Participants' total GEPT reading and writing scores correlated with their average IELTS total reading and writing bands at .562 ($p < .01$), with a large effect size (see Table 10 below).

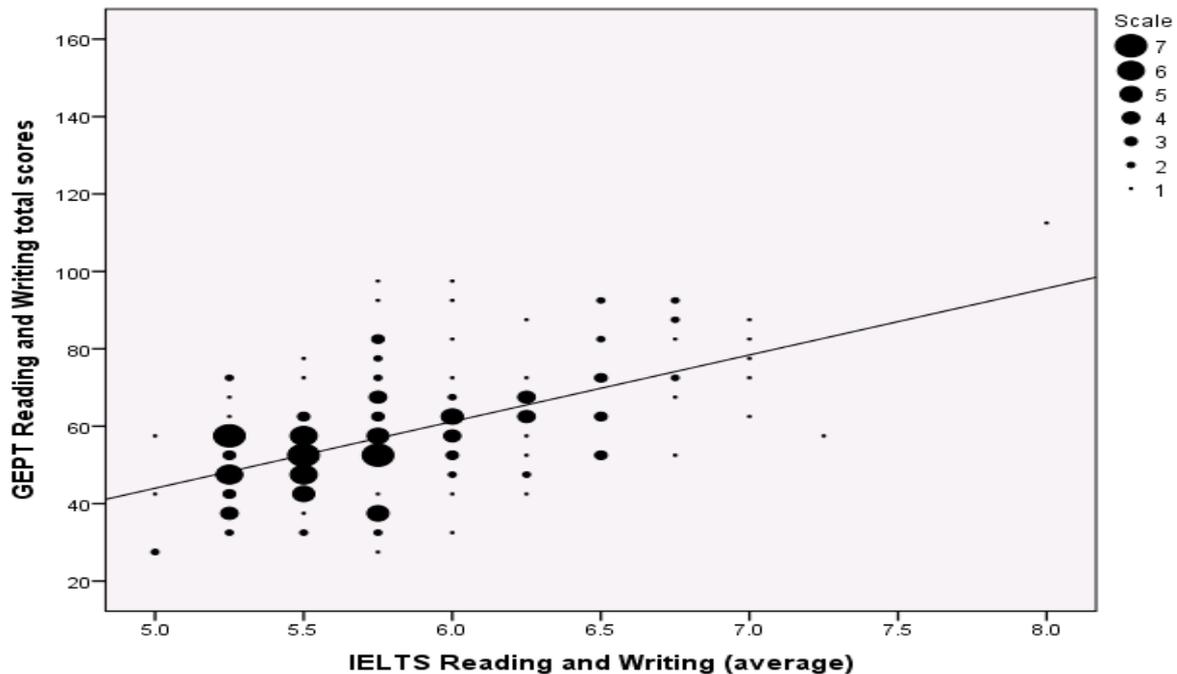
Table 10: Correlations between GEPT Reading and Writing and IELTS scores

		IELTS Overall	IELTS Reading	IELTS Writing	IELTS Reading and Writing (Total)
GEPT Reading and Writing (Total scores)	Pearson Correlation	.550**	.557**	.333**	.562**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	168	168	168	168

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 14 below confirms the positive correlations between the participants' average IELTS reading and writing bands and their GEPT total reading and writing scores. The scatterplot shows that while considering the total scores of both GEPT reading and writing, the plots bunch below the medium of the GEPT scale.

Figure 14: Relationships between GEPT Reading and Writing and IELTS Reading and Writing



In short, based on sections 4.4.1, 4.4.2 and 4.4.3, a) GEPT writing and IELTS writing, b) GEPT reading and IELTS reading, and c) GEPT reading and writing total scores and average IELTS reading and writing bands were positively correlated respectively. Nevertheless, the following three points may worth further attention.

- 1) For participants who had IELTS 5.5, 6.0 and 6.5, their performances on the GEPT test ranged the widest.
- 2) The highest end of the GEPT writing and reading scales were not reached by the participants in this study.
- 3) The performances of participants who had IELTS 7.0, 7.5 and 8.0 appear irregular in terms of the correlations between the GEPT and IELTS. But due to small sample size for these groups, further evidence is needed to draw a conclusion.

4.4.4 Participants with IELTS bands 6.5 or above

In addition to the above correlation results between GEPT and IELTS performances of all the participants, this section describes further results for the participants whose IELTS bands were 6.5 or above.

For the 24 students who had IELTS writing bands 6.5 or above, there was a correlation of .440 ($p < .05$) with a moderate effect size between the total GEPT writing scores and IELTS writing bands. When the two GEPT writing tasks were treated separately, there was higher correlation between GEPT Writing Task 2 and IELTS writing bands than between GEPT Writing Task 1 and IELTS writing bands, and the correlation between IELTS Writing and GEPT Writing Task 1 was not significant (for details see Table 11 below).

For the 29 students who had an average IELTS reading and writing band of 6.5 or above, there was a correlation of .532 ($p < .01$) with a large effect size between the total GEPT writing scores and the average IELTS reading and writing bands. It is worth noticing that GEPT Writing Task 1 correlated with the average IELTS reading and writing bands at .585 ($p < .01$), with a large effect size. This may result from the fact that GEPT Writing Task 1 is an integrated reading-into-writing task and embraces both constructs.

Table 11: Correlations between GEPT Writing and IELTS Writing scores

		IELTS Writing	IELTS Reading and Writing
GEPT Writing Total Score (Task 1 and Task 2)	Pearson Correlation	.440*	.532**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.003
	N	24	29
GEPT Writing Task 1 (Total score)	Pearson Correlation	.393	.585**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.058	.001
	N	24	29
GEPT Writing Task 2 (Total score)	Pearson Correlation	.430*	.404*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	.030
	N	24	29

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

For the 61 students who had IELTS reading bands 6.5 or above, there was a correlation of .420 ($p < .01$) with a moderate effect size between the total GEPT reading scores and IELTS reading bands. The correlation between GEPT Reading Task 1 and IELTS bands was better than that between GEPT Reading Task 2 and IELTS reading bands, both with moderate effect size (for details see Table 12 below).

Table 12: Correlations between GEPT Reading and IELTS Reading scores

		IELTS Reading
GEPT Reading Total Score (Part 1 and Part 2)	Pearson Correlation	.420**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	61
GEPT Reading Part 1 (Total score)	Pearson Correlation	.359**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
	N	61
GEPT Reading Part 2 (Total score)	Pearson Correlation	.350**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006
	N	61

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

For the 35 students who had IELTS overall bands 6.5 or above, their IELTS overall bands correlated with their GEPT reading and writing total scores at .505 ($p < .01$), with a large effect size. For the 29 students who had an average IELTS reading and writing band of 6.5 or above, there was a correlation of .420 ($p < .05$) with a moderate effect size between the GEPT reading and writing total scores and the average IELTS reading and writing bands (for details see Table 13 below).

Table 13: Correlations between GEPT Reading and IELTS overall scores

		IELTS Overall	IELTS Reading and Writing
GEPT Reading and Writing (Total scores)	Pearson Correlation	.505**	.420*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.023
	N	35	29

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Generally speaking, regarding the participants who had IELTS scores 6.5 or above, the correlations between their IELTS scores and GEPT writing scores were better than the results obtained for all participants. In particular, the correlation between the average IELTS reading and writing bands and GEPT Writing Task 1 (Summary from verbal input) was the best correlation result obtained in this study.

4.5 Real-life performances

Sections 4.5 and 4.6 will address RQ2 which aims to examine the relationships between GEPT scores and test takers' performance on real life academic writing tasks. As described in Section 3.4, two writing assignments (essay and report), one in-class test and one

end-of-term examination from four different modules were selected for investigation. This section summarises the participants' performances on these real-life tasks whereas next section will discuss the correlation between the GEPT scores and real-life performances.

For each real-life performance, students can score from 0 to 16 (Details are shown in Table 14 below). All marking followed university departmental marking procedures. Lecturers who marked the real-life performances were not informed of the present study and they did not know the students' IELTS scores. The scores on the four tasks were from different subject teachers. The data used in this study was the final standardised marks. The extent to which academic work marked by single raters is reliable is a thorny question in academia. Until such assessments are double marked or subjected to G theory studies we cannot know this. At the moment we are forced to rely on the "connoisseurship" of academic staff with the clear implications of possible error of measurement that this has in general and also for this study.

Table 14: Real-life scores and the corresponding grades

Score	Grade
16-14	A+/A/A-
13-11	B+/B/B-
10-8	C+/C/C-
7-5	D+/D/D-
4-3	E
2-1	F
0	G

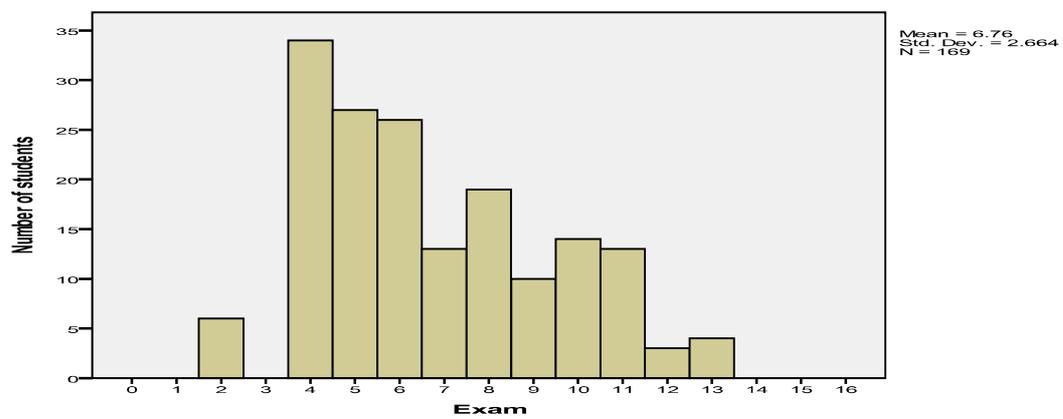
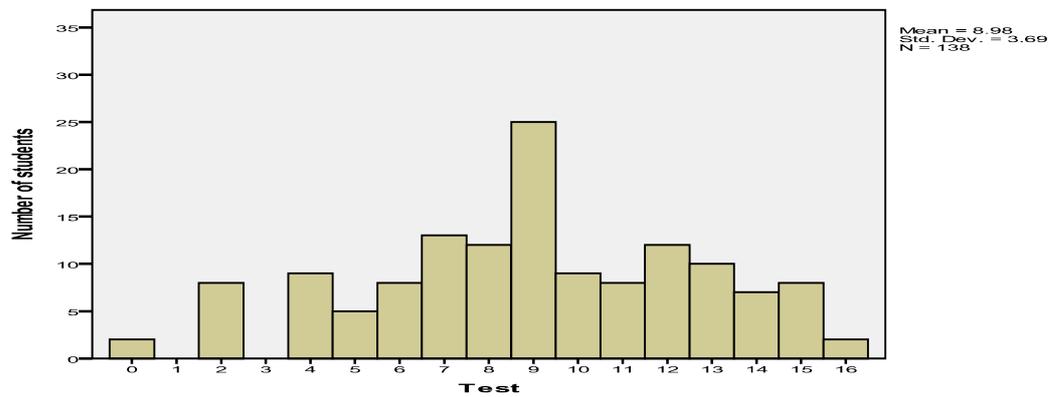
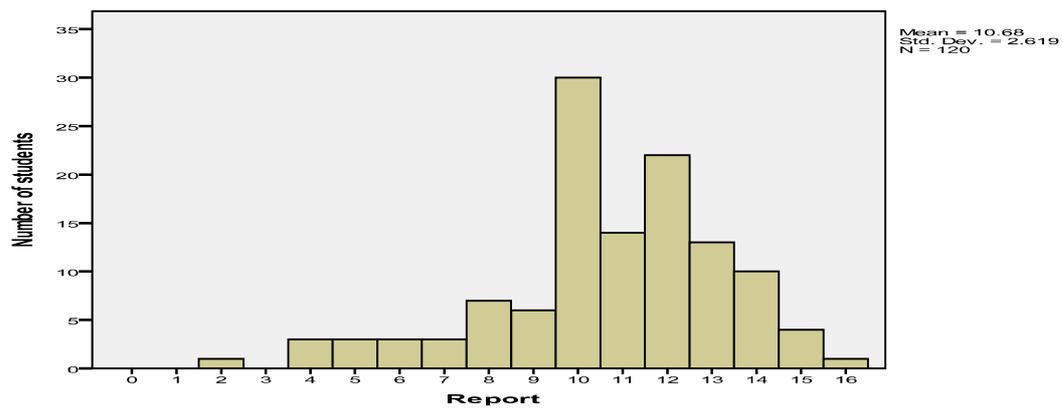
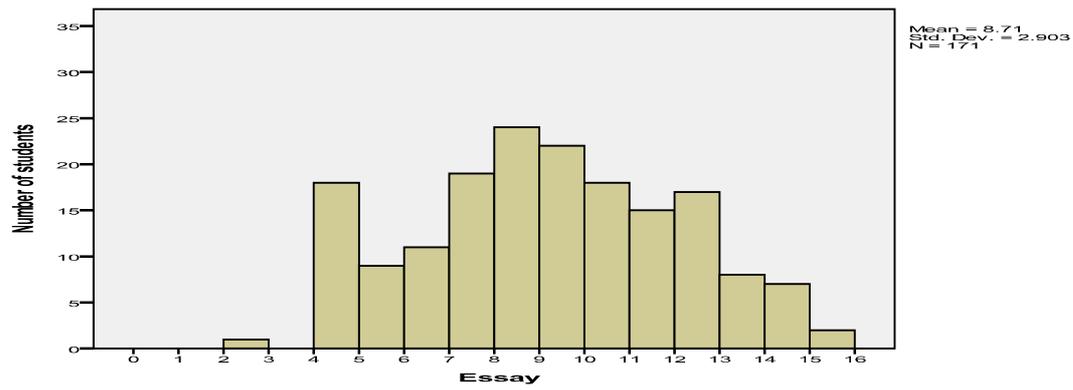
Table 15 below shows a descriptive summary of the four real-life performances. Participants in this study, as a whole group, performed the best on the report task (mean= 10.67) while scoring lowest on the exam (mean= 6.74). The standard deviations of the four performances were moderate. Among the four performances, the in-class test had the greatest standard deviation (3.69).

Table 15: Descriptive statistics of the four real-life performances

Tasks	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Essay	171	2	15	8.71	2.903
Report	120	2	16	10.67	2.619
Test	138	0	16	8.98	3.690
Exam	169	2	13	6.74	2.656

Figure 15 shows histograms presenting the score distribution of each of the four real-life performances.

Figure 15: Histograms of the four real-life performances



4.6 Correlation between test performances and real-life performances

4.6.1 Correlation between GEPT performances and real-life performances

The analysis shows that the GEPT reading and writing scores correlated with the participants' real-life academic performances at .529 ($p < .01$), explaining 27.98% variance of the real-life performances. When considered separately, GEPT reading scores correlated with the real-life academic performances at .499 ($p < .01$), explaining 24.90% variance of the real-life performances, and GEPT writing scores at .294 ($p < .01$), explaining 8.64% of the variance (for details see Table 16 below).

Table 16: Correlations between GEPT performances and real-life performances

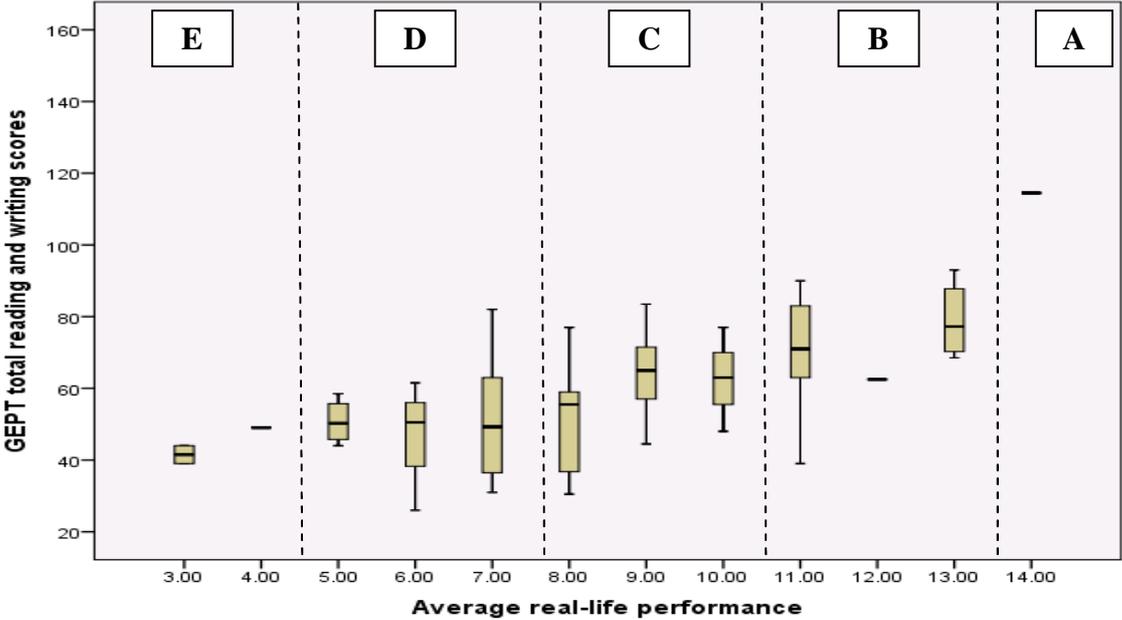
		Average real-life performances (two writing tasks, one test and one exam)	Exam	Test	Report	Essay
GEPT Reading and Writing	Pearson Correlation	.529**	.280**	.482**	.365**	.251**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	N	117	166	136	118	168
GEPT Reading	Pearson Correlation	.499**	.259**	.446**	.322**	.258**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.000	.001
	N	117	169	138	120	171
GEPT Writing	Pearson Correlation	.294**	.228*	.345**	.220*	.136
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.003	.000	.016	.077
	N	117	167	136	118	169

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

The boxplot in Figure 16 represents the relationships between the participants' GEPT reading and writing total scores and their average performance on the four real-life tasks.

Figure 16: Relationships between GEPT Reading and Writing and real-life performances



Regarding the individual GEPT reading and writing tasks, Reading Part 1 correlated the best with the real-life performances at a level of .523 ($p < .01$), followed by the Reading Part 2 at a level of .318 ($p < .01$) (see Table 17 below). In terms of variance explained, 27.35% variance of the real-life performance was accounted for by Reading Part 1, 10.11% by Reading Part 2, 5.81% by Writing Part 1 and 8.88% by Writing Part 2.

Table 17: Correlations between GEPT tasks and real-life performances

		Real-life performances (two writing tasks, one test and one exam)
GEPT Writing Part 1	Pearson Correlation	.241**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009
	N	117
GEPT Writing Part 2	Pearson Correlation	.298**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	117
GEPT Reading Part 1	Pearson Correlation	.523**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	117
GEPT Reading Part 2	Pearson Correlation	.318**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	117

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

4.6.2 Correlation between IELTS performances and real-life performances

For the purpose of referencing, the correlations between IELTS performances and the real-life performances were also analysed (see Table 18 below). The participants' average IELTS reading and writing bands correlated with their average performances on the four selected real-life tasks at .602 ($p < .01$). When the IELTS reading and writing bands were considered separately, there was a correlation of .558 ($p < .01$) between IELTS reading and the real-life performances, and a correlation of .406 ($p < .01$) between IELTS writing and the real-life performances. In terms of variance explained, 31.14% variance of the real-life performance was explained by IELTS reading, 16.48% by IELTS writing, and 36.24% by IELTS reading and writing together. In the field of language testing, the range of .25 to .35 is regarded as typical, good correlations between test performances and later real-life measurements (Pollitt, 1988).

Table 18: Correlations between IELTS and real-life performances

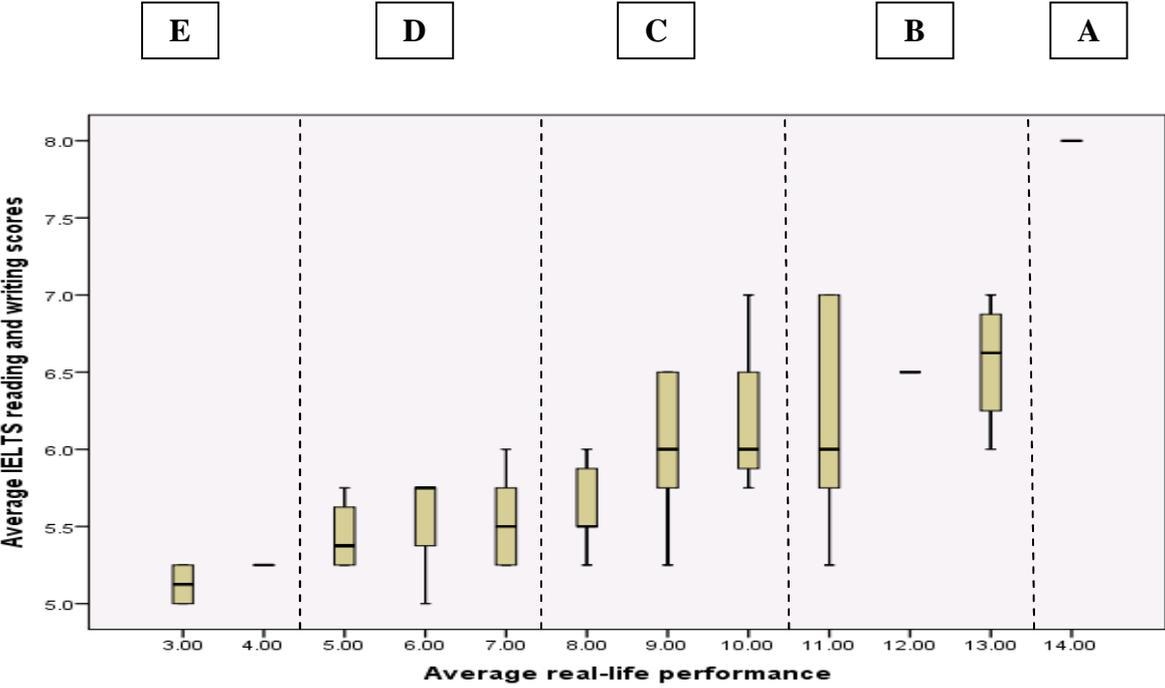
		Real-life performances (two writing tasks, one test and one exam)	Exam	Test	Report	Essay
IELTS Reading	Pearson Correlation	.558**	.432**	.458**	.397**	.259**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	N	117	169	138	120	171
IELTS Writing	Pearson Correlation	.406**	.376**	.350**	.247**	.164*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.007	.032
	N	117	169	138	120	171
IELTS Reading and Writing	Pearson Correlation	.602**	.506**	.504**	.403**	.266**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	117	168	138	120	170

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

The boxplot in Figure 17 shows the graphic representation of the relationships between the participants' average IELTS reading and writing bands and their average performances on the four real-life tasks.

Figure 17: Relationships between IELTS Reading and Writing and real-life performances



While IELTS seems to have a slightly better predictive power than GEPT, the GEPT results shown here are respectable, considering the GEPT Advanced Test is a level-specific test.

4.7 Self-assessment questionnaire on academic reading and writing abilities

4.7.1 Self-assessed academic reading abilities

As mentioned in Section 3.5, a self-assessment questionnaire was administered for the participants to self-assess their academic reading and writing abilities. Participants could rate 1 (Definitely disagree), 2 (Disagree) 3 (Agree), or 4 (Definitely agree) on 29 statements that describe different aspects of one's academic reading and writing ability (see Appendix 3 for the questionnaire).

The Likert scale responses were analysed in terms of the combined percentages of *definitely* and *mostly disagree* categories. The main academic reading difficulties experienced, in rank order, were shown in Table 19.

Table 19: Major self-reported academic reading difficulties

Item		Combined percentage of definitely disagree and mostly disagree	Mean	Std. Dev
10	I can understand long and complex sentences in these texts.	49.2	2.51	.621
9	I can understand nearly all the vocabulary in these texts.	41.1	2.57	.668
8	I can understand how ideas relate to each other across the texts I have selected to read.	30.6	2.81	.712
13	I can do the necessary reading within the time available.	30.6	2.74	.642

The participants were least confident in their abilities in understanding long and complex sentences (Item 10) and all vocabulary items (Item 9) in the reading texts.

Besides, the participants encountered difficulties in constructing intertextual meanings across texts (Item 8). This ability was tested in GEPT Part 2C where candidates were expected to answer eight questions by quickly and selectively reading three passages.

Participants in this study were also concerned if they could do the necessary reading within the time available (Item 13). Weir et al. (2009) also found that time pressure was perceived as one of the most challenging difficulties by undergraduates in their first year of study at a British University. According to the observation by the researcher who invigilated the GEPT exam, the participants were under great time pressure on GEPT Part 1 (careful reading). Most of them were not able to finish all questions within the time allowance.

Table 20, on the other hand, shows four items which the participants were most confident with. Here, the Likert scale responses were analysed in terms of the combined percentages of *definitely* and *mostly agree* categories.

Table 20: Self-reported most confident academic reading abilities

Item		Combined percentage of definitely agree and mostly agree	Mean	Std. Dev
1	I can understand instructions for completing the assignments.	97.6	3.42	.530
3	I can understand most visuals in these texts and the textual commentary about them.	91.9	3.18	.552
6	I can read these part(s) of the text carefully and decide whether they are important for the assignments/essays or not.	80.6	3.01	.634
7	I can read a text carefully and understand how the main ideas relate to each other.	80.6	2.93	.597

Participants in this study appeared to be most confident in their abilities in understanding instructions (Item 1) and visuals (Item 3). Their confidence in understanding visuals may explain partly why they performed better on GEPT Writing Part 2 (Summary non-verbal input) than Part 1 (Summary verbal input).

A majority of the participants were also confident in their careful reading abilities (Items 6 and 7). Nevertheless, this is interesting as these participants performed worse on the GEPT Reading Part 1 (careful reading) than Part 2 (skimming & scanning). The findings discussed previously regarding the linguistic demands (*understanding vocabulary items* and *long and complex sentences*) of the reading texts and the *time* pressure perceived by the participants may provide an explanation.

4.7.2 Self-assessed academic writing abilities

Table 21 presents the main academic writing difficulties experienced, in rank order.

Table 21: Major self-reported academic writing abilities

Item		Combined percentage of definitely disagree and mostly disagree	Mean	Std. Dev
14	I can assess the impact of the text on the intended reader, and revise if necessary.	41.9	2.62	.697
5	I can write an essay that shows an ability to communicate appropriately to the intended reader.	34.7	2.66	.613
6	I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues.	34.7	2.71	.587
9	I can express ideas effectively by using a range of vocabulary.	33.1	2.74	.654
12	I can edit my text for errors of grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling.	33.1	2.68	.609

Participants in this study perceived their abilities in *considering and communicating to the intended reader* (Items 14 and 5) most problematic. Kellogg (2008) argues that what differentiates expert writers from novice writers is the ability to construct one's own meaning with an awareness of the intended reader.

The participants were also concerned with their abilities in *writing about complex subjects* (Item 6) and using *a range of vocabulary* (Item 9), followed by their abilities in *editing the linguistic accuracy of their own texts* (Item 12). As shown below, these abilities were also addressed in the GEPT-Advanced Writing Analytical Scale.

Focus	Score 5 descriptors
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ideas are logically sequenced within and between paragraphs. ▪ Ideas are well connected through the use of a range of appropriate linguistic devices.
Lexical use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A wide range of vocabulary is used to complete the task effectively. ▪ Lexical items are used appropriately. Errors are rare.
Grammatical use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A wide range of structures is used to complete the task effectively. ▪ Structures are used accurately and appropriately. Errors are rare.

Table 22 shows the items, in rank order, which the participants were most confident with regarding their academic writing abilities.

Table 22: Self-reported most confident academic writing abilities

Item		Combined percentage of definitely agree and mostly agree	Mean	Std. Dev
16	I can finish the writing task within the time available.	91.1	3.40	.688
8	I can present and support arguments well.	89.5	3.20	.604
1	I can plan in my mind what I am going to write about.	89.5	3.13	.647
11	I can reference the source texts correctly.	87.1	3.16	.675
7	I can order the ideas which I am going to write about and make clear relationships between them.	87.0	3.00	.543

Unlike the reading abilities, participants in this study appeared to be most confident in their abilities in finishing the writing task on time (Item 16).

In addition, they were confident in their abilities in presenting and supporting arguments well (Item 8), macro-planning (Item 1), referencing (Item 11) and organising ideas (Item 7).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has provided a number of useful insights into the criterion-related validity of two components of the Advanced level GEPT – Reading and Writing by a) examining the relationships between the GEPT scores and IELTS bands, and b) investigating the predictive power of the test scores in terms of test takers' real-life academic performance.

Regarding the cross-test comparability, there were significant positive correlations between the Advanced GEPT Writing and IELTS Writing ($r=.432$, $p<.01$), GEPT Writing and IELTS Reading and Writing ($r=.503$, $p<.01$), GEPT Reading and IELTS Reading ($r=.520$, $p<.01$), and between GEPT Reading and Writing and IELTS Reading and Writing ($r=.562$, $p<.01$).

Regarding the links to the test takers' real-life performance, the Advanced GEPT Reading and Writing scores accounted for 27.98% variance of their real-life performance at a correlation of .529 ($p<.01$).

The insights enable us to recognise the moderate to strong positive correlations between Advanced GEPT Writing and Reading Test and IELTS, which is a more traditionally accepted academic proficiency test. Several key conclusions arising from this study are provided for consideration in respect of the Advanced level GEPT Reading and Writing papers.

Writing

1. In this study, the overall GEPT band 2 captured performances from participants with a wide range of writing abilities as indicated by IELTS band scores 4.5 to 7.0. However, it must be borne in mind that GEPT is a criterion-referenced test which aims specifically at the C1 level. It reports how well candidates are doing relative to a pre-determined performance level on a specified set of goals, and it is not normally used to discriminate between high and low achievers. Only 20% of the participants in this study were at C1 level in terms of their IELTS bands. The relative absence of students in this study who were operating at the upper band pass levels (3 and above) in GEPT restricted the external correlations with IELTS and subject course scores that were possible. Most GEPT performances were scored band 2 or band 3 on all the four marking categories of both GEPT Advanced Writing Part 1 and Part 2.
2. While 24 participants had 6.5 or above on the IELTS writing test, only six of them passed the GEPT Advanced writing test, suggesting that it might be harder to pass the GEPT Advanced writing test than scoring 6.5 or above on the IELTS writing test. Consideration might be given to revisiting how the cut score for passing the test is arrived at.

Reading

1. Out of the 171 participants, 61 of them had an IELTS reading band ranging from 6.5 to 8.0, but only four passed the GEPT reading test. The very low GEPT reading passing rate obtained in this study seems to suggest that it might be harder to pass the GEPT Advanced reading test than scoring 6.5 on the IELTS reading test.
2. The range of the GEPT reading scores was largest for participants who had IELTS 6.5. Regarding the 33 students who had IELTS reading scores of 6.5, their GEPT reading scores ranged from 12 to 78. This may imply the abilities tested by the reading tests were somewhat different between the two tests. One of the possible explanations is that GEPT controls the time allowance of the careful reading items and skimming & scanning items in separate papers while IELTS does not impose such restriction. Further research is needed to compare the constructs measured by the two tests. Follow-up studies similar to Wu (2011) which compared the constructs tested by GEPT and Cambridge at B1 and B2 levels would be desirable.

Correlations between GEPT and IELTS

There was a correlation of .503 ($p < .01$) between the GEPT writing total scores and the IELTS reading and writing bands, a correlation of .520 ($p < .01$) between the GEPT total reading scores and the IELTS reading bands. Besides, participants' total GEPT reading and writing scores correlated with their IELTS total reading and writing scores at .562 ($p < .01$). Besides, for the 29 students who had an average IELTS reading and writing band of 6.5 or above, there was a correlation of .523 ($p < .01$) between the GEPT total writing scores and the IELTS reading and writing bands, and a correlation of .585 ($p < .01$) between the GEPT Writing Task 1 and the IELTS reading and writing bands. All correlations were significant. The correlations between the GEPT Advanced and IELTS obtained provide cross-test comparability evidence to universities intending to consider the advanced GEPT test as an alternative test of academic English proficiency.

Correlations between GEPT and real-life performances

GEPT reading scores correlated with the real-life academic performances at .499 ($p < .01$) and GEPT writing scores at .294 ($p < .01$). As for the individual GEPT reading and writing tasks, Reading Part 1 (careful reading) correlated the best with the real-life performances at a level of .523 ($p < .01$). All correlations were significant. For being a level-specific test, the predictive power of the GEPT Reading and Writing tests seems to be encouraging. A follow-up study (Weir et al., forthcoming) will compare the contextual and cognitive validity of the Writing Part 1 (Summary from verbal input) against real-life academic writing tasks.

6. Bibliography

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Appendix 1: GEPT writing total scores and IELTS writing bands

GEPT Writing Total Score (Max 40)	IELTS Writing							
	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5	5	4.5	Total
28.5	1*							1
26				1				1
24		1*		3*	1*			5
23.5		1	1	2				4
23			2		2			4
22.5					2			2
22			2	2	3	1		8
21.5		1			1	1		3
21				1	1	2		4
20.5			3	3	3			9
20			2	3	4	1		10
19.5			3	3	3	3		12
19		1	2	4	7	5		19
18.5				3	3	4		10
18		2	1		6	4		13
17.5				2	3	3	2	10
17			1		6	6	1	14
16.5				1	2	3	2	8
16				2	1	4	2	9
15.5					1			1
15				1	1	4		6
14.5				1		2		3
14				1	1			2
13.5					2	1		3
13						1		1
12.5					1	3		4
12					1			1
11.5					1			1
10				1				1
Total	1	6	17	34	56	48	7	169

*Numbers in bold are those who passed the GEPT Advanced writing test (i.e., overall band 3 or above).

Appendix 2: GEPT reading scores and IELTS reading bands

Table 2-1: GEPT Reading total scores and IELTS Reading bands

GEPT Reading Total score	IELTS Reading bands									Total
	8.5	8	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5	5	4.5	
86	1*									1
78					1*					1
74			1*		1*					2
69			1	1			1			3
68				2	1					3
66			1			1				2
65		1		2						3
63						1				1
62			1		1	1				3
60					1	1				2
59		1		1						2
57					2	1	2			5
56				1		2	1			4
54						1				1
53			1	2			1			4
51				1	2					3
50						1				1
47		1		2	2	2				7
45				1	5	2	1			9
44				1		1				2
42				1	1	4	2			8
41					2	5	4			11
39				1		1	5	1		8
38					2	5	1	1		9
36		1				2	4			7
35					1		2			3
33					1	6	2			9
32			1		2	4	3			10
30					1		4	1	1	7
29					2		2	1		5
27				1	1	2	1	1		6
26						3	2			5
24					1	1				2
23						1	1	1		3
21						1	2			3
20					1					1
18					1	3				4
17						1	2	1		4
15						1	1	1		3
12					1		1		1	3
11							1			1
Total	1	4	6	17	33	54	46	8	2	171

*Numbers in bold are those who passed the GEPT Advanced reading test.

Appendix 2 (cont.)

Table 2-2: GEPT Reading Part 1 scores and IELTS Reading bands

GEPT Reading Part 1 score	IELTS Reading bands									Total
	8.5	8.0	7.5	7.0	6.5	6.0	5.5	5.0	4.5	
36			1		1					2
35	1		1	2						4
33					1	1				2
32		1	1	1	1					4
30				1	1	1	2			5
29		1		1	1	2	1			6
27					1					1
26			1	3		1	1			6
24			1		3	4	2	1		11
23		1		2	2	1	2	1		9
21				1	1	3	3			8
20				2	4	5	1	1		13
18				3	5	3	1			12
17					1	5	5			11
15						4	5			9
14					4	3	6			13
12		1			3	5	6	1		16
11			1		1	6	3	3		12
9					1	3	3		1	8
8					1	2	3			6
6				1	1	3	3	1		9
5						1				1
3						1		1		2
0									1	1
Total	1	4	6	17	33	54	46	8	2	171

Table 2-3: GEPT Reading Part 2 scores and IELTS Reading bands

GEPT Reading Part 2 score	IELTS Reading bands									Total
	8.5	8.0	7.5	7.0	6.5	6.0	5.5	5.0	4.5	
51	1									1
48			1							1
45					1	2				3
42			1		2	1	1			5
39				2	3		1			6
36				2	1	2	1			6
33		1	1	4	2	2	2			12
30		1	1	1	2	3	1			9
27				1	1	9	4	1		16
24		2		3	2	5	4			16
23							1			1
21			1	3	5	9	6	1	1	26
18			1	1	3	4	7	1		17
15					3	8	3	1		15
12					3	4	9	1	1	18
9					2	3	2	1		8
6					3	1		1		5
3						1	3			4
0							1	1		2
Total	1	4	6	17	33	54	46	8	2	171

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

ACADEMIC WRITING AND READING EXPERIENCES QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: Personal data

1. Name: _____ (Given name) _____ (Surname)
2. Student number: _____
3. Gender: male / female (Please circle)
4. Department: _____
5. Programme: _____ Year: _____
6. IELTS results: Overall band: _____ Reading: _____ Writing: _____

Section 2: Academic reading and writing experiences on UoB Business courses

Please think about your academic reading and writing experiences on your UOB Business courses.

For each statement below, please **circle** the extent of your agreement or disagreement using the following 4-point scale:

- 4 Definitely agree 完全同意
- 3 Mostly agree 基本上同意
- 2 Mostly disagree 基本上不同意
- 1 Definitely disagree 完全不同意

1. When I read for assignments on UoB Business courses,

		Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
1.1	我能够明白功课的题目。 I can understand instructions for completing the assignments.	4	3	2	1
1.2	我能够明白关于复杂商业题材的文章。 I can understand Business texts with complex subject matter.	4	3	2	1
1.3	我能够明白在那些文章中大部份的图表及相对的文字表述。 I can understand most visuals in these texts and the textual commentary about them.	4	3	2	1
1.4	我能够迅速地分辨哪些商业课本及文章可能与题目相关及有用。 I can quickly identify which Business textbooks and articles might be relevant and useful.	4	3	2	1
1.5	我能够迅速及有效地在一篇文章中搜寻哪些部份包含与题目相关及有用的资料。 I can search quickly and effectively for the parts of a text that contain relevant and useful information.	4	3	2	1
1.6	我能够仔细阅读这些部份并决定它们对作业是否重要。 I can read these part(s) of the text carefully and decide whether they are important for the assignments/essays or not.	4	3	2	1
1.7	我能够仔细阅读一篇文章从而明白文章各要点的关系。 I can read a text carefully and understand how the main ideas relate to each other.	4	3	2	1
1.8	在选择要看的不同文章中, 我能够明白各篇的要点有什么关联。 I can understand how ideas relate to each other across the texts I have selected to read.	4	3	2	1
1.9	我能够明白这些文章中的差不多所有词汇。 I can understand nearly all the vocabulary in these texts.	4	3	2	1
1.10	我能够明白这些文章中冗长而复杂的句子。 I can understand long and complex sentences in these texts.	4	3	2	1
1.11	我能够把这些文章中的要点和我已有的知识联系起来。 I can link ideas in these texts to what I know already.	4	3	2	1
1.12	我知道商业文章的结构以及我知道可以在哪部份找到特定的数据。 I know how business texts are structured and which part to look at to find certain types of information.	4	3	2	1

1.13	我能够在限定的时间内完成所有必读的文章。 I can do the necessary reading within the time available .	4 3 2 1
	对于你的学术阅读能力，你还有其他补充吗？ Do you have any other comments about your academic reading abilities? Please specify.	

2. When I write for assignments on UoB Business courses,

		Definitely Agree Mostly Agree Mostly Disagree Definitely Disagree
2.1	我能够在脑海计划将要写作的内容。 I can plan in my mind what I am going to write about.	4 3 2 1
2.2	我能够从阅读文章中做笔记记下重点，掌握抽象的概念和各要点之间的关系。 I can make useful notes from written sources, capturing abstract concepts and relationships between ideas.	4 3 2 1
2.3	我能够有效地用自己的言语表述及概括在被挑选出来的文章中的各个要点。 I can effectively paraphrase and summarize relevant ideas from selected texts in my own words.	4 3 2 1
2.4	我能够用适当的风格及内容写作。 I can write with an understanding of the style and content appropriate to the task.	4 3 2 1
2.5	我的文章能够显示出与读者恰如其分地沟通的能力。 I can write an essay that shows an ability to communicate appropriately to the intended reader.	4 3 2 1
2.6	我能够写出关于复杂题材的文章（不论是以用书信、论说文或报告的体裁）及能够表述我认为重要的事项。 I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues.	4 3 2 1
2.7	我能够为将要写作的重点整理出优先次序及它们之间的关系。 I can order the ideas which I am going to write about and make clear relationships between them.	4 3 2 1
2.8	我能够表述及支持自己的论点。 I can present and support arguments well.	4 3 2 1
2.9	我能够有效地运用不同种类的词汇去表达论点。 I can express ideas effectively by using a range of vocabulary .	4 3 2 1
2.10	我能够有效地运用不同种类的句子结构去表达论点。 I can express ideas effectively by using a range of structures .	4 3 2 1
2.11	我能够正确列出全部参考书目的出处。 I can reference the source texts correctly	4 3 2 1
2.12	我能够正确校对对自己文章中关于文法、词语、标点和拼字等的错误。 I can edit my text for errors of grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling.	4 3 2 1
2.13	我能够编辑自己的文章，使文中要点条理清晰。 I can edit my text to make sure the information is clearly organised.	4 3 2 1
2.14	我能够评估自己文章对读者的影响，有需要时作出修改。 I can assess the impact of the text on the intended reader, and revise if necessary.	4 3 2 1
2.15	我能够评估自己文章的内容对题目来说是否贴题及充足。 I can assess the relevance and adequacy of the assignment/essay for the task set.	4 3 2 1
2.16	我能够在限定时间内完成作业。 I can finish the writing task within the time available .	4 3 2 1
	对于你的学术写作能力，你还有其他补充吗？ Do you have any other comments about your academic writing abilities? Please specify.	



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