



## **The *IELCA* and *IELTS* Exams: A Benchmark Report**

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### **Introduction**

The International English Language Competency Assessment (*IELCA*) is an exam recognized by international public and private academic and professional institutions, such as *Bangor University, De Montfort University Leicester, University of East London, Maritime & Coastguard Agency, UK, Italian Ministry of Education, Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre, Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Españolas, College of Europe, Toyota, and DHL*.

The exam includes two distinct routes, academic and general training, and the benchmark scale of the *IELCA* ranges from B1 to C2. Any exam score below the B1 band is systematically labeled as A2. The *IELCA* exam (2019) assesses the language ability of all the language skills, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. While the academic *IELCA* is about access to educational institutions, the general training module is designed for English use at the secondary education, immigration, and other professional contexts (*IELCA*, 2019).

Considering the skills separately, the raw scores of the academic Listening of 0 to 13 had the equivalent of A2 with a score of 10. The B1 band with a score of 20 had the raw scores of 14 to 23, the B2 band had a score of 30 and raw scores ranging from 24 to 34, the C1 band had a score of 40 with raw scores of 35 to 39, and the C2 band had a score fixed at 50 with a raw score of 40. The Academic Reading exam had a score of 10 for the A2 band with raw scores of 0 to 10, the B1 band had a score of 20 with raw scores of 11 to 22, the B2 band of a score of 30 had raw scores that ranged from 23 to 34, the C1 band with a score of 40 had raw scores of 35 to 39, and the C2 band had a score of 50 with a raw score of 40. The Academic Writing module had a band of A2 of a score of 10 and raw scores of 0 to 37; the B1 band had a score of 20 with raw scores of 38 to 50, the B2 band had a score of 30 with raw scores of 51 to 64, the C1 band had a score of 40 with raw scores ranging from 65 to 74, C2 band had a score of 50 with raw scores of 75 to 83. As for the Speaking module, the A2 band of a score of 10 had raw scores of 0 to 39, the B1 band has a score of 20 and raw scores of 40 to 59, the B2 band had a score of 30 and raw scores of 60 to 88, the C1 band had a score of 40 and raw scores of 89 to 97, and the C2 band had a score of 50 with raw scores that ranged from 98 to 100.

The mapping of the overall scores shown in Table 1 was done in a way that reflects the different levels as stated in the *CEFR* (2001) where column two presents the exact score equivalent of the *CEFR* level, while column one shows the raw scores for each skill with 0 to 79 for the A2 band, 80 to 119 for the B1 band, 120 to 159 for the B2 band, 160 to 199 for C1 band, and 200 for C2 band.

TABLE 1  
*Overall Scoring of the IELCA and its Mapping with the CEFR*

Raw Scores out of 200	Score & CEFR
0-79	10 A2
80-119	20 B1
120-159	30 B2
160-199	40 C1
200	50 C2

In the same vein, the overall mapping of the *IELTS* language skills (*IELTS*, 2019) with the *CEFR* is done as Table 2 shows. The A2 band covers any score below 4.0. The B1 level has three bands of 4, 4.5, and 5. The B2 band has three scores of 5.5, 6, and 6.5. The C1 level has three bands of 7, 7.5, and 8, and the C2 band has one score only, 9.

TABLE 2  
*Mapping of the Overall Bands of the IELTS with the CEFR*

Scores & CEFR	Raw Scores out of 200
A2	4
B1	4.5
	5
B2	5.5
	6
	6.5
C1	7
	7.5
	8
C2	9

Having an exact comparison between the two exams might be a difficult task to achieve. However, the purpose of this report was to map the *IELCA* to the *IELTS* exam and see whether the scores the same test-takers received in the two standardised exams are equivalent or not regarding the language ability of the test takers.

## Method and Analysis

The data was clean and usable, and no case was weeded out. The exam was administered to 270 examinees whose ages ranged from 18 to 50 years old. Seventy-one percent of males, as well as twenty-one percent of females, took part in this test. It is consequential to collect data from the same population that sat for the two tests (Pommerich, 2007). Many studies have been carried out by linking and converting scores of one scale into another (ETS, 2010; Holland, 2007; Holland & Dorans, 2006; Kolen & Brennan, 1995, 2004) and perhaps the most reliable method that has been so far used to convert scores is the equipercentile method (Pommerich, Hanson, Harris, & Scoring, 2000).

Heterogeneous populations from different parts of the world were included in this exam (Table 3), with 62 % from Pakistan, 24 % from India, and 8 % from examinees coming from Bangladesh. The other nationalities had a percentage that ranged from 1.5 (Qatar) to .4 (Malaysia). In total, this population included 11 nationalities whose first language presented a good multitude of different linguistic backgrounds, with a wide linguistic background of 14 languages such as Urdu, Bengali, Arabic, Farsi,

Hindi, Pashto, Punjabi, English, and other languages. The linguistic variety of the participants could be a further addition to the mapping of the *IELCA* with the *IELTS* exam.

Like the *IELTS* and other international standardised exams, the *IELCA* exam is carried out in three hours, with two hours and fifty minutes as a non-stop and continuous assessment on the same day of Listening, Reading, and Writing. As for Speaking, it is scheduled in a period of one to three days, either before or after sitting the other components.

To tap into a more elaborated mapping, it was crucial to investigate the mean scores, standard deviation, and the range values of the four language skills in the two tests.

TABLE 3

*Gender, Country, and First Language of the Candidates in IELCA and IELTS Tests (N = 270)*

Age range	18 to 50 years		
Gender	78: female		29
	192: male		71
			%
Country	Pakistan		62
	India		24
	Bangladesh		8
	Qatar		1.5
	Morocco		1.4
	Sudan		1.1
	Afghanistan		1.1
	Egypt		.7
	Jordan		.4
	Bahrain		.4
Malaysia		.4	
First language	Urdu	159	58.1
	Bengali	22	8.1
	Arabic	12	4.4
	Farsi	1	.4
	Hindi	9	3.3
	Pashto	9	3.7
	Punjabi	32	11.9
	Tamil	3	1.1
	English	3	1.1
	Malayalam	4	1.5
	Gujarati	12	4.4
	Telegu	2	.7
	Malay	1	.4

TABLE 4

*IELCA Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges (N = 270)*

Skills	Mean	SD	Range
<i>IELCA</i> Listening	33.778	7.2133	5.0-50.0 (45.0)
<i>IELCA</i> Reading	31.089	6.8835	10.0-50.0 (40.0)
<i>IELCA</i> Writing	30.537	4.5206	10.0-45.0 (35.0)
<i>IELCA</i> Speaking	33.111	5.1867	20.0-50.0 (30.0)
<i>IELCA</i> Overall	32.223	5.034	15-45 (30.0)

Table 4 shows that the mean of the *IELCA* exam in the four skills ranged from 30.537 (Writing) to 33.778 (Listening) with a standard deviation that ranged from 7.2133 (Listening) to 5.1867 (Speaking). The range values of all the skills were estimated at 45.0, 40.0, 35.0, and 30.0 for Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking, respectively. The overall mean of the *IELCA* exam was 32.223, with a standard

deviation of 5.034, a range value of 30.0. For this reason, it was necessary to convert the *IELCA* scores into the *CEFR* bands. The mean values of the *IELTS* exam ranged from 5.802 (Writing) to 6.333 (Listening) with a standard deviation that ranged from .7447 (Speaking) to 1.0738 (Listening). The span values were 7.0, 5.5, 5.0, and 4.5 for Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking, respectively. The overall score of the four skills in the *IELTS* exam was 6.139, with a standard deviation of .7405 and a value of 5.0.

To check the mapping of the two exams, correlation analysis was used to check whether the *IELCA* exam aligns with the *IELTS*, and therefore, with the *CEFR*. Table 6 indicated that all the correlation values were significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level between the *IELCA* and the *IELTS*. The data showed that there is a significantly high level of correlation of .980, .972, .958, and .945 for Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking, respectively. This high correlation could be explained by the fact that these two standardised international exams are measuring similar constructs of academic Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. Measuring the right construct can lead to useful tests and valid inferences (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010; Wang, Eignor, & Enright, 2008). This is vital to consider because tests that are measuring the right construct could possibly have similar repercussions at the individual, social, and political levels (Shohamy, 2001).

TABLE 5  
*IELTS Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges (N = 270)*

Skills	Mean	SD	Range
<i>IELTS</i> Listening	6.330	1.0738	2.0-9.0 (7.0)
<i>IELTS</i> Reading	5.887	1.0271	3.5-9.0 (5.5)
<i>IELTS</i> Writing	5.802	.6780	3.0-8.0 (5.0)
<i>IELTS</i> Speaking	6.222	.7447	4.0-8.5 (4.5)
<i>IELTS</i> Overall	6.139	.7405	3.5-8.5 (5.0)

TABLE 6  
*Correlation between IELCA and IELTS*

Skills	Correlation
Listening	.980**
Reading	.972**
Writing	.945**
Speaking	.958**

In comparing the means of the four skills in the two tests, it is clear to see that there is good mapping and correlation between the two tests. The means of the scores in the *IELCA* and *IELTS* are mapped with the *CEFR* bands.

TABLE 7  
*Means and CEFR Bands for Listening (N = 270)*

<i>IELCA</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels	<i>IELTS</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels
5.0	1	A2 (n=1)	2.0	1	A2 (n=1)
20.0	13		4.0	2	
25.0	23	B1 (n=36)	4.5	10	B1 (n=35)
			5.0	23	
30.0	98		5.5	51	
	52	B2 (n=150)	6.0	48	B2 (n=151)
35.0			6.5 (B2+)	52	
40.0	58		7.0	24	
	10	C1 (n=68)	7.5	33	C1 (n=68)
45.0			8.0 (C1+)	11	
50.0	15	C2 (n=15)	8.5	12	C2 (n=15)
			9.0	3	

The equipercentile method of the mapping comparison of the Listening scores of the two exams in Table 7 demonstrated that the same 25 students in the *IELCA* exam whose scores ranged from 20 to 25 had the equivalent of 4.0, 4.5 and 5.0 in the *IELTS* exams, with two students who were at the threshold of 4.0 in the *IELTS* exam. This means that the scores of the *IELCA* Listening exam correspond to the *IELTS* scores. In addition, *IELCA* scores of 30.0 to 35.0 would match *IELTS* bands of 4.0, 4.5, and 5.0 in the Listening section, which is the equivalent of band 5. The tabulated findings also suggested that the *IELCA* scores of 40.0 to 45.0 would be the equivalent of 7.0, 7.5, and 8.0 in the *IELTS* exam, which are the equivalents of C1 on the *CEFR* benchmarks. The last score of 50.0 is the equivalent of 8.5 and 9.0 in the *IELTS*, which is the equivalent of C2.

TABLE 8  
*Means and CEFR Levels for Reading (N = 270)*

<i>IELCA</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels	<i>IELTS</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels
10.0	1	A2 (n=2)	3.5	2	A2 (n=14)
15.0	1		4.0	12	
20.0	30	B1 (n=57)	4.5	18	B1 (n=45)
25.0	27		5.0	27	
30.0	125		5.5	79	
	42	B2 (n=167)	6.0	46	B2 (n=166)
35.0			6.5 (B2+)	41	
40.0	30		7.0	17	
	5	C1 (n=35)	7.5	13	C1 (n=36)
45.0			8.0 (C1+)	6	
50.0	9	C2 (n=9)	8.5	8	C2 (n=9)
			9.0	1	

Table 8 displayed the score comparisons of the Reading section. Like the performance in the Listening section, the students' performance in the Reading section generally clustered around the *CEFR* levels of B1 (n = 57 for the *IELCA*), B2 (n = 45 for *IELTS*) in the two exams, B2 (n = 167 for *IELCA* and n = 166 for the *IELTS* exam), C1 (n = 35) and (n = 36) for the *IELCA* and *IELTS* exams respectively, with a few cases of 9 students who scored 50.0 which is the equivalent of 8.5 and 9 in the *IELTS* exam. To illustrate more, an *IELCA* score of 20.0 in the Reading section would be the equivalent of 4.5 in the *IELTS*, and an *IELCA* score of 30.0 would correspond to the score of 5.5 and 6.0 in the *IELTS* exam. A score of 45.0 in the *IELCA* exam would be the equivalent of three scores in the *IELTS* exam: 8.0.

TABLE 9  
*Means and CEFR Levels for Writing (N = 270)*

B2 <i>IELCA</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels	<i>IELTS</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels
10.0	1	A2 (n=2)	3.0	1	
15.0	1		3.5	1	A1 (n=2)
20.0	11		4.0	3	
25.0	23	B1 (n=34)	4.5	8	B1 (n=36)
			5.0	25	
30.0	176		5.5	96	
	37	B2 (n=213)	6.0	78	B2 (n=211)
35.0			6.5 (B2+)	37	
40.0	19		7.0	16	
		C1 (n=21)	7.5	3	C1 (n=21)
45.0	2		8.0 (C1+)	2	

Table 9 presented a comparison of the scores of the Writing section in the two exams. Like the other sections, most of the scores clustered around the *CEFR* levels of B1 and B2. A range of scores of 20.0 to 25.0 would correspond to the scores of 4.0, 4.5, and 5.0, respectively, which is the equivalent of B1 in the *CEFR*. Besides, the scores of 30.0 to 35.0 in the *IELCA* exam would correspond to the scores of 5.5, 6.0, and 6.5 in the *IELTS* exam and that the scores 40.0 and 45.0 in the *IELCA* would correspond to the scores on 7.0, 7.5 and 8.0 in the *IELTS* exam. What is remarkable about the Writing section is that there was no

case that scored 50.0 or 8.5 or 9.0 in the *IELCA* and *IELTS*, respectively. The data of the Writing module of both exams denoted that there are similar percentages in the C1 and A2 bands in the two exams and almost the same percentages in the B1 and B2 bands.

TABLE 10  
*Means and CEFR Levels for Speaking (N = 270)*

<i>IELCA</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels	<i>IELTS</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels
20.0	4		4.0	1	
25.0	16	B1 (n=20)	4.5	3	B1 (n=20)
			5.0	16	
30.0	131		5.5	49	
	55	B2 (n=186)	6.0	83	B2 (n=184)
35.0			6.5 (B2+)	52	
40.0	58		7.0	46	
45.0	3	C1 (n=61)	7.5	14	C1 (n=61)
			8.0 (C1+)	2	
50.0	3	C2 (n=3)	8.5	4	C2 (n=4)

Unlike the other skills, most of the students in the two exams had Speaking scores that clustered around the *IELCA* scores of 30.0 and 35.0, which correspond to the scores of 5.5, 6.0, and 6.5 in the *IELTS* exam. The scores of 40.0 and 45.0 in the *IELCA* exam equal the scores of 7.0, 7.5, and 8.0 in the *IELTS* exam, and a score of 50.0 in the *IELCA* exam would correspond to the score of 8.5 in the *IELTS* exam. Again, the comparison of the Speaking scores would yield almost similar percentages in the two exams.

To further explore this mapping and see whether the *IELCA* maps with the *CEFR* too, it was important to map the scores of the *IELCA* and *IELTS* exams and then check them against the *CEFR* for any possible exact equivalence of the *CEFR* benchmarks. A score of 15.0 in the *IELCA* exam equals a score of 3.5 in the *IELTS* exam. Similarly, a score of 25.0 in the *IELCA* exam corresponds to the scores of 4.5 and 5.5 in the *IELTS* exam and that the scores of 30.0. For a score of 6.5 in *IELTS*, they correspond the score of 35.0 in the *IELCA* exam, which is B2+. Finally, the scores of 40.0 and 45.0 in the *IELCA* exam would correspond to the bands of 7.0, 7.5, and 8.0 in the *IELTS* exam.

TABLE 11  
*Overall Means and CEFR Levels for IELCA and IELTS (N = 270)*

<i>IELCA</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels	<i>IELTS</i> Scores	N	<i>CEFR</i> Levels
15.0	1	A2 (n=1)	3.5	1	A2 (n=1)
20.0	3	B1 (n=32)	4.5	3	B1 (n=32)
25.0	29		5.0	29	
30.0	131		5.5	34	
	61	B2 (n=192)	6.0	97	B2 (n=192)
35.0			6.5 (B2+)	61	
40.0	38		7.0	23	
	7	C1 (n=45)	7.5	15	C1 (n=45)
45.0			8.0 (C1+)	7	

It noteworthy to mention that data of the study (n=270) indicated that there is a perfect matching of the overall scores of both the *IELCA* and *IELTS* and that both scores correspond to the *CEFR* Levels. That is, the A2 *CEFR* level, which has the scores of 15.0 and the 3.5 in the *IELCA* and *IELTS* exams respectively, has a case of one candidate only. The B1 population had a number of 32 examinees whose scores ranged from 20.0 to 35.0 and 5.5, 6.0, and 6.5 in the *IELCA* and *IELTS*, respectively. The B2 population had exactly the same number of candidates (n=192) who had a B2 *CEFR* band and who scored 30.0 and 35.0 in the *IELCA* exam and 5.5, 6.0, and 6.5 in the *IELTS* exam respectively. The 45 examinees had a C1 *CEFR* levels with scores of 40.0 and 45.0 in the *IELCA* exam and 7.0, 7.5, and 8.0 in the *IELTS* exam.

## Discussion

Data of the study revealed a small percentage of about 4% of all the population whose scores were outside the range (see Table 9 for the A2 and B1 bands). Having a percentage of less than 5% of scores outside the range could be said to be normal, given the eventuality that the *IELCA* score is larger than the *IELTS*. For instance, the *IELCA* has a larger total score scale that ranged from 0 to 50 than *IELTS* that has a range of 0 to 9, and therefore, this span in some skills had a few cases outside the mapping range. The largest span was found in the Reading skill of 12 cases each in the A2 and B1 bands for the *IELCA* and *IELTS* exams, respectively.

Both the *IELCA* and *IELTS* exams measure the four skills intended for candidates who are supposed to study or work in an academic environment. The *IELCA* test is an exam anchored in the notion of communicative competency. This test contains innovative tasks that promote competency needed by people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The high correlation of the language skills in the two exams (more than .90, in Table 6) meant the fact that in terms of performance, candidates could be said to have the same language ability whether they sit the *IELCA* or *IELTS* exams. The scores of the two exams reflected the overall tendency of the test performance of the candidates.

The different linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the participants could be said to be another variable in favour of the *IELCA* exam. The age group that ranged from 18 to 50 years, as well the variety of the first language of the participants indicated that regardless of such differences if the exam measures the right construct and the actual ability of the language learners, then the performance would be the same through different international standardised exams.

To further investigate the mapping of the two exams, perhaps opting for a larger and more controlled sample as per the examinees' learning experience with the English language would consolidate and confirm the findings of the current report. However, no matter how different the population sample might be, it could be safe to claim that the two tests are more likely to yield exact mapping of the overall band.

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