

Duolingo English Test vs. IELTS in South Asia: Accessibility, Validity, Cost, and Equity

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Abstract

For students in South Asia, English language competency tests are now a crucial entry point to higher education, professional mobility, immigration, and foreign work. Universities, governments, corporations, and professional associations have all used the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as one of the most popular tests of English ability for decades. However, the Duolingo English Test (DET), an online, computer-adaptive, technology-mediated test that can be performed remotely and typically yields results considerably faster than traditional testing routes, has established a fundamentally different concept. A crucial question for South Asian educational systems is brought up by the increasing adoption of DET: For students looking for overseas educational options, can the Duolingo English Test successfully replace IELTS, or should it continue to be an alternative rather than a replacement?

With a focus on Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, this study examines the possible effects of replacing IELTS with DET among South Asian students. Secondary quantitative and qualitative evidence, psychometric research, institutional evidence, published predictive-validity studies, official testing data, and illustrative cases of students and institutions were all used in the comparative study technique. Accessibility, cost, time efficiency, academic validity, technology requirements, and institutional acceptance are the six categories in which the study assesses the two examinations.

Keywords: Duolingo English Test, IELTS, South Asia, English proficiency, international students, language assessment, higher education, educational equity, digital testing.

Introduction

English proficiency is now more than just a goal for language learners. For millions of South Asian students, being able to communicate in English opens doors to professional work, international higher education, scholarships, migration, and involvement in the global information economy. Universities in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and other English-medium countries frequently accept students from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

IELTS has always been a key component of this procedure. Thousands of educational institutions, corporations, professional associations, and governments worldwide accept the IELTS exam. An important advancement in digital assessment is the creation of the Duolingo English Test. DET was created as an online test that can be taken remotely, subject to its technical and security constraints, in contrast to traditional exams that typically require students to travel to a specific testing venue.

This study investigates whether South Asian students can gain academically from DET's convenience without sacrificing the caliber of assessments.

Background

There are significant disparities between South Asian students' educational opportunities, digital access, income, and geographic location. While a student in a smaller town might have to travel, make accommodations, take time off from work, and manage a restricted number of testing appointments, a student in a major city might have simple access to a language testing facility.

Therefore, the actual cost of language testing goes beyond the exam fee. Transportation, lodging, missed work, preparation expenditures, and repeat test costs might all be included.

By enabling qualified students to take the test remotely, DET may alter this procedure. But the digital model also establishes prerequisites for a separate space, electricity, a suitable computer, dependable internet, and sufficient digital competence.

Research Problem

How much the Duolingo English Test can replace IELTS for South Asian students without compromising the validity, reliability, equity, or worldwide recognition of English-language assessment is the main research question.

Accessibility, affordability, academic validity, institutional acceptance, and technical equity are the five interrelated aspects of the issue.

Research Contribution

By moving the conversation away from a straightforward comparison of test formats and toward a more comprehensive South Asian educational-equity framework, this study adds to the growing body of literature on digital English-language assessment. It contends that the combined factors of psychometric validity, institutional recognition, financial burden, geographic accessibility, technological viability, and subsequent academic achievement should be used to assess the worth of an English proficiency test. According to the report, evidence-based dual recognition backed by independent longitudinal research would be a better future policy for South Asian higher education than replacing IELTS entirely with DET.

Research Objectives

1. To compare DET and IELTS as English-proficiency assessments.
2. To examine the potential impact of DET adoption on South Asian students.
3. To evaluate evidence concerning the academic validity of DET.
4. To investigate accessibility and affordability implications.
5. To examine the role of geographical location in test selection.
6. To assess institutional and immigration recognition.
7. To analyze technological and security concerns.
8. To use real-world cases to evaluate academic outcomes.
9. To identify circumstances in which DET may be preferable to IELTS.
10. To develop recommendations for students, universities, policymakers, and educational institutions.

Research Questions

- RQ1: How does DET compare with IELTS in accessibility for South Asian students?
 RQ2: Can DET reduce the financial and logistical burden associated with English proficiency testing?
 RQ3: Is there sufficient empirical evidence that DET scores predict academic performance?
 RQ4: Does DET provide academic English assessment comparable to established examinations such as IELTS?
 RQ5: What are the principal risks of replacing IELTS with DET?
 RQ6: How does institutional acceptance affect the usefulness of DET in South Asia?
 RQ7: Should DET replace IELTS completely, or should both examinations coexist?

Research Hypotheses

- H1: Students using DET experience greater geographical accessibility than students using traditional center-based IELTS.
 H2: DET reduces the total logistical burden associated with English proficiency testing.
 H3: DET scores demonstrate a meaningful relationship with subsequent academic performance.
 H4: Academic outcomes of students admitted using DET are not substantially inferior to those of students using IELTS or comparable examinations.
 H5: Institutional acceptance is a stronger determinant of the practical usefulness of DET than theoretical comparability alone.
 H6: The benefits of DET are moderated by access to reliable technology and internet connectivity.

Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework is:

Test Choice → Accessibility → Cost/Time Burden → Application Behavior → Admission Opportunity → Academic Transition → Student Outcome

A second pathway is:

Test Choice → Score Validity → Institutional Confidence → Admission Decision → Academic Performance

Moderating variables include socioeconomic status, geographical location, digital literacy, internet quality, university policy, destination country, immigration requirements, and academic discipline.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF DET AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

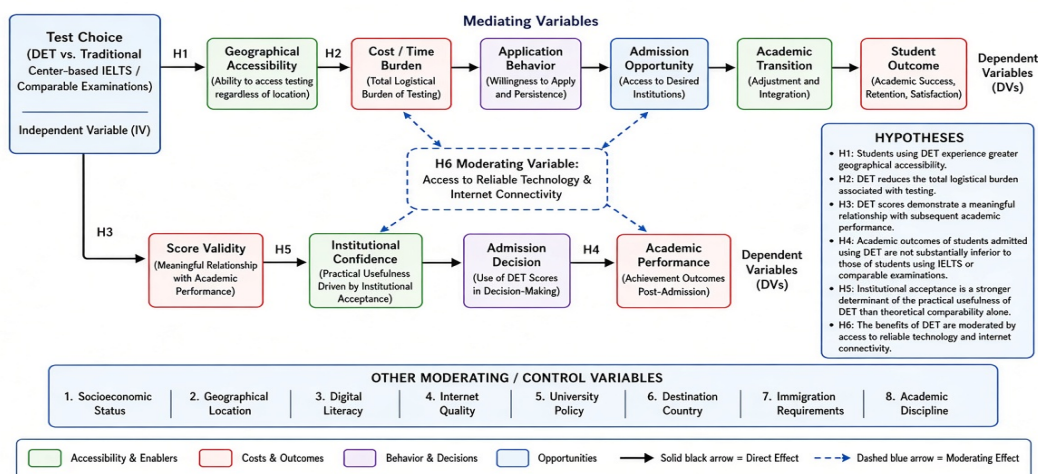


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Based on the **conceptual model** variables can be classified as follows.

1. Independent Variable (IV)

The **main independent variable** is:

Test Choice

- Duolingo English Test (DET)
- Traditional center-based IELTS
- Comparable English proficiency examinations

This is the starting/predictor variable in both pathways.

2. Dependent Variables (DVs)

The model has **two principal dependent/outcome variables**:

Student Outcome Academic success, retention, satisfaction, overall student outcomes

Academic Performance Post-admission academic achievement/performance

These are the ultimate outcomes that the conceptual framework is trying to explain.

3. Mediating / Intervening Variables

Several variables between Test Choice and the final outcomes should **not be labelled independent variables or dependent variables in the overall model**. They are better treated as **mediators/intervening variables**:

Geographical Accessibility Explains how test choice affects access to English testing

Cost/Time Burden Explains the logistical consequences of test choice

Application Behavior Explains willingness to apply and persistence

Admission Opportunity Explains access to desired institutions

Academic Transition Explains adjustment and integration after admission

Score Validity Links test choice to confidence in the test score

Institutional Confidence Links score validity to institutional decision-making

Admission Decision Links institutional confidence to post-admission academic performance

So, for example:

Test Choice → Geographical Accessibility → Cost/Time Burden → Application Behavior → Admission Opportunity → Academic Transition → Student Outcome

and:

Test Choice → Score Validity → Institutional Confidence → Admission Decision → Academic Performance

4. Moderating Variables

The moderating variables are exactly the eight variables you specified:

1. Socioeconomic Status
2. Geographical Location
3. Digital Literacy
4. Internet Quality
5. University Policy
6. Destination Country
7. Immigration Requirements
8. Academic Discipline

These variables **moderate the relationships in the conceptual model**, meaning they can strengthen, weaken, or alter the relationship between the predictor/mediators and outcomes.

For example, the benefit of choosing DET may be stronger for a student with **high digital literacy and reliable internet** than for a student with poor internet connectivity.

5. Special Moderator: Technology & Internet Connectivity

Conceptual Model also specifically identifies:

Access to Reliable Technology & Internet Connectivity → H6
as a moderating effect.

Therefore, for H6:

Test Choice/DET benefits → Student Outcomes
is moderated by:

Reliable Technology & Internet Connectivity

This is particularly important because **Internet Quality** is also listed among your eight moderating variables. You can therefore treat **H6 as a specific moderation hypothesis**, with internet quality/technology access being the operational moderator.

CATEGORY	VARIABLES
Independent Variable	Test Choice (DET vs. IELTS/comparable examination)
Dependent Variables	Student Outcome; Academic Performance
Mediating Variables	Geographical Accessibility; Cost/Time Burden; Application Behavior; Admission Opportunity; Academic Transition; Score Validity; Institutional Confidence; Admission Decision
Moderating Variables	Socioeconomic Status; Geographical Location; Digital Literacy; Internet Quality; University Policy; Destination Country; Immigration Requirements; Academic Discipline
Specific H6 Moderator	Access to Reliable Technology & Internet Connectivity

Table 1: Research Variables

Relationship with H1–H6		
Hypothesis	Main relationship	Variable role
H1	Test Choice → Geographical Accessibility	IV → Mediator
H2	Test Choice → Cost/Time Burden	IV → Mediator
H3	Score Validity → Academic Performance	Mediator → DV
H4	Test Choice/Admission Route → Academic Performance	IV → DV
H5	Institutional Acceptance → Practical Usefulness of DET	Predictor → Outcome
H6	DET benefits → Outcomes, conditioned by technology/internet	Moderation

Table 2: Research Hypothesis

Research Methodology

A comparative mixed-method secondary research strategy is used in this study. Peer-reviewed research, institutional research, official test documentation, predictive-validity studies, comparative assessment evidence, institutional acceptance data, and documented or illustrative cases are all synthesized.

The research employs triangulation across three types of evidence: institutional, access, and psychometric.

Comparative Analytical Model

The examinations' delivery, speaking evaluation, geographic accessibility, speed of results, institutional recognition, reliance on technology, academic validity evidence, immigration recognition, and rural accessibility are all contrasted.

DET is built around remote digital management, whereas IELTS has a well-established center-based and computer-delivered ecology. IELTS is still widely accepted by governments, businesses, professional associations, and educational institutions. Although acceptance of DET varies by institution and goal, it has grown quickly among institutions and programs.

Accessibility: The South Asian Dimension

One of the most compelling arguments for DET is accessibility. Due to the vast geographic and socioeconomic diversity of South Asia, students who live outside of major cities may find that the IELTS process requires travel, lodging, transportation, and time away from work or study. DET has the potential to reduce geographic friction, which can be especially significant in nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, where students may live far from major testing facilities. It is crucial to measure

accessibility as total burden rather than just test-center distance.

Affordability and the Economics of Testing

Transportation, lodging, meals, preparation, lost work time, and repeat test costs are all included in the actual cost of language testing. Because the student does not always have to travel to a testing facility, DET can lower a number of indirect costs. However, the right technology is needed for remote testing. Thus, household resources determine the economic benefit.

A useful model is:

Total Cost of Testing = Direct Fee + Preparation + Travel + Accommodation + Lost Income + Technology + Repeat-Test Risk

Time Efficiency

Applications to international universities are subject to stringent deadlines. While computer-delivered IELTS can also yield results rapidly, DET often yields results promptly. Flexibility and the option to take the test from a distance make the biggest practical difference.

Academic Validity

IELTS cannot be replaced by accessibility unless DET offers significant proof of English language competency. Students' ability to comprehend academic content, express ideas, take part in conversations, and write coherently should all be assessed during a university language exam. Research that has been published offers positive evidence. DET scores and postgraduate students' first-year academic performance were found to be positively correlated in a peer-reviewed study comprising 1,881 DET test takers at a prominent UK university. Additionally, the study discovered that predictive correlations differed by student characteristics, subject, and degree level.

This evidence shows that no language test should be regarded as a perfect predictor of university performance, but it also supports the idea that DET scores provide valuable information regarding academic preparedness.

Case Study 1: UK University Predictive Validity

At a large UK institution, a research with 1,881 students looked at the connection between academic achievement and DET results. DET scores were strongly correlated with first-year academic grades among postgraduate students.

Instead of just comparing language test results, the study examines actual students enrolling in higher education, which makes it valuable.

Case Study 2: Four-Institution U.S. Study

Over 700 undergraduate and graduate students from four U.S. universities were the subject of another investigation. Students that took the DET, IELTS, and TOEFL reported average GPAs that were generally

comparable. In the stated comparisons, the differences were not statistically significant.

Although the results should not be immediately applied to all universities or nations, this research suggests that DET may serve as a reliable admissions metric.

Case Study 3: University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

DET, IELTS, TOEFL, and test-exempt students were compared using first-year academic performance and other outcomes in a study of 397 international students at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. According to the study, academic success was predicted by DET scores at a level similar to those of the TOEFL and IELTS.

This case is especially significant since it illustrates the post-pandemic state of universities and shows that digital testing is still useful if traditional campus operations resume.

Case Study 4: India

One of the most significant DET markets is India. According to Duolingo, testing has been widely distributed throughout Indian cities. This demonstrates how living in a large metropolitan area and receiving an education abroad can become less connected as a result of digital testing.

The potential pathway is:

Reduced geographic friction → Lower application burden → Greater willingness to apply → Potentially broader international participation.

Case Study 5: Pakistani Student

Imagine a Pakistani graduate who wants to pursue a master's degree overseas but lives outside of a big city. In an IELTS-only scenario, the student could have to travel, make travel and lodging arrangements, and possibly repeat the trip if another try is needed.

The student could be able to finish the test remotely if the intended university accepts DET. This could cut down on overall expenses and time.

However, DET's convenience does not address the student's real issue if the university or immigration track demands IELTS or another authorized test.

Case Study 6: Bangladeshi Student

Similar financial and geographic limitations can apply to a Bangladeshi student studying outside of Dhaka. Remote testing can lower travel and associated expenses if the target university accepts DET and the student has the necessary technology.

Case Study 7: Nepal

Nepal serves as an example of both the advantages and disadvantages of digital testing. Geographical obstacles can be lessened by remote assessment, but students who live in places with erratic internet or energy might not benefit as much.

Digital Divide

The digital gap is the biggest argument against DET. Access to a compatible computer, reliable internet, sufficient electricity, a quiet space, and digital proficiency are all prerequisites for remote testing.

Traditional geographic inequality is lessened by DET, but technical inequality may become more significant.

Therefore:

Traditional inequality = Distance + Transport + Test-center availability + Cost

Digital inequality = Device + Internet + Electricity + Private space + Digital literacy

Test Security

Exams with high stakes need to confirm candidates' identities and safeguard score integrity. Technology-assisted monitoring and review are used by DET. Both new security opportunities and threats are brought forth by remote testing.

While DET use remote technologies and monitoring, IELTS benefits from a regulated physical examination environment. It is not necessary to presume that any model is flawless.

Artificial Intelligence and Assessment

In high-stakes evaluation, DET is part of a larger trend toward artificial intelligence. Automated scoring, adaptive testing, fraud detection, and behavioral monitoring are all supported by AI.

But algorithmic bias, privacy, transparency, false positives, and equity across various language and cultural groups are additional issues raised by AI.

When evaluating South Asian English users, who may have a variety of educational backgrounds and English dialects, these issues are particularly crucial.

Predictive Validity

A cautious conclusion is supported by the available research. DET scores can indicate certain aspects of academic performance and have a correlation with recognized English tests. According to comparative research, students who enroll in institutions via the DET, IELTS, and TOEFL have generally comparable academic results.

Nevertheless, there is no proof that the DET and IELTS are the same exam. Task design, delivery, speaking evaluation, writing assignments, and candidate experience are all different.

Therefore:

Psychometric comparability $\neq$ complete practical equivalence.

IELTS's Continuing Strength

Because of its widespread recognition and well-established institutional infrastructure, IELTS is still quite

powerful. It is acknowledged in government, professional associations, employment, and educational settings.

This is particularly crucial for South Asian students who could later require proof in English for employment, professional registration, or immigration.

Institutional Acceptance

The practical value of any English test depends on recognition.

Practical Value of Test = Validity × Recognition × Accessibility

If a university does not accept DET, a high DET score cannot be used for that application.

Students should therefore follow this sequence:

University requirement → Program requirement → Immigration requirement → Test selection

Psychological Dimension

While some students feel more at ease chatting with a live examiner in person, others prefer digital evaluation. Performance can be impacted by test anxiety and exam format familiarity.

Thus, the optimal exam depends in part on each student.

Academic Writing

Extended written communication is specifically evaluated in IELTS Academic Writing. This is pertinent since essays, reports, literature reviews, and research papers are often required for university coursework.

Writing is evaluated by DET as well, although using a different methodology. Therefore, universities should keep in mind that academic writing training at the university level cannot be replaced by an entrance exam.

Speaking Assessment

Direct communication with a qualified examiner is a component of the IELTS. DET employs technology-mediated evaluation. Different kinds of communication evidence are offered by these formats.

Rather of being instantly classified as a flaw, the discrepancy could be considered as a variation in evaluation design.

COVID-19 as a Turning Point

Remote language testing was expedited by the pandemic. When traditional test facilities were disrupted, DET's remote operation offered it an advantage.

Digital testing has progressed beyond emergency use and is now a part of the permanent assessment ecology, as seen by the ongoing institutional adoption of DET following the pandemic.

South Asia After COVID-19

South Asian education is becoming more and more computerized. These days, students apply online, participate in virtual classes, use online tools for preparation, and interact digitally with foreign universities.

Thus, digital language testing aligns with this broader shift.

Economic Impact

DET has the potential to speed up applications and lower travel and lodging costs. Device and internet fees are still important, though.

Therefore, the entire cost should be used to assess the impact rather than just the examination fee.

Gender and Household Considerations

Students who have trouble going on their own to distant testing locations may benefit from remote testing. However, a private and appropriate setting is necessary for home testing, which can be challenging in crowded homes.

Rural–Urban Inequality

DET can potentially reduce rural–urban disparities by eliminating some travel requirements. Yet rural students may face weaker digital infrastructure.

A balanced approach could provide secure digital testing facilities through universities and community centers.

Proposed South Asian Policy Model

This study recommends a Dual Recognition Model. Under this model, universities recognize both IELTS and DET when evidence supports comparable proficiency for the intended academic purpose.

Universities should establish minimum requirements using validated concordance evidence.

Institutional Decision Matrix

Factor | DET | IELTS

Academic admissions | High potential | Very high

Geographic accessibility | Very high | Moderate

Digital dependence | Very high | Moderate

International recognition | High and expanding | Very high

Immigration portability | Destination-dependent | Broad

Remote convenience | Very high | Moderate

Human speaking interaction | Different/limited | Strong

Research evidence | Growing | Extensive

Rural travel burden | Low | Potentially high

Long-term professional portability | Moderate to high | Very high

Proposed Primary Research Design

Data from at least 500–1,000 students in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka should be gathered for a future study. Students ought to be split up into IELTS and DET groups.

Test results, preparation time, test expense, distance traveled, household income, location, internet dependability, university, degree level, discipline, first-year GPA, academic probation, retention, and satisfaction should all be considered variables.

Statistical Tests

Recommended methods include descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, Mann–Whitney U tests, Pearson or Spearman correlation, multiple regression, logistic regression, and propensity-score matching.

A proposed regression model is:

$$\text{GPA} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{English Score}) + \beta_2(\text{Test Type}) + \beta_3(\text{Socioeconomic Status}) + \beta_4(\text{University}) + \beta_5(\text{Discipline}) + \varepsilon$$

Propensity-score matching is recommended because students self-select their English test and may differ systematically.

Accessibility Index

A future study can develop an accessibility index:

$$\text{Accessibility Index} = 0.25A + 0.20C + 0.20T + 0.15G + 0.20F$$

where A is appointment accessibility, C is cost accessibility, T is technology accessibility, G is geographic accessibility, and F is flexibility.

Economic Burden Index

$$\text{Economic Burden} = \text{Direct Cost} + \text{Travel Cost} + \text{Accommodation Cost} + \text{Lost Income} + \text{Preparation Cost} + \text{Repeat-Test Cost}$$

This provides a more realistic measure of testing burden.

Results of the Secondary Evidence Synthesis

Finding 1: DET has a major accessibility advantage.

Finding 2: DET has credible predictive-validity evidence.

Finding 3: Institutional acceptance remains the central limitation.

Finding 4: IELTS retains greater cross-purpose portability.

Finding 5: Technology creates both access and exclusion.

Hypothesis Evaluation

H1: Supported.

H2: Supported.

H3: Supported with qualification.

H4: Generally supported by available evidence, but not universally proven.

H5: Strongly supported.

H6: Supported conceptually and practically.

Discussion

The question "Is Duolingo better than IELTS?" is too simplistic. The more useful question is: Better for whom, for what purpose, and under what circumstances?

For a student applying to a university that accepts DET, with reliable technology and a need for rapid testing, DET may be preferable.

For a student applying across multiple countries, professional bodies, or immigration pathways, IELTS may offer greater portability.

Why DET Should Not Completely Replace IELTS

There are several reasons: institutional recognition, immigration requirements, professional licensing, the digital divide, the need for independent research, and the value of maintaining assessment diversity.

Why Universities Should Not Require IELTS Exclusively

If DET is validated, accepted, and appropriately aligned with the institution's language requirements, requiring IELTS alone may impose additional costs without a corresponding educational benefit.

The goal of admissions testing should be valid evidence rather than loyalty to a particular testing brand.

Implications for Pakistani Students

Pakistani students should verify whether their target university and specific program accept DET, whether the intended visa pathway recognizes the test, whether the required score is realistic, whether their internet and computer are reliable, and whether future professional plans make IELTS more useful.

Implications for Indian Students

India's large international student population and extensive digital environment make it an important DET market. Students should select the test according to university and destination requirements rather than assuming that one examination is universally superior.

Implications for Bangladesh

Bangladeshi students may benefit from remote testing when travel is costly, but internet reliability and household testing conditions should be considered.

Implications for Nepal and Sri Lanka

Geography and institutional policy are important factors. Students should verify the requirements of each destination institution.

Role of Educational Consultants

Consultants should not automatically recommend IELTS or DET. They should consider destination, university, program, immigration pathway, budget, technology, English ability, and application deadline.

Role of Universities

Universities should publish transparent minimum scores, subscores, equivalent requirements, program-specific policies, and scholarship-related conditions.

Role of South Asian Governments

Governments should encourage independent validation studies, digital testing standards, data protection, accessibility, and clear separation between admission requirements and immigration requirements.

Ethical Considerations

Language testing can determine access to education, scholarships, migration, employment, and professional recognition. Testing systems should therefore meet standards of fairness, validity, reliability, transparency, accessibility, privacy, and accountability.

Limitations

This is primarily a secondary research study rather than a new longitudinal experiment. Available predictive-validity studies are not exclusively South Asian. Institutional policies change frequently. DET acceptance does not automatically imply immigration acceptance. Costs vary across countries and time. Students self-select their examinations, creating potential selection bias. Some DET evidence is associated with organizations connected to the test, making independent replication important.

Recommendations

1. Adopt dual recognition.
2. Maintain destination-specific verification.
3. Conduct South Asian longitudinal research.
4. Measure socioeconomic impact.
5. Investigate rural access.
6. Establish digital testing support centers.
7. Increase independent research.
8. Publish transparent score equivalencies.
9. Separate admission and immigration requirements.
10. Avoid describing DET merely as an "easy IELTS."

Future Research Agenda

A future longitudinal study should include approximately 2,000 students from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. It should track English scores, GPA, socioeconomic status, digital access, discipline, university, application success, retention, and academic warnings for at least three years.

Proposed Statistical Model

$$\text{Academic Success}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{DET}_i + \beta_2 \text{IELTS}_i + \beta_3 \text{SES}_i + \beta_4 \text{DigitalAccess}_i + \beta_5 \text{Discipline}_i + \beta_6 \text{University}_i + u_i + \varepsilon_i$$

A second model could examine application success as a function of test type, cost, distance, score, socioeconomic status, and university acceptance.

Overall Evaluation

DET is not simply a cheaper or shorter version of IELTS. It represents a different philosophy of language assessment.

IELTS is built around an established international examination infrastructure. DET is built around digital delivery, adaptive testing, remote administration, rapid scoring, technology-supported security, and geographic accessibility.

The evidence increasingly suggests that DET can provide meaningful information about academic English proficiency. At the same time, IELTS remains more established across education, government, employment, and professional recognition.

Conclusions

According to the evidence, DET is credible enough to serve as a viable substitute for IELTS in many university admissions applications, particularly in cases where the receiving institution expressly accepts it.

Accessibility is its greatest contribution. DET can lower a number of obstacles related to international English testing for students who live distant from testing locations, have little money, have tight application deadlines, or prefer technology-mediated evaluation.

But a high-stakes exam consists of more than just academic validity. In addition to being inexpensive, easily available, technologically possible, and adequately predictive of academic performance, a South Asian student needs an exam that is approved by the university, program, and pertinent immigration track when applicable.

The central conclusion is therefore:

In South Asia, the Duolingo English Test should be established as a reliable alternative to IELTS, with students and institutions choose between the two based on factors such as evidence, purpose, recognition, accessibility, and individual circumstances.

This dual-recognition strategy has the most promise for educational equity in South Asia.

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