

The Relationship Between the TOEFL iBT® Test and Academic Writing Practices in English-Medium Universities in South Asia: Case Studies From Bangladesh, India, and Nepal

AUTHORS

Anthony Green, Saraswati Dawadi, Agnes
Kukulska-Hulme, Ram Ashish Giri, Rubina Khan,
and Santosh Mahapatra

ETS Research Report Series

EIGNOR EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Daniel F. McCaffrey
Lord Chair in Measurement and Statistics

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Usama Ali
Senior Measurement Scientist

Beata Beigman Klebanov
Principal Research Scientist, Edusoft

Katherine Castellano
Managing Principal Research Scientist

Jamie Mikeska
Managing Senior Research Scientist

Teresa Ober
Research Scientist

Jonathan Schmidgall
Senior Research Scientist

Jesse Sparks
Managing Senior Research Scientist

Zuwei Wang
Senior Measurement Scientist

Klaus Zechner
Senior Research Scientist

Jiyun Zu
Senior Measurement Scientist

PRODUCTION EDITORS

Ayleen Gontz
Manager, Editorial Services

Emily Ramsower
Manager, Editorial Services

Since its 1947 founding, ETS has conducted and disseminated scientific research to support its products and services, and to advance the measurement and education fields. In keeping with these goals, ETS is committed to making its research freely available to the professional community and to the general public. Published accounts of ETS research, including papers in the ETS Research Report series, undergo a formal peer-review process by ETS staff to ensure that they meet established scientific and professional standards. All such ETS-conducted peer reviews are in addition to any reviews that outside organizations may provide as part of their own publication processes. Peer review notwithstanding, the positions expressed in the ETS Research Report series and other published accounts of ETS research are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Officers and Trustees of Educational Testing Service.

The Daniel Eignor Editorship is named in honor of Dr. Daniel R. Eignor, who from 2001 until 2011 served the Research and Development division as Editor for the ETS Research Report series. The Eignor Editorship has been created to recognize the pivotal leadership role that Dr. Eignor played in the research publication process at ETS.

TOEFL® Research Series

The TOEFL® test is the world's most widely respected English language assessment, primarily used for admissions purposes in more than 130 countries. Since the 1970s, the TOEFL tests have had a rigorous, productive, and far-ranging research program. ETS has made the establishment of a strong research base a consistent feature of the development and evolution of the TOEFL tests, recognizing that rigorous research is essential to support a forward-looking assessment program and to substantiate claims about what test takers know or can do based on their test scores.

In addition to TOEFL-related research projects conducted by ETS staff each year, the TOEFL Committee of Examiners (COE), composed of distinguished language learning and testing experts from the academic community, funds an annual program of research carried out by external researchers around the world. To date, hundreds of studies on the TOEFL tests have been published in refereed academic journals and books, in addition to the more than 300 peer-reviewed reports about TOEFL research published by ETS.

Current (2025–2026) members of the TOEFL COE

Koen Van Gorp – Chair	Michigan State University, USA
Bart Deygers	Ghent University, Belgium
Becky Huang	The Ohio State University, USA
Yo In’Nami	Chuo University, Japan
Heike Neumann	Concordia University, Canada
Gary Ockey	Iowa State University, USA
Anamaria Pinter	University of Warwick, UK

To obtain more information about the TOEFL programs and services, visit www.ets.org/toefl.

The Relationship Between the TOEFL iBT® Test and Academic Writing Practices in English-Medium Universities in South Asia: Case Studies From Bangladesh, India, and Nepal

Anthony Green¹, Saraswati Dawadi², Agnes Kukulska-Hulme², Ram Ashish Giri³, Rubina Khan⁴, & Santosh Mahapatra⁵

¹Centre for Research in English language Learning and Assessment, University of Bedfordshire

²Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University

³English Language Centre, Monash University

⁴Department of English, University of Dhaka

⁵Birla Institute of Technology & Science, Pilani

Abstract

Acknowledging that all sections of the TOEFL iBT® test should be used for admissions decisions, this study focuses specifically on the potential of the TOEFL iBT Writing section as one component of entry screening for English-medium undergraduate business and engineering programs at six universities in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. Using a mixed-methods approach, researchers collected data from 180 first-year students and 24 teachers through TOEFL iBT Writing tests, questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews. The study investigated the alignment between TOEFL iBT Writing tasks and university writing practices, as well as test performance and teacher and student perceptions of the test's appropriateness, as part of procedures for student admissions.

Although TOEFL iBT Writing tasks aligned well with content course expectations, they differed from typical English language classroom practices, which tended to focus on surface-level skills. Both students and teachers generally viewed TOEFL iBT Writing tasks positively. However, some concerns were raised about the difficulty of the integrated writing task, particularly for students unfamiliar with the format or struggling with the listening input.

Test scores and qualitative data suggested that although many students possessed adequate English writing skills for academic study, a minority experienced real difficulties. This raised questions about current institutional English-medium instruction policies. Despite overall positive perceptions among participants, adopting TOEFL iBT as an entry measure may face resistance due to social, cultural, and political factors associated with using a foreign-made test designed for North American settings.

The study's findings have implications for curriculum development and English language teaching practices in South Asian higher education contexts.

Keywords: English-medium education, English-medium instruction (EMI), instruction policies, English language learning, South Asian universities, TOEFL iBT®, writing assessment

Corresponding author: A. Green, E-mail: Tony.Green@beds.ac.uk

Acknowledgments

We are sincerely grateful to Dr. Amol Padwad, formerly of B. R. Ambedkar University, for his participation in the early stages of the project.

Introduction

Large-scale, professionally developed tests of English for academic purposes are widely accepted as evidence of language proficiency for academic study in English-medium instruction (EMI) courses globally. The TOEFL iBT® test demonstrates extensive international recognition, being accepted by more than 13,000 institutions across more than 160 countries, with ETS claiming acceptance by “all the top universities across Asia” (TOEFL, 2023; see also TOEFL, 2026).

However, validity theory presents a critical challenge to any assumption of universal applicability. Schmeiser and Welch (2006) argued that tests designed for one specific context cannot automatically be generalized to others. The TOEFL iBT was explicitly developed to “measure examinees’ English language proficiency in situations and tasks reflective of university life in North America” (Enright et al., 2000, p. 10), with its design rooted in analyses of North American academic practices.

Norris et al. (2021) observed that EMI at universities worldwide may involve “distinct uses for, types of, and expectations about academic English” compared to North American contexts. This suggests that additional validity evidence is required to justify TOEFL iBT use outside North America.

Researchers have begun addressing this gap. Harsch et al. (2017), for instance, collected specific validity evidence supporting TOEFL iBT use in a university setting in the United Kingdom. Scholars like Dimova et al. (2020), Norris et al. (2021), and Owen et al. (2021) have advocated for validity research in countries where English is not the majority language and where educational practices may differ from North American models. This study investigates perceptions of the suitability of the TOEFL iBT in 12 cases situated in EMI programs at six universities in three member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Bangladesh, India (where we focus on the state of Telangana), and Nepal. Although the TOEFL iBT comprises four comprehensive sections—reading, listening, speaking, and writing—we chose to focus on writing in the first instance because the students at these universities are assessed on their written work.

The TOEFL iBT Test and Academic Writing

Comprehensive descriptions of college writing in North America were used as the foundation for the development of tasks and rating criteria used in TOEFL iBT (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1983; Cumming et al., 2000, 2004; Hale et al., 1996; Jamieson et al., 2000; Rosenfeld et al., 2001). They have subsequently been used for the evaluation of the test tasks, contributing to a validation argument for the test (Chapelle et al., 2008).

Several studies have explored the types of writing tasks assigned at university and the competencies they involve in North American contexts and in other English-dominant countries. TOEFL iBT test responses and academic assignments are produced under different conditions for different purposes, and linguistic analyses have revealed notable differences between them. Nonetheless, a general conclusion has been that writing produced in the TOEFL iBT test is similar enough to the writing done in academic assignments at college to justify the use of scores in college admissions (Biber et al., 2017; Llosa & Malone, 2017, 2019; Riazi, 2016).

Building on studies of instructor and student perceptions of the comparability of tasks and performance on TOEFL iBT writing tasks and writing tasks assigned in university writing courses conducted in North America (Biber et al., 2017; Llosa and Malone, 2017, 2019) and elsewhere (Riazi, 2016; Yeom, 2023), the present study investigates these questions through a series of case studies in the South Asian university EMI context.

The adequacy of task-centered conceptualizations of academic writing has been questioned from an academic literacies perspective (Lillis & Scott, 2007) on the grounds that task-centered conceptualizations take too little account of how students approach and experience the writing process and how their languages, cultures, values, and attitudes shape their performance of academic writing tasks (Moore et al., 2015). We therefore collected information not only on what students are asked to do when they write, but also on how they and their teachers conceive and carry out the tasks they are asked to perform. This extends work carried out by Malone and Montee (2014) and Llosa and Malone (2017) on stakeholder perception of TOEFL iBT and its relation to the lived experience of academic study. Taking into account our domain analysis of the role that writing plays in the lives of stakeholders informs our conclusions about the likely impact of the use of TOEFL® in the South Asian context.

English-Medium Instruction

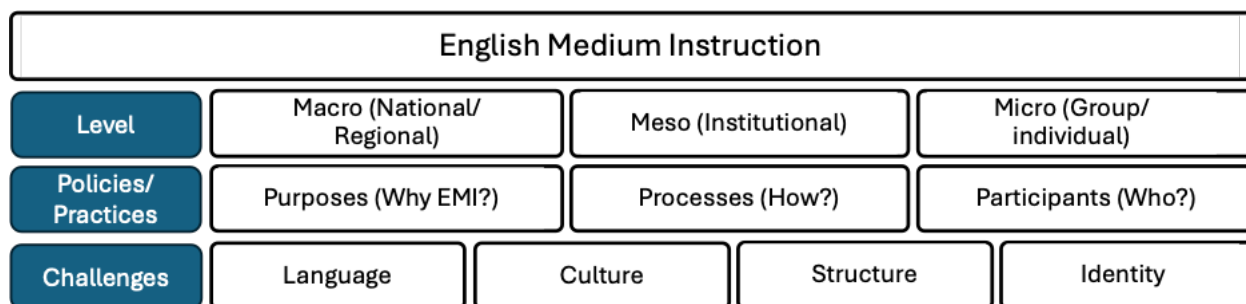
Investigating the use of a test of English at universities in South Asia involves the growing global phenomenon of EMI. The most widely cited definition of the term, more often applied to higher education (HE) than to primary or secondary schooling, describes it as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (Dearden, 2014, p. 4). In the complex linguistic and cultural landscape of international, transnational, and virtual educational provision, this definition has been criticized as overly restrictive. There is no clear theoretical justification for excluding HE institutions in countries, like the United States or Canada, where English as L1 is dominant (Baker & Hüttner 2016; Humphreys, 2017; Pecorari & Malmström, 2018), or for separating practices in HE from those at other educational levels (Shohamy, 2012).

Taking a more inclusive view of EMI as involving three elements—“(1) English-medium education of (2) academic subjects other than the English language to (3) L2 [second language] users of English” (Smit, 2023, p. 500)—recent scholarship has focused on language use as a multidimensional phenomenon.

Briefly, this study is informed by an understanding of EMI as a complex interaction between intentions and practices involving the dimensions set out in Figure 1. Each element listed in each row of the framework invokes all the elements listed in the row below: interrelated macro, meso, and

micro contexts for EMI each imply policies and practices connected to purposes, processes, and participation. Each context raises partly distinct linguistic, cultural, structural, and identity issues.

Figure 1. Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for English-Medium Instructional (EMI) Contexts



Views on the Use of the TOEFL iBT Test in English-Medium Instruction

Appropriate use of the TOEFL iBT test rests in part on the validity claim that “the content of the test is relevant to and representative of the kinds of tasks and written and oral texts that students encounter in college and university settings” (ETS, 2025, p. 6). A positive view, expressed by Walkinshaw et al. (2017), is that the TOEFL iBT is more suitable than (a) locally developed assessments, because they are often of poor quality, and (b) international tests of a more general proficiency in English because unlike them, it addresses academic language use. Others have found evidence that the TOEFL iBT test can be as predictive of academic success as alternative, locally developed language assessments in selected EMI settings (Ihlenfeldt & Rios, 2023; O’Dwyer et al., 2018).

Conversely, critics have pointed to factors that differentiate many EMI settings from North American academic settings: use of different varieties of English, differences in opportunities for multilingual language use, or differences in how academic performance is evaluated (Dimova, 2020; Galloway et al., 2020; Iliovits et al., 2022; Macaro et al., 2018). Such findings may challenge the TOEFL iBT validity claim that “tasks and scoring criteria are appropriate for obtaining evidence of test takers’ academic language abilities” (ETS, 2025, p. 5).

On linguistic/cultural grounds, Dryden and Dovchin (2022) and Iliovits et al. (2022) suggested that monolingual tests of English should be replaced by multilingual alternatives that better reflect language practices in EMI courses, whereas Deygers et al. (2018) questioned the inclusion of

writing tasks in admissions tests at a university where students are not typically assigned any writing during their first year of study.

In North America, Britain, Ireland, and Australasia, students required to take the TOEFL iBT test for admission are L2 users of English from a wide variety of language backgrounds. Other than English, they are unlikely to have languages in common with either their teachers or most of their fellow students. In South Asian EMI, students and staff are far more likely to share one or more languages other than English. In practice, these other languages are often used for instruction in combination with English to support comprehension (Giri et al., 2024).

There are differences between South Asian and North American (and other) English varieties at the lexical, syntactic, phonological, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic levels (Hickey, 2005; Kachru 2017). It is possible that such differences affect how writing is conceived and evaluated between contexts with implications for the nature of English proficiency required for academic success and the interpretation of TOEFL iBT scores. As one example of this, adjusting to local accents is often cited as a source of difficulty for South Asian students studying in inner circle Anglophone countries (see, for example, Kukatlapalli et al., 2019), but in the South Asian context, accents used to deliver lectures and seminars are likely to be familiar to the mostly local students. Given this familiarity with English delivered with South Asian accents, the North American (and British or Antipodean) accents employed in the input to the TOEFL iBT Integrated Writing task (Task 1) could thus be viewed as a potential source of construct-irrelevant difficulty for the South Asian university students in our study (Ockey & French, 2016; Ockey et al., 2016).

In connection with the claim that “the test results are used appropriately and have positive consequences” (ETS, 2025, p. 6), it might be argued that widespread use of the TOEFL iBT test would help to ensure that prerequisites for the successful EMI implementation are met, meaning that admitted students have the language skills required and that explicit teaching of academic writing is encouraged (Linn et al., 2021). On the other hand, use of the TOEFL iBT is implicated in regional debates over the social impact of EMI policies. Charges include that they damage local languages and cultures and that they serve above all to reinforce social advantage (Hamid & Amin, 2022; Sah & Li, 2018).

As part of the landscape of EMI provision reflected in our framework, our case studies focus primarily on linguistic and cultural issues from the perspectives of student and teacher participants on selected courses. The experiences of these participants are best understood in relation to the wider

meso and macro contexts in which they operate. We therefore begin by briefly profiling national and institutional language policies.

Language Policies for Higher Education

To gain a picture of policy intentions across our three countries—Bangladesh, India, and Nepal—we reviewed national policy guidance and related literature on the use of EMI in HE. As part of a globalizing trend that includes countries in Africa, Europe, and Latin America, as well as elsewhere in Asia (Dearden, 2014), language policies in HE across South Asia reflect a complex interaction between cultural identity and aspiration. As Annamalai (2003) observed, policy documents reveal a fundamental tension between *cultural roots*, the desire to preserve national identity through local languages, and *material progress*, the drive for international competitiveness through English.

This tension is manifested in political disputes and sometimes inherently contradictory (Studer, 2021) policy statements that prevaricate between globalizing and nationalistic pressures (Dearden, 2014; Hultgren, 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2017). Historically, South Asian countries have sought to displace English—the language of colonial (or, in Nepal and Telangana, royal) administration—by promoting local vernaculars as mediums of instruction. However, English has remained entrenched as a language of privilege, notably in prestigious HE courses. India and Nepal, among the world’s most linguistically diverse countries, exemplify this complexity. In both nations, less than half the population claims the official national language as their mother tongue. Bangladesh presents a slightly different scenario, with Bangla dominating, though the country has retreated from its original “one state, one language” policy for education under private sector pressures. University Grants Commissions in these countries navigate the linguistic landscape carefully. Bangladesh’s Strategic Plan for Higher Education explicitly calls for English proficiency to “[raise] the standard of our higher education to a globally competitive level,” while India’s National Education Policy 2020 encourages more use of mother tongues and bilingual programming.

Implications are at once personal and institutional. English is the preeminent language of aspiration with governments, universities, and individual students, all keen to benefit from a supposed English advantage (Bhatia, 2022; Meganathan, 2022; Padwad, 2024; Poudel, 2019; Sultana 2024; Sultana & Roshid, 2020). At the same time, EMI tends to restrict any advantage to students from well-resourced private schools, perpetuating significant social disparities. Within HE, students

with limited English proficiency may find themselves marginalized, experiencing a crisis of identity as increasing English usage distances them from their home communities (Hamid & Sultana, 2024; Hillman, 2023). Institutionally, the trend is clear. Meganathan (2015) noted that EMI accounts for 90% of HE in India. Although public universities aim to maintain national language prevalence, private institutions increasingly adopt English, particularly in STEM, business, and medicine. This shift creates pressure on public institutions and cascades down to primary education. Although it satisfies demand from parents, primary level EMI is contrary to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO; 2003) guidelines as it may compromise effective learning (Boruah & Mohanty, 2024; Giri et al., 2024; Sah, 2023; Seel et al., 2022). All three countries reflect complex and unstable relationships between ideologies of identity and opportunity.

The Universities in This Study

To capture the diversity of HE provision, data were collected from one public and one private or autonomous university from each country included in the study. Business and engineering courses were chosen because across the three countries EMI is commonly practiced in these popular and prestigious academic disciplines (Dafouz & Smit, 2020; Hasan & Akhand, 2010) and they reflect contrasting writing demands. Because a test used in admissions should most closely reflect the writing expected of students when they begin their academic careers, we chose to focus on first-year undergraduate courses. The first year is also the stage when students are most likely to take English classes.

We use the following conventions to identify the six universities in our study.

- Country: BAN (Bangladesh), IND (India), or NEP (Nepal)
- University type: PUB (public) or PRV (private/autonomous)
- Course type: BS (business) or EN (engineering)

Thus, BAN-PUB-EN refers to engineering courses at the public university in Bangladesh.

At the outset, documents from the six participating universities concerning academic writing, such as entry requirements and English language support, were collected and analyzed to obtain information about the courses in our case studies.

Our three public universities are affiliate universities that award degrees to students registered at many affiliated colleges and those on their main campuses. All are long-established institutions and among the highest ranking in their respective territories. The three private/autonomous universities

are smaller and newer, charging higher fees and enjoying greater autonomy from their respective governments. All are also prestigious and perform well on national comparisons. We selected high ranking institutions on the assumption that levels of English proficiency would be highest in these contexts.

For admission to the courses in our case studies across the public and private sectors, students who met minimum requirements on public examinations were invited to take an entrance test and might also be interviewed. Undergraduate entry to all six universities requires some knowledge of English, although this may only be present as a component in public examinations. None of the six currently makes any use of TOEFL iBT.

At IND-PUB university, the entrance tests for undergraduate courses in engineering (Telangana Engineering, Agriculture & Pharmacy Common Entrance Test: TEAPCET) and business (the national Common University Entrance Test: CUET) are administered in multiple languages and do not include any compulsory English component. The entrance tests at NEP-PUB are more typical across our case studies: qualifying students must pass the Common Management Admission Test (CMAT) for business courses or an in-house test for engineering. These tests are both entirely objectively scored and include 25 of 100 items on verbal ability: English grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. All four of our universities in Bangladesh and India also set entrance tests with objectively scored English language components; however, at BAN-PRV, the test also includes a short essay on a given topic (scored out of 10). Students who perform poorly on the English section may be required to take additional language classes. The entrance tests for NEP-PRV also follow an exclusively multiple-choice format and are administered in English. As at other universities, the business test includes a verbal section: 24 items mixing English grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Successful candidates must also complete an analytic writing task and attend an interview. The test for engineering students has three sections all focused on science topics and does not include an English language component. Of the three public universities, IND-PUB is the only one that has an explicit EMI policy covering all courses. NEP-PUB has an EMI policy for postgraduate study, but here, as at BAN-PUB, the medium of instruction for undergraduates varies by program.

All three private/autonomous universities are explicitly EMI institutions with all courses ostensibly taught in English. At BAN-PRV university, use of English is encouraged and to some extent enforced on campus, although (as is true across all our sites) multilingualism and code

switching are common. At BAN-PUB, Bangla is the dominant language used for service encounters and everyday interaction. In Hyderabad, the most common languages on the IND-PUB campus are Telugu, the official state language of Telangana; Dakhini (Hyderabadi Urdu); and English. At IND-PRV, English is more prevalent, although Hindi, the national language, is also widely spoken. Nepali fills this role at both NEP-PUB and NEP-PRV.

All universities in our study require students to attend English language classes in addition to their EMI subject classes. These are mainly generic language improvement classes for all students, without regard to discipline (like the ENG 101 Basic English and ENG 102 Composition and Communication Skills courses at BAN-PUB university or the Communication and Information course at NEP-PUB), but IND-PRV offered courses for specific disciplines such as Technical Report Writing for engineers.

Research Questions

Our study addresses two research questions.

Research Question 1: To what extent does the academic writing construct as measured by the TOEFL iBT Writing section align with university writing tasks and writing practices on business and engineering courses?

Research Question 2: Based on (a) test performance and (b) student and staff perspectives, would it be appropriate to use the TOEFL iBT Writing section as an element in admissions procedures for EMI undergraduate business and engineering courses?

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach and an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The choice of design helped to address the research questions adequately and explained the quantitative findings from the first session of data collection with qualitative information, which was gathered in a second session. In the first session (Session 1) of student data collection, test (TOEFL iBT administered to research participants) and questionnaire survey data were collected from students at the participating institutions. Although predominantly quantitative, the questionnaires also included a few open-ended questions. In the second session (Session 2), qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions (FGD) with five students from each course. Teacher interviews involving English teachers and academic subject teachers were also carried out to gain insights into beliefs and practices related to academic writing on EMI courses and

perceptions of a potential role for the TOEFL iBT in admissions, specifically focusing on the writing section.

Participants in Session 1 were 180 first-year undergraduate students across business and engineering courses at six universities in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal (see Table 1). Fifteen students were included from each course except at IND-PRV where, for practical reasons, we recruited 19 business students and 11 engineering students. Although we sought a balance between male and female students, the majority of students in engineering courses are male, and this is reflected in our sample: 57% of the participants in business courses and 73% of those on engineering courses were male. Although the share of the adult population completing tertiary education in the three countries is very low (India having the highest of the three at just under 13% of the adult population; Statistica, 2026), 76% of these students reported that at least one of their parents had a university degree (70% in Bangladesh, 93% in India, 65% in Nepal). Just three of the 180 students (all from India) reported that they had taken a TOEFL test before.

Table 1. Student Participants in Session 1 by Country, University Status, Course Type, and Gender

Country	University status	Course	Male	Female
Bangladesh	Public	Business	7	8
		Engineering	11	4
	Private	Business	7	8
		Engineering	6	9
India	Public	Business	12	3
		Engineering	10	5
	Private	Business	13	6
		Engineering	9	2
Nepal	Public	Business	6	9
		Engineering	14	1
	Private	Business	9	6
		Engineering	13	2
Total			117	63

The 24 teachers participating in interviews (T1 to T8 for each country; Table 2) included teachers of subject courses (in engineering and business) and teachers of English. In India, the engineering and business teachers were generally able to provide useful information about the writing tasks assigned to students. In piloting the interviews in Bangladesh and Nepal, few subject teachers were able to provide useful data on whether the TOEFL tasks reflected the kinds of writing they assigned. Here, we relied more on English teachers as informants. These English teachers teach

within either the business or engineering faculties and were able to provide some insights into the writing assigned in subject classes. All participants gave their informed consent before participating in either session.

Table 2. Teacher Interview Participants by Institution, Course Type, and Gender

Institution	Course type	Male	Female
BAN PUB	Business		
	Engineering	T5	
	English	T6 (BS); T8 (EN)	T7 (EN)
BAN PRV	Business		
	Engineering		
	English	T1 (BS); T4 (EN)	T2 (BS); T3 (EN)
IND PUB	Business	T6	T5
	Engineering	T8	T7
	English		
IND PRV	Business	T2	T1
	Engineering	T4	T3
	English		
NEP PUB	Business	T6	T5
	Engineering	T7	
	English		T8 (EN)
NEP PRV	Business		
	Engineering		
	English	T2 (EN); T3 (BS); T4 (BS)	T1 (EN)
Total interviews		14	10

Note. BS = business; EN = engineering; T = teacher interview participant (numbered 1 through 8).

Data Collection Methods

In Session 1, a TOEFL iBT Writing section was administered to all participating students. The Writing section takes 29 minutes to complete and includes two tasks. For Question 1: Integrated Writing, students are required to read a short passage and listen to a short lecture, then write in response to what they read and listened to. For Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion, students needed to state and support an opinion in an online classroom discussion. In this case, Question 1 involved summarizing and contrasting perspectives on the use of taxes to discourage

unhealthy lifestyle choices. Question 2 called for a discussion of alternative measures to promote conservation.

Completed responses were sent to ETS for scoring. The operational TOEFL iBT Writing section is scored by a combination of AI and certified human raters, and results are reported as a single section score on a scale from 0 to 30. For the purposes of this study, AI was not used, but all responses were scored by certified human raters based on the TOEFL iBT Writing Scoring Guides (rubrics; <https://www.ets.org/pdfs/toefl/toefl-ibt-writing-rubrics.pdf>). This process generated separate scores for Question 1 and Question 2 that could each range from 0 to a maximum of 5. These scores allowed us to compare performance across tasks and to interpret results in relation to the level descriptions on the TOEFL iBT Writing Scoring Guides.

Based on a review of relevant literature and our analysis of the macro and meso contexts, two questionnaires were also prepared. The Writing Practices Questionnaire (Appendix A), administered before students sat for the TOEFL iBT test, included 44 selected-response questions classified under five sections: Background Information, Writing in your English Classes, Writing in English in Your Subject Classes, Use of Technology in Writing, and Other Institutional Support.

Adapting the task classification used in the TOEFL 2000 project (Hale et al., 1996), task types listed in the questionnaire included short texts that report information read or listened to (e.g., essays, library research papers, reports on experiments or observations, and summaries) and grammar/vocabulary exercises. Following piloting, we added a number of task types that did not feature in Hale et al. (1996) but were suggested by participants. These included grammar/vocabulary exercises (encountered in English classes), Q&A (a few words or one or two sentences to answer questions about things participants have read or listened to) and paragraphs (short texts written to answer simple questions). Q&A and paragraphs both resemble the short tasks that Hale et al. (1996) treated within categories of task type or genre (typically essays).

The TOEFL Suitability Questionnaire (TSQ; Appendix B) included 13 questions. These were grouped under four sections: Demographic Information, Your Experience of Taking the TOEFL Writing Test, Your Opinion About the TOEFL Writing Test, and The TOEFL Test and Writing at the University.

The questionnaires and tests were piloted in each country with a group of 10 students similar to those involved in the main study. The surveys were delivered via JISC Online Surveys (Version 3). A paper-and-pencil version of the TOEFL iBT Writing test was used for this pilot study as no

electronic version of the new writing section format (launched in 2023) was yet available. A set of 16 prompts was developed for use in student FGD. The purpose of the FGD was to trace student views on writing courses, writing in subject courses, and the TOEFL iBT. Procedures for the FGD (Appendix C) were trialed with pilot groups of student participants.

To gather teachers' views, we employed a semistructured interview schedule containing 17 guiding questions under three sections (Appendix D). These covered university writing practices, similarities and differences between TOEFL iBT writing tasks and rubrics and those used in university settings, and the suitability of TOEFL iBT as a university entry-level test with the focus on the writing section. Interview procedures were piloted with two teachers in each country.

Data Collection Session 1: TOEFL iBT and Questionnaire Administration

In the first session of the student data collection procedure, students took the TOEFL iBT Writing test and completed the two questionnaires. The students responded to the Writing Practices Questionnaire (WPQ) via the JISC platform, then took the TOEFL iBT Writing test online under routine test conditions. The test was conducted in secure university computer laboratories with adequate internet connectivity following guidelines provided by ETS. In the event of any electrical outages (a common issue in the region), the students were able to resume the test where they had left off. Immediately following completion of the test, the students responded to the TSQ on the JISC platform.

Data Collection Session 2: Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Students participating in Session 1 were assigned to a focus group: three focus groups for each course, each with five members. Within a week after the TOEFL administration, FGD were conducted in person by the local research team. Students were encouraged to speak according to their preference either in the national/regional language or in English or in both. The FGD sessions lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour.

The eight teachers from each of the selected universities in each country (see Table 2) were interviewed individually in person by a member of the research team. The interviews lasted between 35 and 55 minutes.

Teachers did not have the direct experience of taking the test, so we gave teachers sample test material (test tasks and rubrics) to review before they were interviewed. They were shown paper copies of the two questions from the TOEFL iBT Writing section and the scoring guides (scoring

rubrics) for TOEFL iBT Writing responses. Consistency of questioning was maintained, and data collection protocols were followed across data collection sites to ensure comparability of findings. The same research instruments were used in all three countries, apart from a few minor changes of wording to account for the contexts (e.g., name of country or university). The FGD and interview sessions were all recorded in preparation for transcription.

Data Analysis

For Session 1, quantitative analyses employed JASP (JASP Team, 2024). Our analysis of TOEFL iBT scores involved comparisons of the overall scores and scores on each of the two questions by country, university status, and course type. We employed ANOVA to determine the statistical significance of these differences with follow-up *t*-tests used for paired comparisons of student scores, enabling us to assess the difficulty of the TOEFL iBT Writing section tasks for the studied student populations.

We conducted a quantitative analysis of students' questionnaire responses, examining academic writing task type prevalence across universities and courses as well as perceptions of TOEFL iBT task alignment with academic writing requirements. Our analysis also explored students' views on the test's appropriateness as an entry-level assessment for engineering and business programs. Complementary qualitative data from open-ended questions provided additional insights into these quantitative findings.

For Session 2, interview and FGD data were transcribed and, wherever required, translated. A sample of three transcripts where translations had been used was translated from English back to the original language. No differences were found that would affect interpretation of the data.

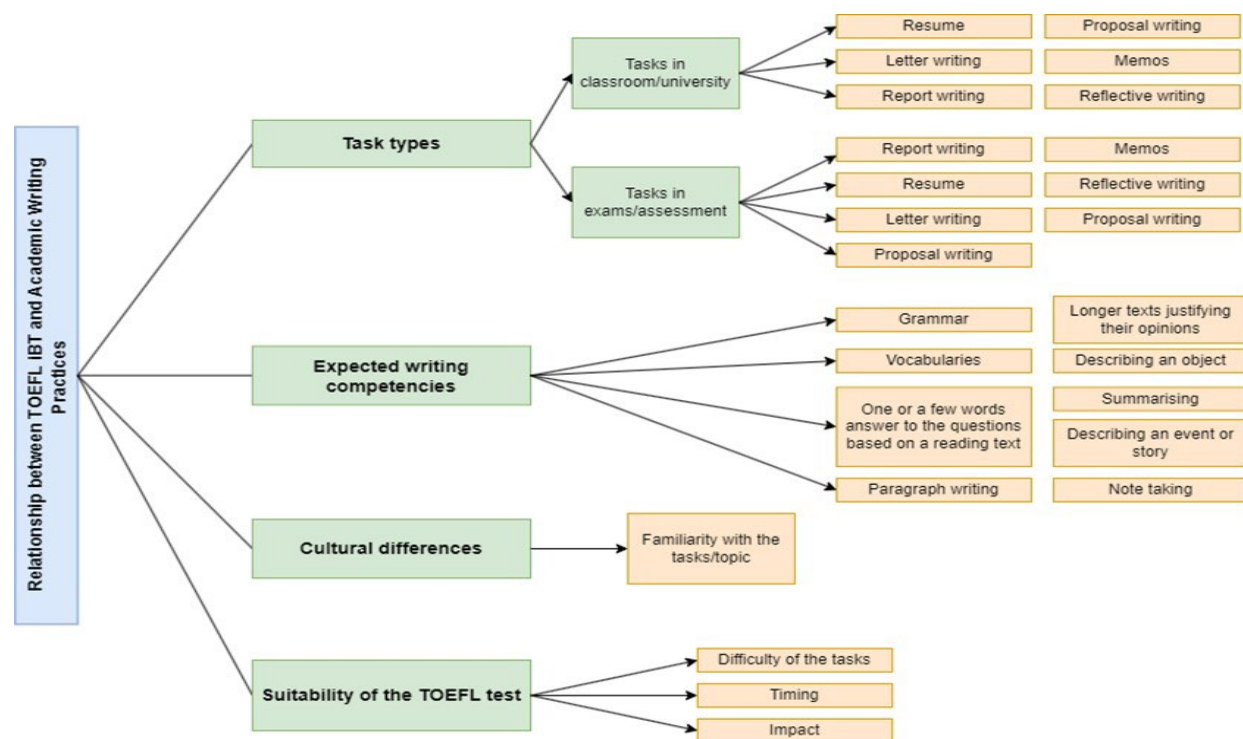
Transcripts were read carefully, cleaned, and prepared for analysis. Employing a thematic analysis approach, all transcripts were coded using Taguette (Rampin & Rampin, 2021), a free open-source text tagging tool.

An initial coding scheme was developed based on the literature review, but thematic analysis is an iterative process (Braun & Clarke, 2021), and Taguette was used to record and organize additional themes as they emerged during analysis.

Both top-down and bottom-up approaches were utilized. First, a bottom-up approach was used to code approximately 10% of the data. Four project members coded the data individually. Next, these codes were reviewed by the team and grouped into four major themes: task types, expected

writing competencies, cultural differences, and suitability of the TOEFL iBT Writing section (Figure 2). In the next phase of analysis, the codes were applied to the rest of the interview and FGD transcripts. Further codes that emerged at this point included rubrics, plagiarism, challenges in taking the TOEFL test, and newspaper writing.

Figure 2. The Interview/Focus Group Discussion Coding Scheme



Note. The green boxes show the first phase of analysis. The orange boxes show the second phase of analysis.

To reduce the subjectivity of coding and to gauge the reliability of the findings, three transcripts were independently coded by project team members with a satisfactory level of coder reliability: a mean percentage agreement of 87.5%. Disagreements were subsequently resolved through discussion. The Session 2 findings (student FGD and teacher interviews) were used to help us interpret, elaborate on, or contextualize the Session 1 (questionnaire and test performance) findings.

Results

Alignment Between the TOEFL iBT Writing Section and Local Writing Practices

We first present our findings in relation to Research Question 1 (To what extent does the academic writing construct as measured by the TOEFL iBT Writing section align with university writing tasks and writing practices on business and engineering courses and on English language support courses?) drawing on data from questionnaires, FGD, and interviews.

Session 1 Questionnaire Data

Our survey findings indicated that undergraduate students from business and engineering studies from all three countries are expected to carry out a variety of writing tasks in English both for their subject and for dedicated English language classes. Most reported writing in English for subject classes (162 of 178 responses) and for English classes (155 of 166 responses). For both their subject and English classes, most students reported writing for in-class assignments (subject 127, English 122), homework or project assignments (subject 139, English 128), and written examinations (subject 112, English 104).

Writing appears to be a significant time commitment for students in these courses. Most respondents reported writing at least twice a week for both their subject and English classes (see Appendix A for the WPQ). When asked how much time they committed to writing for subject classes (WPQ27), 47 of the 159 who responded reported spending less than 1 hour writing in class; 79, 1 to 3 hours; and 33, 4 hours or more. Outside class (WPQ28), of 163 responses, 49 reported less than 1 hour; 62, 1 to 3 hours; and 39, 1 to 7 hours. Of 13 students who claimed to spend longer, 11 reported spending 12 hours or more. For English classes (WPQ9), 155 responded. Most reported spending less than 1 hour in class (65) or 1 to 3 hours (85) writing with five students reporting more. Additionally (WPQ10), most of these students reported either less than 1 hour (67) or 1 to 3 hours (74) writing for English classes outside of class; 14 reported spending longer.

Adapting the task classification used in the TOEFL 2000 project (Hale et al., 1996), which was a key source for the TOEFL iBT test design (Chapelle et al., 2008), the types of tasks that students reported for their content classes (WPQ29) are shown in Table 3. For their English language classes (WPQ11), responses are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Student Writing Practices Questionnaire 11: What kind of English writing do you do in your English classes?

University	Course	Grammar/voice exercises	Q&A	Paragraphs	Essays	Library resource papers	Reports on experiments or observations	Summaries	Case studies	Plans/proposals	Computer programs	Book reports	Stories	Letters	Résumés	Notes
BAN PUB	Business	5	7	8	6	1	4	6	6	2	0	1	2	6	10	5
	Engineering	9	11	11	8	3	5	10	1	3	4	4	4	8	7	6
BAN PRV	Business	13	10	14		5	8	13	4	2	2	12	10	9	8	9
	Engineering	12	12	15	14	8	6	10	7	7	5	5	4	4	6	6
IND PUB	Business	12	11	11	12	8	13	10	9	4	9	5	5	7	12	6
	Engineering	9	6	10	9	3	7	10	5	3	4	3	2	3	6	8
IND PRV	Business	7	9	16	13	4	9	14	6	3	3	2	5	5	4	8
	Engineering	7	7	9	6	2	8	6	4	2	2	2	1	4	1	6
NEP PRV	Business	5	8	12	14	5	5	11	6	2	2	10	7	3	2	6
	Engineering	2		4	5	2	4	5	2	8	2	2	3	7	9	4
NEP PUB	Business	12	5	11	11	2	2	10	8	4	0	3	8	5	2	5
	Engineering	3	2	3	2	2	4	2	3	3	0	1	1	3	2	2
Business total (<i>n</i> = 90)		57%	53%	77%	60%	27%	44%	68%	41%	18%	17%	35%	39%	37%	40%	41%
Engineering total (<i>n</i> = 90)		49%	44%	60%	51%	23%	40%	50%	26%	30%	20%	20%	17%	34%	36%	37%
Overall total (<i>N</i> = 180)		53%	49%	69%	56%	25%	42%	59%	34%	24%	18%	28%	29%	36%	38%	39%

Note. BAN PUB = Bangladesh public university; BAN PRV = Bangladesh private university; IND PUB = India public university; IND PRV = India private university; NEP PRV = Nepal private university; NEP PUB = Nepal public university.

Table 4. Student Writing Practices Questionnaire 29: What kind of English writing do you do in your subject classes?

University	Course	Grammar/voice exercises	Q&A	Paragraphs	Essays	Library resource papers	Reports on experiments or observations	Summaries	Case Studies	Plans/proposals	Computer programs	Book reports	Stories	Letters	Resumes	Notes
BAN PUB	Business	2	9	9	9	0	9	6	9	4	0	1	4	5	7	8
	Engineering	7	4	4	7	12	8	4	8	10	1	1	3	2	7	
BAN PRV	Business	12	11	12	12	6	9	11	10	3	3	10	9	7	7	9
	Engineering	7	11	9	6	5	10	6	5	4	11	4	2	3	6	7
IND PUB	Business	8	9	11	7	9	11	8	12	3	5	2	2	3	10	5
	Engineering	7	9	12	7	3	6	7	3	0	3	2	1	4	5	7
IND PRV	Business	5	9	13	8	9	15	13	12	5	7	3	4	4	7	8
	Engineering	3	6	7	5	6	5	6	5	4	4	2	2	4	3	6
NEP PRV	Business	7	7	11	12	4	8	12	4	3	2	10	9	2	2	4
	Engineering	2	3	6	6	4	11	6	1	7	6	2	2	7	9	7
NEP PUB	Business	13	8	12	7	1	2	11	8	2	1	4	8	6	1	5
	Engineering	4	6	6	3	2	6	3	1	4	2	0	1	3	2	7
Business total (n = 90)		50%	56%	72%	59%	31%	57%	65%	59%	21%	19%	32%	38%	29%	36%	41%
Engineering total (n = 90)		27%	49%	51%	36%	31%	58%	42%	22%	31%	42%	13%	10%	28%	31%	48%
Overall total (N = 180)		39%	53%	62%	48%	31%	58%	54%	41%	26%	30%	23%	25%	28%	34%	44%

Note. BAN PUB = Bangladesh public university; BAN PRV = Bangladesh private university; IND PUB = India public university; IND PRV = India private university; NEP PRV = Nepal private university; NEP PUB = Nepal public university.

Like Hale et al. (1996), we found that essays, reports, and summaries were among the most common task types assigned across subject classes (Table 4). The five most frequently reported task types in business courses were, starting from the most frequent, paragraphs, summaries, case studies, essays and reports on experiments or observations. In engineering courses, the most frequently reported task types were reports on experiments or observations, paragraphs, Q&A, notes, computer programs, and summaries. English classes appeared rather different, featuring paragraphs, summaries, essays, grammar/vocabulary exercises, and Q&A (Table 3).

Paragraphs and Q&A tasks reported by students paralleled the short tasks recorded by Hale et al. (1996): one sentence up to a half page. However, there was less obvious connection between the TOEFL iBT Writing tasks and the letters, résumés, and stories tasks quite frequently reported on some English courses (Table 3). Letters and resumes tasks reflected the importance to students in the context of projecting an English identity to access employment opportunities. Stories tasks, mostly reported by business students in Bangladesh and Nepal, seemed less relevant to academic or professional needs. Open-ended questionnaire responses pointed to additional task types assigned in English classes, particularly writing dialogues, another task with little obvious relevance for academic study.

In sum, although we cannot be certain that task labels carry identical meanings in different contexts, the task types assigned by content teachers in South Asia, as reported by students, appeared generally similar to those observed by Hale et al. (1996) in North America. University content course requirements and examination tasks that involve writing implied skills in composing cohesive, coherent, logical, and well-structured texts. English courses designed to support EMI did not appear to be consistently aligned with the writing done on subject courses.

Of the 180 students, 147 (82%) either agreed (104, 58%) or strongly agreed (43, 24%) with the statement that “the TOEFL test writing tasks reflect writing skills needed for a university course like mine where English is the medium of instruction” (TSQ11.4; see Appendix B for the TSQ). Just five (3%) disagreed; 28 (16%) were neutral. We asked the same question separately about each of the two TOEFL iBT Writing tasks: Question 1: Integrated Writing Task (TSQ10.3) and Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion Task (TSQ10.4). Of the 180 students, 152 (84%) agreed that the Integrated Writing Task reflected needed writing skills; 28

(16%) were neutral. Of the 180 students, 137 (76%) agreed that the Writing for an Academic Discussion Task reflected needed writing skills; 35 (19%) were neutral, and 8 (4%) disagreed.

To mitigate the risk of confirmation bias, we also asked students to respond to the statement, “The TOEFL writing tests involve English writing skills that students at my university would NOT use” (TSQ10.7). In this case, 65 (36%) agreed (14, 8% strongly agreed) compared to 72 (40%) disagreed. In an open-ended response, one student pointed to the relative importance placed on content over linguistic accuracy on engineering courses: “For Engineering courses the grammar, syntax or spelling probably doesn’t matter much to the evaluator. Most of the time, as long as a student can get an idea across, it would probably not cause any issues for them” (IND-PRV-EN). Another noted the limited time available for TOEFL iBT as a differentiating factor.

Responses to “What do you think are the main differences between the writing tasks on this TOEFL test and the kinds of writing tasks you do in English on your university degree course?” (TSQ12) also included mention of time restrictions but suggested additional differences. Some students noted that their university writing was based on their academic subject, following a “structured style of writing which we need to stick to” (IND-PRV-BS) whereas the TOEFL iBT involved more personal expression. Others mentioned the role of listening input, including how Question 1: Integrated Writing seemed limited to “just explaining the lecture” (NEP-PUB-EN), which did not seem to reflect the expectations of university staff.

In open-ended responses, a few students suggested that the tests were of better quality and would be more helpful for improving writing skills than the tasks assigned on their university courses. For example, responding to TSQ12, one student observed that “the TOEFL writing tests are more standardized and have more varied topics to discuss. The instructions provided are clear and there is an incentive to write in a mature tone with varied vocabulary. In contrast, my university degree courses are designed with less precision and overall quality in mind. They are more of a checklist item rather than an attempt to help students improve their English proficiency” (BAN-PUB-BS).

Several students mentioned the use of keyboards for writing as a difference. For example, “At university degree course we write on paper with pen and on this TOEFL we write answer by typing on keyboard” (NEP-PUB-BS). This was also reflected in responses to the question, “How do you write for your English/subject classes?” (WPQ12/30) where students were able to select multiple options. For English (WPQ12) and subject classes (WPQ30) respectively, 141 (78%)

and 149 (83%) reported that they wrote using pen and paper compared with 69 (38%) and 78 (43%) using a computer and 22 (12%) and 29 (16%) using a tablet or other digital device.

Session 2 Focus Groups

Qualitative findings from FGD and teacher interviews provided further evidence for the frequency of writing and for the range of task types. As reported by students in FGD, writing activities on English courses seemed to range from grammar and vocabulary exercises to lengthier writing tasks. Some responses reflected an academic orientation: “Report writing analysis is a very big part of our curriculum right now” (IND-PUB-EN); “In our TOEFL test there was a video also a passage. So, in our [English courses] we learned about how to summarize a passage also from the video. So that also very relatable in TOEFL exam” (BAN-PRV-EN); “For most of the time we generally do summarizing articles and summarizing the findings” (IND-PUB-EN). Others mixed the academic with more professional, employment-oriented task types: “Several types of writing tasks are assigned to students such as writing email, vocabulary, grammar, paragraph, passages etc. In [another English] course, we had writing essays, report writing, formal letters, informal letters, business letters, newsletters, paraphrasing, summary and some instructor taught us CV writing” (BAN-PRV-EN). Less obviously academic forms of writing were also mentioned in the FGD data: “Compare contrast summer vacation in Dhaka city and in village” (BAN-PRV-BS); “Free writing; essay, story, case study, passage summary, movie review, etc.” (NEP-PRV-EN). Students at both universities in Bangladesh, but not those in India or Nepal, mentioned writing dialogues. Students noted both similarities and differences between their university writing practices and the TOEFL iBT Writing section. Many recognized how TOEFL represented the kinds of writing they needed to do for their subject courses: “Yeah, the summarizing part was quite relatable. We always do that in our courses. To summarize these research papers, then, if we need to present also we need to make a report. In all of these tasks we use that summarizing part. And also we do that in our lectures. Deliver something then we write the notes. So, it’s similar to what we could see on the [TOEFL] exam” (IND-PRV-BUS); “In TOEFL writing exam we need to summarize a passage and so we had in our finals. That’s the similarity. The difference is the listening part. Just that one part is different from our course. And other topics are similar to our course” (BAN-PRV-BUS).

When noting differences, a number pointed to the relative importance of demonstrating content knowledge in writing for subject classes and more limited attention to accurate language

use: “I think [TOEFL] is not suitable in the sense that it’s relies simply on whether or not you can find listen to what they’re trying to say or read what they’re trying to say successfully, but it doesn’t really matter what you do with that content. But then in our [university] exams [we] usually have to take that information and use a certain method to find a solution or an answer.” (IND-PRV-BS); “On or our regular courses... they are more oriented towards answering the question in spite of vocabulary” (IND-PRV-BS). Engineering students noted that much of their work involved numbers and computer code rather than extensive writing. For example, one Bangladeshi student commented that the courses he had taken were “mainly based on code and programming learning. So there is not much to explain. We just had to explain code. So, I couldn’t find much similarities” (BAN-PRV-EN).

Some considered that their university textbooks were more challenging to read than the input texts on the test: “I think the English that was used in the TOEFL test in the reading comprehension [i.e., the input text for Question 1: Integrated Writing] was comparatively simpler as compared to... our textbooks” (IND-PRV-BS). Others felt that their university writing tasks were more challenging and that the TOEFL questions might be too straightforward: “University tasks are advanced tasks requiring more rigor... I think we need more advanced tasks than the current TOEFL tasks. More rigorous tasks will be better” (NEP-PRV-BS).

Some students contrasted the accessibility of assistive technology when writing assignments with the lack of such tools when responding to the TOEFL iBT Writing section: “While writing report stage, [students] generally use [the online writing assistant] Grammarly to correct sentences and things like that” (IND-PRV-EN). As in the questionnaire responses, some students referred to the predominance of paper and pencil over computer use in university writing: “Our course related assignments are professional related. They are different because the procedures are different. They are paper-pencil tests” (NEP-PRV-EN).

A common theme was the relatively constrained nature of much university writing. Students found it refreshing that the TOEFL tasks allowed them to express an opinion, contrasting their university assignments and exams that seemed to require unoriginal or even memorized responses. A business student from Bangladesh expressed strong views about what they considered a passive and superficial educational experience, contrasting this with their impression of university study in other countries: “May I address the elephant in the room? The problem is in the whole education system, the way they expect from us we have to write down

definitions, we have to write down from memorization, so because of this we don't get a chance to actually think and get into those topics, like universities abroad. We are just reading the books, memorizing, 'what is consumer behavior?', 'what is marketing?' and we are just writing that in the paper. So, first of all the problem is in the education system. Secondly, we are not getting the chance to go deep into the topic and we are not actually developing our skills. So, our needs are also not [met]" (BAN-PUB-BUS). In this context, the TOEFL iBT Writing section seemed to reflect the more critical approach to topics identified with international universities.

Session 2 Teacher Interviews

Teachers of English writing skills in business courses and engineering courses mentioned a similar range of writing tasks to the students, noting that their courses and the TOEFL iBT Writing section shared a focus on critical analysis, requiring students to synthesize different perspectives: "They have to read and they have to give their own analysis, they have to give their interpretations. What I noticed here is that they have to actually make a synopsis of two, three different types of opinions" (BAN-PRV-T1: English Teacher [BS]). English teachers also, like the TOEFL scoring rubrics, valued a balance of accuracy, task relevance, and rhetorical organization: "We go by parameters—clarity, grammatical, and lexical accuracy, contextually relevant ideas, topic sentences, conciseness, development, organization..." (NEP-PRV-T2: English Teacher [EN]).

English teachers noted extensive similarities between TOEFL and their in-house English courses involving, for example, "synthesizing information from multiple sources to craft coherent responses, akin to research papers or analytical essays... argumentative essays for class discussion responses, focusing on expressing opinions, supporting arguments with evidence, and engaging in critical analysis and scholarly discourse" (BAN-PRV-EN-T3: English Teacher [EN]). Others noted differences such as the use of "creative writing exercises and technical writing tasks, which prioritize literary creativity and specialized information conveyance respectively, diverging from the TOEFL's focus on academic writing and language proficiency" (BAN-PRV-EN-T2: English Teacher [BS]). Providing some context for the use of nonacademic task types such as dialogues and stories, teachers described a general trajectory from more basic communication courses at entry toward more academically and professionally oriented support in later stages of a student's career.

Students were not necessarily expected to arrive as undergraduates with an ability to write in English for academic purposes, and basic courses were designed to help bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary writing. On a basic course where “students were first year, first semester students... the course was designed to meet their future communicative needs. It mainly covers the four language skills and it focuses little on their academic or future professional needs” (BAN-PUB-T5: English Teacher [BS]).

Differences from the TOEFL iBT tasks noted by subject teachers included the disciplinary focus of writing for academic subject classes. One teacher of a business subject observed, “TOEFL iBT writing is specialized in English writing but our writing is content based on subjects, so we rely on subject matter mostly” (BAN-PUB-T7: Business Teacher). As a result, linguistic accuracy was a relatively minor concern for some: “If their writing is intelligible, that is good enough for us. The length is fixed. But the focus is on core concepts and main points” (NEP-PRV-T1: English Teacher [EN]). However, other subject teachers did consider language as a factor in their grading where “one [student] has written very poor English [and] one has written at least a moderate English. Definitely the person who is writing a moderate English gets better marks” (IND-PRV-T4: Engineering Teacher). Referencing, avoidance of plagiarism, appropriate use of technical vocabulary, and adherence to the genre conventions of documents such as technical reports were also mentioned by subject teachers as factors that differentiated their grading practices from the TOEFL iBT scoring rubrics: “If they are writing a term paper, the writing must have properly cited references. If they are not citing them properly, then actually that immediately goes into bad writing because they are plagiarizing” (IND-PRV-T2: Business Teacher).

Test Performance and Perceptions of the Suitability of the TOEFL iBT Writing Section for Admissions

Here we present the results relating to Research Question 2: Based on (a) test performance and (b) student and staff perspectives, would it be appropriate to use the TOEFL iBT (Writing section) as an element in admissions procedures for EMI undergraduate business and engineering courses in these contexts?

Session 1 Test Performance

TOEFL iBT Writing tasks are scored based on the Writing Scoring Guides (www.ets.org/pdfs/toefl/toefl-ibt-writing-rubrics.pdf) by a combination of AI scoring and certified human raters. Raw scores are converted to a scaled section score of 0–30. In the most recent published data (ETS, 2024a), mean scores on the TOEFL iBT Writing section for test takers in our three countries are Bangladesh, 22; India, 23; and Nepal, 22. For the purposes of this study, results are based on certified human rater scores alone and are expressed on the 6-point scales (0–5) published in the Writing Scoring Guides. Table 5 displays the TOEFL iBT results on Question 1: Integrated Writing and Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion for business students by country and university status. Table 6 displays the TOEFL iBT results on Question 1: Integrated Writing and Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion for engineering students by country and university status.

Table 5. TOEFL iBT Raw Scores for Business Students on Question 1: Integrated Writing and Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion

Country	Status	Question 1: Integrated Writing				Question 2: Academic Discussion			
		Min	Max	Mean	StDev	Min	Max	Mean	StDev
Bangladesh	Private	1	2	1.07	0.26	1	4	2.60	1.12
	Public	1	3	1.47	0.74	2	4	3.33	0.62
India	Private	2	5	3.79	1.08	3	5	4.47	0.61
	Public	3	5	3.67	0.82	3	5	4.33	0.72
Nepal	Private	1	4	2.47	0.92	2	5	3.53	0.83
	Public	1	4	2.40	1.12	2	4	3.07	0.46
Total		1	5	2.48	1.34	1	5	3.60	1.00

Note. Scores on the TOEFL iBT Writing scales range from 0 to 5.

Table 6. TOEFL iBT Raw Scores for Engineering Students on Question 1: Integrated Writing and Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion

Country	Status	Question 1: Integrated Writing				Question 2: Academic Discussion			
		Min	Max	Mean	StDev	Min	Max	Mean	StDev
Bangladesh	Private	1	4	2.67	0.90	1	4	2.93	1.03
	Public	1	5	3.00	1.00	2	5	4.07	1.10
India	Private	1	5	3.55	1.44	3	5	4.45	0.69
	Public	2	5	3.80	0.94	3	5	4.47	0.64
Nepal	Private	1	4	2.73	0.96	2	5	3.27	0.70
	Public	1	4	2.00	1.00	0	3	2.53	0.92
Total		1	5	2.93	1.17	1	5	3.58	1.13

Note. Scores on the TOEFL iBT Writing scales range from 0 to 5.

To investigate differences in performance, a three-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of Country (Bangladesh, India, Nepal), University Status (public, private), and Course Type (business, engineering) on scores from each question (Table 7). For Question 1: Integrated Writing, the analysis revealed significant main effects for both Country $F(2, 168) = 48.353, p < .001$, and Course Type $F(1, 168) = 11.249, p < .001$. Post-hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD indicated that students from India scored significantly higher than both Bangladeshi (M difference = 1.67, $p < .001$) and Nepalese students (M difference = 1.32, $p < .001$), with no significant difference between Bangladesh and Nepal ($p = .115$).

Table 7. ANOVA Results for Question 1: Integrated Writing Scores

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2p
Country	2	48.353	< .001	.365
University Status	1	0.006	.940	.000
Course Type	1	11.249	< .001	.063
Country $\times$ Status	2	2.443	.090	.028
Country $\times$ Course Type	2	14.374	< .001	.146
Status $\times$ Course Type	1	0.171	.680	.001
Country $\times$ Status $\times$ Course	2	1.105	.334	.013
Error	168			

Note. $N = 180$. η^2p = partial eta squared.

There was no significant main effect for University Status, $F(1, 168) = 0.006, p = .940$ (Table 7). A significant interaction effect was found between Country and Course Type, $F(2, 168) = 14.374, p < .001$, but not between Country and University Status, $F(2, 168) = 2.443, p = .090$. Neither the interaction between University Status and Course Type, $F(1, 168) = 0.171, p = .680$, nor the three-way interaction between all factors, $F(2, 168) = 1.105, p = .334$, were significant. The model explained a substantial portion of the variance in writing scores ($R^2 = .470$, adjusted $R^2 = .435$).

A second three-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects on Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion (Table 8). This analysis again revealed a significant main effect for Country, $F(2, 168) = 47.811, p < .001$. Post-hoc analyses (Tukey's HSD) showed that students from India (M difference = 1.20, $p < .001$) again scored significantly higher than both Bangladeshi and Nepalese students, with no significant difference between Bangladesh and Nepal ($p = .641$).

While there were no significant main effects for University Status, $F(1, 168) = 0.543, p = .462$, or course type, $F(1, 168) = 0.272, p = .603$, significant interaction effects were found

between Country and University Status, $F(2, 168) = 13.779, p < .001$, and between Country and Course Type, $F(2, 168) = 4.960, p = .008$ (Table 8). The three-way interaction between Country, University Status, and Course Type was not significant, $F(2, 168) = 0.646, p = .525$. This model also explained a substantial portion of the variance in writing scores ($R^2 = .451$, adjusted $R^2 = .415$).

Table 8. ANOVA Results for Question 2: Writing Scores

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2p
Country	2	47.811	< .001	.363
University Status	1	0.543	.462	.003
Course Type	1	0.272	.603	.002
Country × Status	2	13.779	< .001	.141
Country × Course Type	2	4.960	.008	.056
Status × Course Type	1	0.153	.696	.001
Country × Status × Course	2	0.646	.525	.008
Error	168			

Note. $N = 180$. η^2p = partial eta squared.

What emerges most clearly from these results is that the Indian students outperformed those from Bangladesh and Nepal on both questions. Although it is not possible to convert the raw scores into scaled scores to compare them with minimum entry levels used in North America, scores of 4 or higher would generally be judged sufficient for academic purposes. Scores of 1 or 2 would be insufficient, whereas a score of 3 would be marginal, indicating Question 1 responses that “may be incomplete, inaccurate, or imprecise” or Question 2 responses that are only “partially successful” (ETS, 2024b). On this basis, the majority of the students in our study at the two Indian universities would meet basic expectations for academic writing in North America as represented by the TOEFL iBT test; the majority of those in Bangladesh and Nepal would not.

Session 1 Questionnaire Data

In responses to the TSQ administered immediately following the test, students tended to agree with the statement, “I think I performed well on the TOEFL writing test today” (TSQ9.1) with 99 students (55%) choosing either strongly agree (19, 11%) or agree (80, 44%) in response to this item. Fifteen (8%) chose disagree, and one chose strongly disagree with the remaining 65 (36%) neutral.

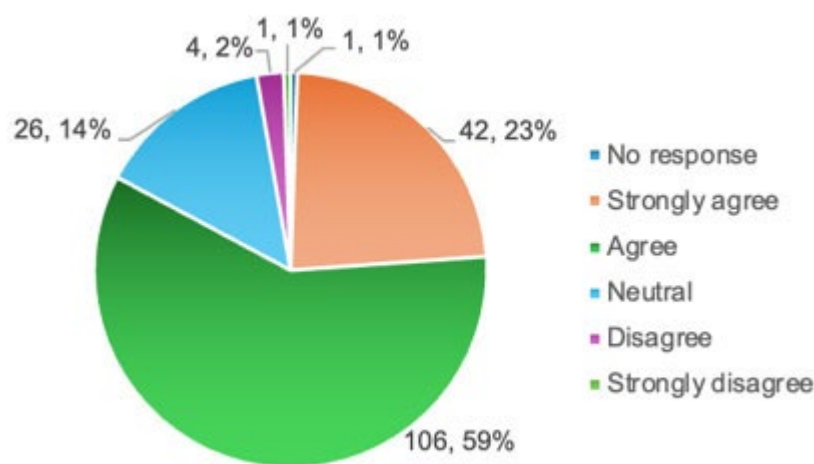
As sources of insight into potential causes of difficulty for the students, two questions addressed whether students considered they had enough time (TSQ9.3, TSQ9.4) and ideas (TSQ9.5, TSQ9.6) to respond to Questions 1 and 2. In both cases, they were more positive about Question 1 than Question 2. Just eight (4%) of the 180 students disagreed (including one strongly) that they had enough time to respond to Question 1: Integrated Writing, but 28 (16%) disagreed and four (2%) strongly disagreed that they had enough time to write Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion. With respect to ideas, nine (5%) disagreed (one strongly) that they had enough ideas to write about Question 1 (on the topic of health and consumerism) whereas 26 (14%) disagreed (three strongly) in relation to Question 2 (wildlife conservation).

In open-ended responses, when asked to comment on the experience of taking the test (TSQ9), a few students mentioned timing as a source of difficulty: “The questions asked in this test were familiar, but we have the practice of taking a lot of time to complete those. To complete the questions in allocated time was a challenge but the timings were fair” (NEP-PRV-EN). One commented on the accent in the listening element of Question 1: “In listening test, I can’t get the accent and don’t connect to my next point” (BAN-PUB-BS), and another noted that listening as part of a writing test was unfamiliar. It was striking that of the 36 responses, most mentioned how positive the experience had been. Typical responses included, “I had a good experience in this test and I am thankful. I learned a lot” (BAN-PRV-EN) and “It was a really good experience writing this paper and I would love to do it again” (IND-PRV-EN).

Session 2 Focus Groups

Figure 3 provides an overall summary of how respondents from Bangladesh, India, and Nepal rated the suitability of topics (Question 1: Contrasting Views on the Use of Taxes to Discourage Unhealthy Consumption and Question 2: Alternative Measures to Promote Conservation) and their impact on performance, along with the variability and range of these ratings. Among the 60 valid open-ended responses concerning suitability, students in Bangladesh and Nepal were rather more favorable toward the TOEFL iBT topics than those in India: “[The TOEFL iBT] test is very suitable for us. We like to have the same kind of test not only in English but also in other subjects. We all agree on it. It tests our all-round skills of language” (NEP-PUB-EN). “It is not suitable -the TOEFL test in the sense that it relies simply on whether or not you can find and listen to what they are trying to say or read...what they are trying to say successfully” (IND-PRV-BS).

Figure 3. Student Responses to the Item TSQ10.8: “The topics on the TOEFL writing test are suitable for students from my country” (n, %)



The student focus groups (see Appendix C for prompts) further supported the impression that the test had been a positive experience for many students: “It was not that tough, not that easy. We were given enough time. It was a good experience” (BAN-PRV-EN); “I enjoyed every part of the test” (NEP-PRV-EN); “I thought that it was a fun test” (IND-PUB-BS); “These listening tests, you’re not used to them. and so that is something that takes a little bit of getting used to but once that’s done. I think there’s not many challenges with it as it went very smoothly” (IND-PUB-EN). Students, particularly those from business courses, were supportive of the idea that TOEFL iBT might be used as part of admissions procedures.

While the Indian students tended to report finding the test reasonably easy, timing and content emerged more clearly as sources of difficulty for some in Bangladesh and Nepal. Comments included the following: “Time management was a challenge. We did not have enough time to think and plan. Ten minutes to read, plan and write at least 100 words are not enough” (NEP-PRV-BS); “The timing was a bit of a challenge for me. I was trying to gather my thoughts, but the timing was not helping so I couldn’t finish both of them” (BAN-PRV-BS); “I had no idea about smoking... so I couldn’t write that much about this discussion [for Question 2]” (BAN-PUB-EN).

As in the questionnaire responses, as well as remarking on their own limitations in vocabulary and grammar, some students mentioned the listening element and typing as difficulties: “The speed and the accent was the problem” (BAN-PUB-BS); “I did not find that

much challenging, but I was confused in selection of vocabulary, and I found difficulty in understanding the accent” (NEP-PUB-EN); “I am not used to writing in keyboard. So, that’s why I was kind of slow and it was a bit difficult” (BAN-PUB-BS). A few were concerned by the implications of differences in English instruction in different types of school: “[TOEFL iBT writing] can be difficult for the students coming from government schools where writing is neglected” (NEP-PRV-EN); “Teachers are not competent in English. That is the problem of not our college. It is the problem in Nepal” (NEP-PUB-EN).

Session 2 Teacher Interviews

Like the students, the teachers generally expressed very positive views of the TOEFL iBT Writing section (see Appendix D for prompts). The careful task design and clear scoring rubrics attracted approving comments, and the test was favorably compared to the multiple-choice tests of grammar and vocabulary used locally in admissions: “The TOEFL is useful. I like the ways in which TOEFL has been designed, its rubrics and I should learn from its format and rubric” (NEP-PRV-T1: English Teacher [EN]). Several teachers commented that the TOEFL iBT Writing test would make a suitable entry measure: “TOEFL as an entry test may be good. It will bring it at par with others as far as English is concerned” (NEP-PRV-T1: English Teacher [EN]); “I think it is suitable for our context of Bangladesh” (BAN-PRV-T3: English Teacher [EN]); “In Nepal... there is a reading component but they have MCQs only. I’ll be happy if my university adopts TOEFL as an entry test” (NEP-PRV-T3: English Teacher [BS]).

Although students were generally positive about their performance and considered that the test was not too difficult, teachers were more divided about the level of difficulty. Some felt that the test would be relatively easy for their students: “Well at [this university] the kind of students that we get, I think that they will not be tightly challenged with this kind of writing task. They should be alright” (BAN-PUB-T5: English Teacher [BS]). Others, notably in Bangladesh, doubted whether their students could perform adequately: “From my experience of my students, I don’t think that they would be comfortable answering these questions because I’m pretty sure that many of them will not be able to understand the questions themselves” (BAN-PRV-T2: English Teacher [BS]); “I think from our context of Bangladesh, probably it’s not suitable since there is a wide gap in students’ actual proficiency and the expected English language proficiency. There is a huge gap between their proficiency and what the TOEFL iBT expects” (BAN-PRV-T3: English Teacher [EN]); “I think they are not used to this; this will be hard for them, because they

are not prepared. This will be hard for undergraduate students” (BAN-PUB-T8: English Teacher [EN]).

Reflecting a theme occasionally touched on in the student focus groups, some teachers were concerned that if stricter English language entry requirements were set, poor or unequal access to English in the school system could unfairly restrict access to university: “I have just one concern that someone can have very good brain, very good thinking ability, but with a background in developing countries, it is quite possible that the person is not very conversant in English... For admission, of course, they need English, but then that they may acquire it over time, but then this will just funnel them out” (IND-PRV-T1: Business Teacher); “So because... our education system has trained them so much in terms of you need to focus on the maths and all of that. So, they're writing skills are not developed, given their ability, so they could have done much better. So, if we make it as an entry criteria without thinking it we have to go back the value chain and think about what is happening in the schools” (IND-PUB-T5: Business Teacher).

A number of teachers agreed that the teaching of English in schools would need to be reformed if students were to be adequately prepared for a writing test of this kind at entry. Another concern was the expense of tests like TOEFL iBT: “In the past such international test have been unpopular because they are expensive” (NEP-PRV-T3: English Teacher [EN]). Notwithstanding such reservations, many teachers commented that TOEFL was a better test than the tests of English associated with their respective courses.

Discussion

The major focus of this study is on teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the suitability of the TOEFL iBT Writing section as a component of an entry test for undergraduate studies. Unlike previous studies that have explored students’ and instructors’ perceptions of writing tasks in undergraduate courses/classes and in TOEFL iBT (e.g. Llosa & Malone, 2017; Yeom, 2023), our study offers unique evidence around suitability of TOEFL iBT Writing tests to be used as an entry test for undergraduate studies in the distinctive, though diverse, context of South Asia. Although we believe it has implications for the region, it must be acknowledged that the study, which covers just three countries, has involved a small number of students and teachers at prestigious universities on highly selective courses. It is possible that views expressed by participants may not be more widely shared. There is clearly also a need to investigate other

language skills and the other sections of the TOEFL iBT test as well as to carry out more empirical, observational research into local practices.

First, we asked students and teachers whether TOEFL iBT Writing tasks were comparable with tasks assigned to undergraduate students in business, engineering, and English support courses. Echoing the findings of studies conducted in North America, such as Llosa and Malone (2017), our participants recognized that TOEFL iBT Writing tasks did reflect the writing required in their subject courses. Task types such as essays, reports, and summaries appeared frequently in both university courses and TOEFL, and students and teachers recognized that both TOEFL and university writing require skills in synthesizing information and critical analysis.

Equally, as in North America and elsewhere, participants considered that the TOEFL iBT Writing section does not fully represent the range of tasks or the specificity of content found in university writing. Writing for academic subjects often involves extensive preparation, without the time constraints imposed by the TOEFL tasks. Subject teachers prioritize disciplinary content over linguistic accuracy.

Additional differences were noted that are less typical of North American contexts. Students at these universities reported completing most of their writing assignments by hand rather than on computer. Some participants contrasted the scope offered by TOEFL iBT for writers to compare perspectives and engage critically with a topic using local practices that they felt placed more value on accurate memorization.

Like studies elsewhere comparing English language support classes with academic practices (Grapin & Llosa, 2019), English support courses at these universities appeared inconsistently aligned with both TOEFL and subject course requirements. Many participants in the study made the point that the TOEFL tasks better reflected the kinds of writing expected in their content classes than those assigned in their English language courses. Similarly, English language components of the entrance tests in current use that we reviewed centered on vocabulary and grammar with little scope for any form of extended writing. This suggests that, as reported by previous research (e.g., Barnes, 2016; Gong, 2023; Sardi et al., 2022), a test like TOEFL has some potential to exert a positive washback: encouraging more focus on writing in general and specifically on discourse-level skills. Although this could motivate teachers and students to change their teaching and learning practices, experience suggests that changes in

testing practices are unlikely to be sufficient to bring radical change to underresourced classrooms.

With some reservations, the teachers and students were supportive of the use of the TOEFL iBT Writing test as an entry measure. It was seen to be a high-quality test representing international standards to assess students' proficiency and understanding of the various aspects of writing. Teachers were impressed with the scoring rubrics and the quality of the tasks, comparing these favorably with the subjectivity and variability of local practices.

On the other hand, it was suggested that in this context, a test like the TOEFL iBT may add to the difficulties and barriers to access experienced by students from poorly resourced schools. Although we did not collect data on educational experiences, we note that a minority of student participants in this study, notably in Nepal and Bangladesh, did not perform well, producing error-strewn texts that suggested difficulty in summarizing content and developing ideas. This raises questions about how far current EMI policies may benefit all students.

Although the TOEFL iBT Writing test may have proved popular with teachers and students, pressures elsewhere in the education system may work against any initiative to expand the use of the test as an entry measure for local courses. Policy makers at the institutional level and above will not be oblivious to the social, cultural, and political implications of relying on a foreign-made test. Even a partial role for a new test in this context may provoke resistance. It would be advisable to consult a full range of stakeholders and conduct extensive trials before embarking on any such change.

Noting the generally positive reception of the test among teachers and students, it might be welcomed as an example to support improvements in local practices. Curriculum developers might consider using writing tasks and rubrics similar to those on the test to improve writing-related practices in English language classrooms. There is also considerable scope for improvement in the design of tests used at entry and within programs. These would benefit from the development and validation procedures embodied in the TOEFL program. With support from the developers, the test could play an important role in inspiring the professionalization of assessment practices in the region.

References

- Annamalai, E. (2003). Medium of power: The question of English in education in India. In J. W. Tollefson & A. B. Tsui (Eds.), *Medium of instruction policies: Which agenda? Whose agenda?* (pp. 177–194). Routledge.
- Baker, W., & Hüttner, J. (2016). English and more: A multisite study of roles and conceptualisations of language in English medium multilingual universities from Europe to Asia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 38(6), 501–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2016.1207183>
- Barnes, M. (2016). The washback of the TOEFL iBT® in Vietnam. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(7), 158–174. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2016v41n7.10>
- Bhatia, K. T. (2022). English language policy in multilingual India. In E. L. Low & A. Pakir (Eds.), *English in East and South Asia: Policy, features and language in use* (pp. 1–16). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429433467-1>
- Biber, D., Reppen, R., & Staples, S. (2017). Exploring the relationship between TOEFL iBT scores and disciplinary writing performance. *TESOL Quarterly*, 51, 948–960. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.359>
- Boruah, P. B., & Mohanty, A. K. (2024). Social construction of EMI in India: Situating EMI within the multilingual education paradigm. In R. A. Giri, A. Padwad, & M. M. N. Kabir (Eds.), *English as a Medium of Instruction in South Asia* (pp. 76–93). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003342373-6>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Bridgeman, B., & Carlson, S. (1983). *Survey of academic writing tasks required of graduate and undergraduate foreign students* (Research Report Series No. RR-83-18). ETS. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2330-8516.1983.tb00018.x>
- Chapelle, C. A., Enright, M. K., & Jamieson, J. (Eds.). (2008). *Building a validity argument for the Test of English as a Foreign Language*. Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Cumming, A., Grant, L., Mulcahy-Ernt, P., & Powers, D. E. (2004). A teacher-verification study of speaking and writing prototype tasks for a new TOEFL®. *Language Testing*, 21(2), 107–145. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0265532204lt278oa>

- Cumming, A., Kantor, R., Powers, D., Santos, T., & Taylor, C. (2000). *TOEFL 2000 writing framework: A working paper* (TOEFL® Monograph No. 18). ETS.
<https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RM-00-05.pdf>
- Dafouz, E., & Smit, U. (2020). *ROAD-MAPPING English medium education in the internationalised university*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23463-8>
- Dearden, J. (2014). *English as a medium of instruction - a growing global phenomenon*. British Council.
- Deygers, B., Van den Branden, K., & Van Gorp, K. (2018). University entrance language tests: A matter of justice. *Language Testing*, 35(4), 449–476.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532217706196>
- Dimova, S. (2020). English language requirements for enrolment in EMI programs in higher education: A European case. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 47, Article 100896. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2020.100896>
- Dimova, S., Yan, X., & Ginther, A. (2020). *Local language testing: Design, implementation, and development*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429492242>
- Dryden, S., & Dovchin, S. (2022). Translingual English discrimination: Loss of academic sense of belonging, the hiring order of things, and students from the Global South. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 15(4), 1231–1252. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2022-0065>
- Enright, M., Grabe, W., Koda, K., Mosenthal, P., Mulcahy-Ernt, P., & Schedl, M. (2000). *TOEFL® 2000 reading framework*. ETS.
- ETS. (2024a). *TOEFL iBT® test and score data summary 2023*.
<https://www.ets.org/pdfs/toefl/toefl-ibt-test-score-data-summary-2023.pdf>
- ETS. (2024b). *TOEFL iBT® Writing rubrics* [PDF]. <https://www.ets.org/pdfs/toefl/toefl-ibt-writing-rubrics.pdf>
- ETS. (2025). *TOEFL® research insights: Volume 4. Validity evidence supporting the interpretation and use of TOEFL iBT® scores*. <https://www.ets.org/pdfs/toefl/toefl-ibt-insight-slv4.pdf>
- Galloway, N., Numajiri, T., & Rees, N. (2020). The ‘internationalisation,’ or ‘Englishisation,’ of higher education in East Asia. *Higher Education*, 80, 395–414.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00486-1>

- Giri, R. A., Padwad, A., & Kabir, M. M. N. (2024). Introduction. In R. A. Giri, A. Padwad, & M. M. N. Kabir. (Eds.). *English as a medium of instruction in South Asia* (pp. 76–93). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003342373>
- Gong, K. (2023). Challenges and opportunities for spoken English learning and instruction brought by automated speech scoring in large-scale speaking tests: A mixed-method investigation into the washback of speech rater in TOEFL iBT®. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 8, Article 25. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-023-00197-2>
- Grapin, S. E., & Llosa, L. (2019). Comparing objectives and assignments in ESL versus mainstream composition courses: Implications for writing programs and instructors. *NYS TESOL Journal*, 6(1), 3–18.
- Hale, G. A., Taylor, C., Bridgeman, B., Carson, J., Kroll, B., & Kantor, R. (1996). *A study of writing tasks assigned in academic degree programs* (Research Report Series No. RR-95-44). ETS. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2333-8504.1995.tb01678.x>
- Hamid, M. O., & Al Amin, M. (2022). English as a medium of instruction in Bangladeshi higher education: A policy perspective. In J. McKinley & N. Galloway (Eds.), *English medium instruction practices in higher education: International perspectives* (pp. 13–24). <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350167889.ch-001>
- Hamid, M. O., & Sultana, S. (2024). English-medium instruction in higher education in Bangladesh. In K. Bolton, W. Botha, & B. Lin (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English medium instruction in higher education* (pp. 352–364). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003011644-30>
- Harsch, C., Ushioda, E., & Ladroue, C. (2017). Investigating the predictive validity of TOEFL iBT® test scores and their use in informing policy in a United Kingdom university setting (TOEFL iBT® Research Report Series No. 30). <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12167>
- Hasan, M. K., & Akhand, M. M. (2010). Approaches to writing in EFL/ESL context: Balancing product and process in writing class at tertiary level. *Journal of NELTA*, 15(1–2), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.3126/nelta.v15i1-2.4612>
- Hickey, R. (2005). South Asian Englishes. In R. Hickey (Ed.), *Legacies of colonial English (Studies in transported dialects)* (pp. 536–558). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486920.022>

- Hillman, S. (2023). 'I feel unbalanced': Bridging emotions, creativity, and translingual pedagogy with EMI students. *The Language Learning Journal*, 51(5), 591–606.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2023.2239861>
- Hultgren, A. K. (2020) Global English: From “Tyrannosaurus rex” to “red herring.” *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 19(3), 10–34. <https://doi.org/10.35360/njes.574>
- Humphreys, P. (2017). EMI in Anglophone nations: Contradiction in terms or cause for consideration? In B. Fenton-Smith, P. Humphreys, & I. Walkinshaw (Eds.), *English medium instruction in higher education in Asia-Pacific* (pp. 93–114). Springer International. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51976-0_6
- Ihlenfeldt, S. D., & Rios, J. A. (2023). A meta-analysis on the predictive validity of English language proficiency assessments for college admissions. *Language Testing*, 40(2), 276–299. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02655322221112364>
- Iliovits, M., Harding, L., & Pill, J. (2022). Language use in an English-medium instruction university in Lebanon: Implications for the validity of international and local English tests for admissions. *Journal of English Medium Instruction*, 1(2), 153–179.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/jemi.21009.ili>
- Jamieson, J., Jones, S., Kirsch, I., Mosenthal, P., & Taylor, C. (2000). *TOEFL® 2000 framework: A working paper* (Research Report Series No. RM-00-03). ETS.
<https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RM-00-03.pdf>
- JASP Team. (2024). JASP (Version 0.18.3) [Computer software]. <https://jasp-stats.org/>
- Kachru, Y. (2017). World Englishes, pragmatics, and discourse. In M. Filppula, J. Klemola, & D. Sharma (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of world Englishes* (pp. 272–290). Oxford University Press.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2017). The languages of higher education in East and Southeast Asia: Will EMI lead to Englishisation? In B. Fenton-Smith, P. Humphreys, & I. Walkinshaw (Eds.), *English medium instruction in higher education in Asia-Pacific: From policy to pedagogy* (pp. 21–36). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51976-0_2
- Kukatlapalli, J., Doyle, S., & Bandyopadhyay, S. (2019). An investigation into the English language experiences of Indian international students studying in New Zealand universities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(3), 485–499.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1685940>

- Lillis, T., & Scott, M. (2007). Defining academic literacies research: Issues of epistemology, ideology and strategy. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 5–32.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/japl.v4i1.5>
- Linn, A., Shrestha, P., Bezborodova, A., & Hultgren, A. K. (2021). *Current practice in English medium education in higher education: Case studies from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Bangladesh and Nepal*. British Council.
- Llosa, L., & Malone, M. E. (2017). Student and instructor perceptions of writing tasks and performance on TOEFL iBT® versus university writing courses. *Assessing Writing*, 34, 88–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2017.09.004>
- Llosa, L., & Malone, M. E. (2019). Comparability of students' writing performance on TOEFL iBT® and in university writing courses. *Language Testing*, 36(2), 235–263.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532218763456>
- Macaro, E., Curle, S., Pun, J., An, J., & Dearden, J. (2018). A systematic review of English medium instruction in higher education. *Language Teaching*, 51(1), 36–76.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000350>
- Malone, M. E., & Montee, M. (2014). Stakeholders' beliefs About the TOEFL iBT® test as a measure of academic language ability (TOEFL iBT® Research Report Series No. 22).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12039>
- Meganathan, R. (2015). English language education situation in India. *Journal of English as an International Language*, 10(1), 48–66. <https://www.eilj.com/journals/2015-journals/volume-10issue-1-may-2015>
- Meganathan, R. (2022). Language conundrum: English language and exclusivity in India's higher education. In P. Sengupta (Ed.), *Critical sites of inclusion in India's higher education* (pp. 81–96). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8256-8_5
- Moore, T., Morton, J., Hall, D., & Wallis, C. (2015). Literacy practices in the professional workplace: Implications for the IELTS reading and writing tests (IELTS Research Report Series No. 1). <https://search.informit.org/doi/pdf/10.3316/informit.374377788935485>
- Norris, J. M., Davis, J. M., & Xi, X. (2021). Framing the assessment of academic English for admissions decisions. In *Assessing academic English for higher education admissions* (pp. 1–21). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351142403-1>

- Ockey, G. J., & French, R. (2016). From one to multiple accents on a test of L2 listening comprehension. *Applied Linguistics*, 37(5), 693–715.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amu060>
- Ockey, G. J., Papageorgiou, S., & French, R. (2016). Effects of strength of accent on an L2 interactive lecture listening comprehension test. *International Journal of Listening*, 30(1–2), 84–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2015.1056877>
- O'Dwyer, J., Kantarcıoğlu, E., & Thomas, C. (2018). *An investigation of the predictive validity of the TOEFL iBT® test at an English-medium university in Turkey* (Research Report Series No. RR-18-43). ETS. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12230>
- Owen, N., Shrestha, P. N., & Hultgren, A. K. (2021). *Researching academic reading in two contrasting English as a medium of instruction contexts at a university level* (Research Report Series TOEFL-RR-91). ETS. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12317>
- Padwad, A. (2024). English, EMI, and social justice: The Indian (Hi) story. In R. A. Giri, A. Padwad, & M. M. N. Kabir (Eds.), *English as a medium of instruction in South Asia*. (pp. 115–127). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003342373-9>
- Pecorari, D., & Malmström, H. (2018). At the crossroads of TESOL and English medium instruction. *TESOL Quarterly*, 52(3), 497–515. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.470>
- Poudel, T. (2019). The place of English in educational policy of Nepal: A critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Nepalese Studies*, 12(1), 112–128.
- Rampin, R., & Rampin, V. (2021). Taguette: Open-source qualitative data analysis. *Journal of Open Source Software*, 6(68), Article 3522. <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.03522>
- Riazi, A. M. (2016). Comparing writing performance in TOEFL iBT and academic assignments: An exploration of textual features. *Assessing Writing*, 28, 15–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2016.02.001>
- Rosenfeld, M., Leung, P., & Oltman, P. K. (2001). The reading, writing, speaking, and listening tasks important for academic success at the undergraduate and graduate levels (TOEFL® Monograph No. 21). ETS. <https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RM-01-03.pdf>
- Sah, P. K. (2023). Emotion and imagination in English-medium instruction programs: Illuminating its dark side through Nepali students' narratives. *Linguistics and Education*, 75, Article 101150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2023.101150>

- Sah, P. K., & Li, G. (2018). English medium instruction (EMI) as linguistic capital in Nepal: Promises and realities. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 12(2), 109–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2017.1401448>
- Sardi, A., Surahmat, Z., & Nur, S. (2022). The washback of Intensive TOEFL® Training Program (ITTP) on student's learning motivation. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 5(4), 593–597. <https://doi.org/10.34050/elsjish.v5i4.24570>
- Schmeiser, C. B., & Welch, C. J. (2006). Test development. In R. Brennan (Ed.), *Educational measurement* (4th ed., pp. 307–353). American Council on Education; Rowman & Littlefield.
- Seel, A., Yadava, Y. P., & Kadel, S. (2017). *Medium of instruction and languages for education (MILE): Ways forward for education policy, planning and practice in Nepal*. Transcend Vision Nepal.
- Shohamy, E. (2012). A critical perspective on the use of English as a medium of instruction at universities. In A. Doiz, D. Lasagabaster, & J. M. Sierra (Eds.), *English-medium instruction at universities: Global challenges* (pp. 196–213). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.27195478.16>
- Smit, U. (2023). English-medium instruction (EMI). *ELT Journal*, 77(4), 499–503. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccad018>
- Statistica. (2026). *Share of adults who have earned a tertiary education in OECD countries in 2023, by country* [Table]. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/232951/university-degree-attainment-by-country/>
- Studer, P. (2021). Internationalization, quality and multilingualism in higher education: A troublesome relationship. In P. Studer, F. D. Rubio-Alcalá, & D. Coyle (Eds.), *Developing and evaluating quality bilingual practices in higher education* (pp. 9–30). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.22730526.6>
- Sultana, S. (2024). EMI in the multilingual ecology of South Asia: Historical development, shifting paradigms, and transformative practices. In R. A. Giri, A. Padwad, & M. M. N. Kabir (Eds.), *English as a medium of instruction in South Asia* (pp. 31–56). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003342373-4>
- Sultana, S., & Roshid, M. M. (2020). Introduction: English language and English language education in the multilingual ecology of Bangladesh: Past, present, and future. In S.

- Sultana, M. M. Roshid, M. Z. Haider, M. M. N. Kabir, & M. H. Khan (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English language education in Bangladesh* (pp. 1–14). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356803-1>
- TOEFL. (2026). *Find institutions that accept the TOEFL iBT® test*. <https://www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/where-to-study/destinations-search.html>
- TOEFL Test Official Japan Office. (2023). *TOEFL iBT® requirements of the top universities in Asia* [PDF]. https://www.toefl-ibt.jp/dcms_media/other/2023TOEFL%20iBT%20Acceptance%20Map%20asia.pdf
- UNESCO. (2003). *Education in a multilingual world: UNESCO education position paper*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000129728>
- Walkinshaw, I., Fenton-Smith, B., & Humphreys, P. (2017). EMI issues and challenges in Asia Pacific higher education: An introduction. In B. Fenton-Smith, P. Humphreys, & I. Walkinshaw (Eds.), *English medium instruction in higher education in Asia-Pacific: From policy to pedagogy* (pp. 1–18). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51976-0_1
- Yeom, S. (2023). *Using international English proficiency tests in EMI contexts: A comparison of tasks and student performance on TOEFL iBT® writing tasks and course assignments in Korean Universities* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. New York University.

Appendix A: Writing Practices Questionnaire

Before you take the TOEFL iBT Writing section, we would like to ask you a few questions about the writing in English that you do at your university. There are 44 questions.

Section A. Background Information

1. Your TOEFL ID number: _____

2. Which university are you studying at?

please tick (✓) one answer

Bangladesh

☐ Public

☐ Private

India

☐ Public

☐ Private

Nepal

☐ Public

☐ Autonomous

3. Which type of course are you enrolled on?

please tick (✓) one answer

Business Studies/ Engineering

Section B. Writing in your English language classes

In this section, we are asking about English language classes – the classes students take at university to improve their English.

4. Do you have any English Language Courses during your undergraduate programme?

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes/ No

5. What type of course(s) do you have?

please tick (✓) all that apply

A course in General English/ A course in English for Specific Purposes (for example, English for Engineering)/ Other English course type (5.a please specify) _____

6. In which year and semester do you have English courses?

please tick (✓) all that apply

☐ 1 st year, 1 st semester	☐ 1 st year, 2 nd semester
☐ 2 nd year, 1 st semester	☐ 2 nd year, 2 nd semester
☐ 3 rd year, 1 st semester	☐ 3 rd year, 2 nd semester
☐ 4 th year, 1 st semester	☐ 4 th year, 2 nd semester

7. Do you do any writing for your English classes at university?

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes/ No

8. How often do you write for your English classes?

please tick (✓) one answer

Once a week/ Twice a week/ Three times a week/ Four times a week or more

8.a. Other (please specify) _____

9. How much time do you usually spend each week writing in English during these classes?

please tick (✓) one answer

Less than one hour/ One to three hours/ Four hours or more

10. How much time do you usually spend each week writing for your English courses outside the classes?

please tick (✓) one answer

Less than one hour/ One to three hours/ Four to seven hours/ Eight to eleven hours/ Twelve hours or more

11. What kind of English writing do you do in your English classes? Choose from the writing tasks listed below.

please tick (✓) all that apply

☐ Grammar or Vocabulary Exercises.	<i>Individual words or sentences used to practice or test your knowledge of language.</i>
☐ Q&A.	<i>A few words or one or two sentences to answer questions about things you have read or listened to.</i>
☐ Paragraphs.	<i>Short texts you write to answer simple questions.</i>
☐ Essays.	<i>Longer texts stating and justifying your opinion about a topic.</i>
☐ Library Research Papers.	<i>Similar to an Essay, but supporting your opinion with information from sources you find in the library or on the internet. Library research papers often include quotes from sources.</i>
☐ Reports on Experiments or Observations.	<i>A report that describes how you followed a process. A report often has sections such as a statement of objectives, description of method, and presentation of results.</i>
☐ Summaries.	<i>A short text that just reports information you read or listened to, it does not explain or comment on the information.</i>
☐ Case Studies.	<i>A text you write to describe a situation; generally case studies explain how a particular issue or problem was dealt with.</i>
☐ Plans/ Proposals.	<i>A text you write to describe what can be done to address an issue or solve a problem.</i>
☐ Computer Programmes.	<i>A computer programme with explanation of what the programme does.</i>
☐ Book Reviews.	<i>A report about a book or article you read.</i>
☐ Stories.	<i>A story you write to describe real or imagined events.</i>
☐ Letters.	<i>Personal or business letters.</i>
☐ Resumes (CVs).	<i>A text that gives brief information about your education and work experience.</i>
☐ Notes.	<i>Notes made about a book you read or a lecture or programme you listen to.</i>
☐ 11.a. Other (please specify)	

12. How do you write for your English classes?

please tick (✓) all that apply

By pen/ pencil (handwriting)/ On a computer or typewriter (physical keyboard)/ On a tablet or digital device (digital keyboard)/ Using dictation software/ 12.a. Other (please specify) _____ .

13. What type of writing assignments do you do for your English classes?

please tick (✓) all that apply

In-class assignments (writing is done in class time)/ Homework or project assignments (writing is done outside class)/ Written examinations (writing is supervised and done within a strict time limit)

14. How often do you work together with classmates when you write for your English classes?

please tick (✓) one answer

Always/ Often/ Occasionally/ Not at all

15. How do you prepare for writing for your English classes?

please tick (✓) all that apply

By finding information from the library or internet/ By studying examples of good writing / By reading class notes/ By practicing writing/ By using translation software/ By studying grammar and vocabulary/

15.a. Other (please specify) _____

16. Do your English teachers usually explain the qualities they are looking for when they judge your writing?

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes / No

17. Which aspects of your writing do you think your English teachers give the most importance in your English classes?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Content (ideas)/ Grammar/ Vocabulary/ Organization (of the ideas in the text)/ Spelling/ Writing style/ Appearance (layout and handwriting)/ 17.a. Other (Please specify) _____

18. What do you get for your written work from your English teachers?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Marks (a number like 75%, or 15 out of 20)/ Letter grades (for example, A, C+, F)/ Comments about my work from the teacher/ 18.a. Other (Please specify) _____

19. Do you receive any feedback from your English teachers on your writing?

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes/ No

20. What kind of feedback do your English teachers give you on your writing?

please tick (✓) all that apply

☐ Spoken feedback (face to face)/ Spoken feedback (by phone or video)/ Recorded audio or video feedback/ Corrections of your work/ Written comments/ 20.a. Other (Please specify) _____

21. If you receive written feedback from your English teachers, how is it given?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Handwritten/ Typed

22. What platforms do teachers use to give you feedback on your writing?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Paper/ Email/ Social media (Moodle, WhatsApp, Facebook or similar)/ SMS (text messages)/ 22.a. Other (Please specify) _____

23. In general, how useful is this feedback to you?

please tick (✓) one answer

Very useful/ Somewhat useful/ Not useful

24. What do you usually do after receiving feedback on your writing from your English teacher?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Read or listen to the feedback/ Revise my work/ Seek help/advice from classmate(s)/ Seek help/advice from senior student(s)/ Seek help/advice from family member(s)/ Ask for more help/advice from teacher(s)/ 24.a. Other (please specify) _____

Section C. Writing in English in your subject classes (Business/Engineering)

In this section, we are asking about your subject classes – the classes students take at university to learn a degree subject (for example, Science, Engineering, Business etc.).

25. Do you do any writing in English for your subject classes at university (i.e. your Business/Engineering classes)

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes / No

26. How often do you write in English for your subject classes?

please tick (✓) one answer

Once a week/ Twice a week/ Three times a week/ Four times a week or more/ 26.a. Other (please specify) _____

27. How much time do you usually spend each week writing in English during your subject classes?

please tick (✓) one answer

Less than one hour/ One to three hours/ Four hours or more

28. How much time do you usually spend each week writing in English for your subject courses outside the classes?

please tick (✓) your answer

Less than one hour/ One to three hours/ Four to seven hours/ Eight to eleven hours/ Twelve hours or more

29. What kind of English writing do you do in your subject classes at university? Choose from the writing tasks listed below.

please tick (✓) all that apply

☐ Grammar or Vocabulary Exercises.	<i>Individual words or sentences used to practice or test your knowledge of language.</i>
☐ Q&A.	<i>A few words or one or two sentences to answer questions about things you have read or listened to.</i>

☐ Paragraphs.	<i>Short texts you write to answer simple questions.</i>
☐ Essays.	<i>Longer texts stating and justifying your opinion about a topic.</i>
☐ Library Research Papers.	<i>Similar to an Essay, but supporting your opinion with information from sources you find in the library or on the internet. Library research papers often include quotes from sources.</i>
☐ Reports on Experiments or Observations.	<i>A report that describes how you followed a process. A report often has sections such as a statement of objectives, description of method, and presentation of results.</i>
☐ Summaries.	<i>A short text that just reports information you read or listened to, it does not explain or comment on the information.</i>
☐ Case Studies.	<i>A text you write to describe a situation; generally case studies explain how a particular issue or problem was dealt with.</i>
☐ Plans/ Proposals.	<i>A text you write to describe what can be done to address an issue or solve a problem.</i>
☐ Computer Programmes.	<i>A computer programme with explanation of what the programme does.</i>
☐ Book Reviews.	<i>A report about a book or article you read.</i>
☐ Stories.	<i>A story you write to describe real or imagined events.</i>
☐ Letters.	<i>Personal or business letters.</i>
☐ Resumes (CVs).	<i>A text that gives brief information about your education and work experience.</i>
☐ Notes.	<i>Notes made about a book you read or a lecture or programme you listen to.</i>
☐ Other (please specify)	

30. How do you write for your university subject classes?

please tick (✓) all that apply

By pen/ pencil (handwriting)/ On a computer or typewriter (physical keyboard)/ On a tablet or digital device (digital keyboard)/ Using dictation software/ 30.a. Other (please specify) _____.

31. What type of writing assignments do you do in English for your subject classes?

please tick (✓) all that apply

In-class assignments (writing is done in class time)/ Homework or project assignments (writing is done outside class)/ Written examinations (writing is supervised and done within a strict time limit)

32. How often do you work together with classmates when you write in English for your subject classes?

please tick (✓) one answer

Always/ Often/ Occasionally/ Not at all

33. How do you prepare for writing in English for your subject classes?

please tick (✓) all that apply

By finding information from the library or internet/ By studying examples of good writing / By reading class notes/ By practicing writing/ By using translation software/ By studying grammar and vocabulary/ 33.a. Other (please specify) _____

34. Do your subject teachers usually explain the qualities they are looking for when they evaluate your writing?

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes / No

35. Which aspects of your writing do you think your teachers give the most importance in your subject classes?

please tick (✓) one answer

Content (ideas)/ Grammar/ Vocabulary/ Organization (of the ideas in the text)/ Spelling/ Writing style/

Appearance (layout and handwriting)/ 35.a. Other (Please specify) _____

36. What do you get for your written work from your subject teachers?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Marks (a number like 75%, or 15 out of 20)/ Letter grades (for example, A, C+, F)/ Comments about my work from the teacher/ 36.a. Other (Please specify) _____

37. Do you receive any feedback from your subject teachers on your writing?

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes/ No

38. What kind of feedback your subject teachers give you on your writing?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Spoken feedback (face to face)/ Spoken feedback (by phone or video)/ Recorded audio or video feedback/ Corrections of your work/ Written comments/ 38.a. Other (Please specify) _____

39. In general, how useful is this feedback to you?

please tick (✓) one answer

Very useful/ Somewhat useful/ Not useful

40. What do you usually do after receiving feedback on your writing from your subject teachers?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Read or listen to the feedback/ Revise my work/ Seek help/advice from classmate(s)/ Seek help/advice from senior student(s)/ Seek help/advice from family member(s)/ Ask for more help/advice from teacher(s)/ 40.a. Other (please specify) _____

Section D. Use of Technology in Writing

41. Do you use technology to help you with your writing?

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes/ No

42. What technological support do you use?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Spell check/ Grammar check/ Translation/ Vocabulary resources/ Editing/ 42.a. Other (please specify)

43. Do you use any electronic/digital platforms to help you develop your writing skills?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Spell checkers/ Grammar correction tools (for example, Grammarly, Microsoft Word Editor)/ AI tools (for example, Chat GPT)/ Writing websites/ 43.a. Other (please specify) _____

Section E. Other Institutional Support

In this section, we ask you about ways other than classes that your university helps you with your writing.

44. Other than the classes mentioned in Sections B and C, what support do you have from your university for your writing?

please tick (✓) all that apply

Departmental/institutional support (a specialist writing center or writing lab)/ A bank of writing materials (library resources such as articles or samples/ models related to writing)/ Teacher guidelines (such as a list of writing dos and don'ts and what is expected by teachers for writing assignments)/ Mentoring by other students/ Optional additional classes / Remedial classes (for students who fail a writing course)/ 44.a.

Other (please specify) _____

That is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your cooperation and time.

Appendix B: TOEFL Suitability Questionnaire

You have just taken a **TOEFL iBT Writing** section. There were two writing **questions** on the test.

The first is called **Question 1: Integrated Writing** (20 minutes) — you read a short passage and listen to a short lecture, then write about what you read and listened to.

The second is called **Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion** (10 minutes) — you read a question from a professor and two responses from other students, then you write a post in an online academic discussion.

Please answer our questions about your experience of taking the test and your opinions about its suitability for students applying to university courses like yours.

Section 1: Demographic information

First, please answer a few questions about yourself.

1. Your TOEFL ID number: _____
2. Your age: *please tick (✓) one answer:* 15-20/ 21-25/ 26-30/ above 30 years
3. Gender: *please tick (✓) one answer:* Male/Female/Other/Prefer not to say
4. What language(s) do you usually speak at home? (list up to four)
5. How long have you been studying English? (in years) 1-5/ 6-10/ 11-15/ more than 15
6. Have any of your parents (or guardians) completed a university degree?
please tick (✓) one answer: No / Yes / I don't know / Prefer not to say

Section 2: Your experience of taking the TOEFL writing test

7. Have you ever taken a TOEFL test before?

please tick (✓) one answer

Yes/ No

- 7.a. If your answer is “Yes”, what year did you take the test? Before 2019 / 2019/ 2020/ 2021/ 2022/ 2023

8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? <i>please tick (✓) one answer for each statement</i>	strongly agree				strongly disagree
8.1 I was familiar with tasks like Question 1: Integrated Writing before I took this TOEFL test	1	2	3	4	5
8.2 I have been taught how to synthesize information as required by the Question 1: Integrated Writing task	1	2	3	4	5
8.3 I have the ability to synthesize information as required by the Question 1: Integrated Writing task	1	2	3	4	5
8.4 I have the skills I need to perform well on Question 1: Integrated Writing tasks	1	2	3	4	5
8.5 I was familiar with tasks like Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion tasks before I took this TOEFL test	1	2	3	4	5
8.6 I have been taught how to synthesize information as required by the Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion tasks	1	2	3	4	5

8.7 I have the ability to synthesize information as required by the Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion tasks	1	2	3	4	5
8.8 I have the skills I need to perform well on Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion tasks	1	2	3	4	5

9. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? please tick (✓) one answer for each statement	strongly agree				strongly disagree
9.1 I think I performed well on the TOEFL writing test today	1	2	3	4	5
9.2 My performance on the TOEFL writing test was strongly influenced by the topics	1	2	3	4	5
9.3 I had enough time to write the Question 1: Integrated Writing task	1	2	3	4	5
9.4 I had enough time to write the Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion task	1	2	3	4	5
9.5 I had enough ideas to write about the topic of the Question 1: Integrated Writing task	1	2	3	4	5
9.6 I had enough ideas to write about the topic of the Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion task	1	2	3	4	5

9. a. If you have any other comments about your experience of taking the TOEFL writing test, please write them here:

--

Section 3: Your opinions about the TOEFL writing test

10. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? please tick (✓) one answer for each statement	strongly agree				strongly disagree
10.1 The Question 1: Integrated Writing task gave me a fair chance to show my English writing abilities	1	2	3	4	5
10.2 The Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion task gave me a fair chance to show my English writing abilities	1	2	3	4	5
10.3 The Question 1: Integrated Writing task reflects the writing skills needed for a university course where English is the language of instruction	1	2	3	4	5

10. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? <i>please tick (✓) one answer for each statement</i>	strongly agree				strongly disagree
10.4 The Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion task reflects the writing skills needed for a university course where English is the language of instruction	1	2	3	4	5
10.5 A poor overall performance on the TOEFL test would show that a person's writing ability is too limited to study on a university course like mine where English is the language of instruction	1	2	3	4	5
10.6 I think that people who perform well on the TOEFL writing test would also perform well on the writing tasks assigned at my university	1	2	3	4	5
10.7 The TOEFL writing tests involve English writing skills that students at my university will not use	1	2	3	4	5
10.8 The topics on the TOEFL writing test are suitable for students from my country	1	2	3	4	5

10.a. If you have any other comments about your opinion of the TOEFL writing test, please write them here:

--

Section 4: The TOEFL test and writing at University

11. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? <i>please tick (✓) one answer for each statement</i>	strongly agree				strongly disagree
11.1 The TOEFL Question 1: Integrated Writing task is similar to the tasks I am assigned in English language classes at my university	1	2	3	4	5
11.2 The Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion task is similar to tasks I am assigned in English language classes at my university	1	2	3	4	5
11.3 The Question 1: Integrated Writing task reflects writing skills needed for a university course where English is the medium of instruction	1	2	3	4	5
11.4 The TOEFL test writing tasks reflect writing skills needed for a university course where English is the medium of instruction	1	2	3	4	5
11.5 The TOEFL test writing tasks are more difficult than most writing tasks assigned in English language classes at my university	1	2	3	4	5
11.6 The TOEFL writing test is a better test of my English writing skills than the tests of English I have taken at my university	1	2	3	4	5

12. What do you think are the main differences between the writing tasks on this TOEFL test and the kinds of writing tasks you do in English on your university degree course?

Please write your answer here:

13. If you have any other comments you would like to make about the TOEFL writing test, please write them here:

That is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your time and for your answers!

Appendix C: Student Focus Group Discussion Prompts

Before the FGD: Check that the participants are happy to be recorded and have all signed the consent form. Ask your participants what language they prefer to use for the discussion.

- What language do you prefer to use for the discussion?

Note: if needed these prompts can be translated into their local languages

- Tell the students that you are going to talk about their writing in English in two kinds of courses: Business/Engineering Subject courses and the other is courses in English as a subject and on the TOEFL iBT Writing section.

Section 1: English Courses

1. What English courses do you do?
2. What kind of writing do you do in your English courses?
3. What kinds of writing activities are you usually required to undertake as part of your academic assignments/tests/exams on your English Courses?
4. What do you think about the relevance of the writing tasks on your English courses to your needs and interests?

Section 2: subject courses (Business/engineering)

1. Do you do any writing in English in your Business/Engineering courses? If yes, what kinds of writing activities are you usually required to undertake in the course of your studies?
2. What kinds of writing activities are you usually required to undertake as part of your academic assignments/tests/exams in your Engineering /Business courses?
3. What do you think about the relevance of the writing activities in your Engineering /Business studies to your needs and interests?

Section 3: TOEFL

4. How did you find the TOEFL-iBT Writing Questions? (Follow up questions would be: your experience, was it easy/difficult)
5. How would you compare the writing Questions in the TOEFL Writing section and the tasks in your English/writing course of your university? (This may be supplemented by sub-questions on a comparison of the language, content and format of the test and the tasks.)
6. In what respects do you think the TOEFL-iBT Writing Questions are similar to those of the semester/end term (final exam) of the English/writing course of your university?
7. In what respects do you think the TOEFL-iBT Writing Questions are similar to those of the semester/end term (final exam) of the Business/Engineering course of your university?
8. In what ways may the TOEFL-iBT Writing section be suitable for students like you? In what ways may it be NOT suitable?
9. What kinds of challenges, if any, did you face when you took the TOEFL-iBT Writing section?

Appendix D: Teacher Interview Prompts

Before the interview: Check that the interviewee is happy to be recorded and has signed the consent form.

Explain that you are going to show the interviewee some sample TOEFL Writing test material from the recently revised test (Questions and Scoring Guides). Tell them that you will ask them some questions about their teaching and about their views of the TOEFL Writing tasks.

Section 1: English writing instruction

First, I have some questions about the writing assignments you use in your classes

1. What courses in English/writing are offered to undergraduate students at your university?
2. What courses in English/writing have you been teaching at your university? How long have you taught this course/ these courses?
3. What kinds of writing does the English/writing course you teach at your university aim to develop? In other words, what do you want students to be able to do (or do better) in their English writing at the end of the course that they cannot do (or cannot do very well) at the beginning of the course?
4. What kinds of writing activities or assignments do you ask your students to do? How often do you give assignments?
5. Does the course you teach include writing in end-of-term/semester exams? What does this involve?
6. What kinds of writing activities do you think the English/writing course you teach should include in order to meet the writing needs of higher education? Do you think any of the writing tasks on the course are NOT very useful for students?

7. What do you think distinguishes ‘good’ writing from ‘bad’ writing on class assignments/ in end-of-term/semester exams?

[if teachers have few ideas, you might prompt them by asking how far they consider qualities such as grammar, vocabulary, text structure and organisation - paragraphing, cohesion and coherence, length - academic register, use of sources, paraphrase, avoidance of plagiarism]

8. What kinds of scores or grades do you award for writing assignments and end-of-term/semester exams? How do you decide those scores/ grades?
9. Do you have writing assessment/evaluation criteria, rubrics or other guidelines for marking writing on the English/writing course you teach at your university? Are these given to teachers or do teachers make their own? What features or qualities of writing do the rubrics include?

Section 2: TOEFL iBT writing tasks

[Now make sure that the interviewee can see examples of the two TOEFL Writing tasks and that they have time to read through them]

Next, I'd like to ask you about the tasks on the iBT TOEFL Writing section.

10. I have just shown you the new TOEFL-iBT Question 1: Integrated Writing and Question 2: Writing for Academic Discussion tasks. What do you think of the TOEFL-iBT writing Question 1 and Question 2 tasks?
11. How do the TOEFL-iBT Question 1: Integrated Writing and Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion compare to the writing tasks assigned on the English course(s) you teach and to your end-of-term/semester exams?

12. Do you think these TOEFL iBT Question 1 and Question 2 Writing tasks are similar to the class assignments and end-of-term/semester exams on the course(s) you teach?

13. Which writing activities and/or assignments on the English/writing course at your university are most similar to

a) TOEFL-iBT Question 1: Integrated Writing and

b) TOEFL-iBT Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion?

In what ways are they similar?

14. Does your English/writing course include any writing assignments that are very different from these TOEFL-iBT tasks? In what ways are they different?

Section 3: TOEFL iBT writing

[Now make sure that the interviewee can see examples of the two iBT TOEFL Writing rubrics and that they have time to read through them]

Finally, I'd like to talk to you about the rubrics that are used to score the iBT TOEFL Writing tasks.

15. have shown you the rubrics for the TOEFL-iBT Question 1: Integrated Writing and Question 2: Writing for an Academic Discussion tasks. What do you think of these TOEFL-iBT writing rubrics?

16. How do the TOEFL-iBT Writing rubrics compare to the rubrics (or the implicit criteria) you use to score writing on assignments and end-of-term/semester exams on the English/writing courses you teach?

17. Now that you have seen the new TOEFL iBT Writing tasks and Scoring Guides, do you think the TOEFL iBT Writing section would be suitable for use as an entry test for undergraduate (Business / Engineering) courses at your university? Why, or why not?

Suggested Citation:

Green, A., Dawadi, S., Kukulska-Hulme, A., Giri, R. A., Khan, R., & Mahapatra S. (2026). *The relationship between the TOEFL iBT® test and academic writing practices in English-medium universities in South Asia: Case studies from Bangladesh, India, and Nepal* (TOEFL® Research Report No. RR-108). ETS. <https://doi.org/10.64634/3ng15y64>

ETS, the ETS logo, TOEFL, and TOEFL IBT are registered trademarks of Educational Testing Service (ETS). All other trademarks are property of their respective owners.

Find other ETS-published reports by visiting the [ETS Research Report Series website](#) or searching the [ETS ReSEARCHER](#) database.

