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# The influence of the IELTS Speaking test preparation on second language socialization of post-secondary international students in Canada

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

THE INFLUENCE OF THE IELTS SPEAKING TEST PREPARATION ON SECOND  
LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION OF POST-SECONDARY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS  
IN CANADA

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

The study explores international students' experience of their IELTS Speaking test preparation and the second language socialization process in Canada and the relationship between them. This research employs a mixed method as the methodology, with quantitative data collection informing the collection and analysis of the qualitative portion. Quantitative data for this study was collected from 60 international students in Canada, and qualitative data collected from 5 Chinese international students at a large Canadian university in Western Canada. While acknowledging the many criticisms of the IELTS test, the findings of this research shed light on a surprising and, to the best of this researcher's knowledge, previously undiscovered effect: the positive role preparation for the IELTS Speaking test may play in second language socialization.

*Keywords:* second language (L2) socialization, IELTS Speaking test preparation, international students in Canada, challenges

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## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Overview.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Research Perspectives and Philosophical Worldview .....	3
Problem Statement.....	4
Research Questions.....	6
Researcher Interest.....	6
Overview of the Thesis .....	8
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Overview.....	9
International Students in Canada .....	9
Challenges for International Students.....	10
International Students' Utilization of Social Media .....	11
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Second Language Socialization .....	12
Social media in L2 socialization.....	15
IELTS Speaking Test Preparation .....	16
Overview of the IELTS Speaking Test .....	16
IELTS Speaking Preparation.....	19
Connections between the IELTS Speaking Preparation and L2 Socialization.....	22
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology.....</b>	<b>25</b>
Overview.....	25
Research Design.....	25
Quantitative Method .....	26
Survey Pretest .....	26
Survey .....	27
Qualitative Method .....	28
Semi-structured interview .....	28
Timeline .....	31
Chronology of events and procedures. ....	31

Ethical Considerations .....	31
Limitations .....	32
Delimitations.....	33
<b>Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>34</b>
Overview.....	34
Quantitative Survey Analysis .....	34
Data Cleaning .....	34
Survey Data Categorization.....	35
Descriptive Statistics .....	36
Three Types of Questions in the Survey.....	36
Single Choice Questions / Yes or No Questions .....	36
Reliability Statistics. ....	46
Multiple Choice Analysis.....	48
Text-input Analysis .....	52
Qualitative Interview Analysis .....	58
Research Question 1.1 .....	60
Alice .....	60
Bree .....	62
Cherry.....	63
Danny .....	63
Evan.....	63
Research Question 1.2 .....	63
Research Question 1.3 .....	65
Research Question 2.1 .....	67
Research Question 2.2 .....	68
Summary .....	69
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion.....</b>	<b>70</b>
Overview.....	70
Conclusion of Findings.....	70
Discussion.....	71
Participant Characteristics .....	71
Social Media Utilization for IELTS Speaking Test Preparation .....	73
The Influence of IELTS Speaking Preparation on L2 Socialization .....	74

Reflections .....	75
Implications and Further Research .....	75
<b>References .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Appendix A: Survey questions .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Appendix B: Interview Script .....</b>	<b>101</b>

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Overview**

This chapter will begin by introducing several key themes of this research: the place of the IELTS exam as a measure of language proficiency for international students in Canada; second language socialization; and the role of social media in language socialization.

### **Introduction**

International students represent an important part of Canada's development strategy. The Canadian government has modified several policies aimed at attracting more international students to study in Canada since 2009 (Reichert et al, 2020). Kim and Kwak (2019, p.4) state that "the recruitment of international students fits within Canada's social development and nation-building goals". For international students, studying and living abroad offers many benefits. In terms of language learning opportunities, living abroad may afford immersive exposure to a target language, placing international students in an environment where they are much more likely to use and practice it.

Demonstration of proficiency in English is typically required for study in an English-medium institution, given the assumption that certain levels of proficiency are equated with academic success (Murray & Murray, 2015). In Canada, international students studying at English-medium universities are normally required to provide proof of English language proficiency by submitting scores on one of multiple standardized language tests (Johnson & Tweedie, 2021). There are many such tests acceptable for postsecondary admission (e.g., see University of Calgary, 2021; University of Toronto, 2021), but the academic version of the International English Language Test System (IELTS AC) is a popular choice and it measures international students' English language proficiency (ELP) in four modules: reading, listening,



writing and speaking (IELTS, 2020). Though not without its critics (e.g., Pearson, 2019), the IELTS AC is widely used internationally, and exceptionally researched (Green, 2019) from multiple perspectives such as curriculum washback (Allen, 2016; Barnes, 2017; Green, 2007); equivalency (Tweedie & Chu, 2019); predictive validity (Dang & Dang, 2021; Johnson & Tweedie, 2021); and through critical lenses for its disproportionate role as an immigration and educational gatekeeper (e.g., Ahern, 2009; Hamid et al, 2019).

The sheer number of IELTS test-takers worldwide has given rise to a large-scale IELTS test preparation industry (Gan, 2009), with both negative and positive effects. The washback of IELTS to test preparation has shown a narrowing effect on language curriculum (R. Hu & Trenkic, 2019), but at the same time IELTS preparation courses have been shown to help international students to improve their English proficiency as well as improve scores on the subsequent IELTS test (Yang & Badger, 2015).

International students in Canada may also experience language socialization as they are exposed to the forms of language used by English speakers in their host country. Socialization into the target language can occur under various domains and it often includes different kinds of social interactions, in a variety of contexts, such as in-classroom contexts, after school settings, and in virtual online interactions (Duff, 2011).

There are many research studies of second language (L2) socialization, focusing on academic socialization (e.g., oral presentations, academic discourse and writing discourse) (Duff, 2011; Duff & Anderson, 2015; Nam & Beckett, 2011). However, many informal settings, outside of academic contexts, which also include various opportunities for international students to practice English use; these include a wide range of situations like speaking with a restaurant server or friends, which offer the possibility of further development in L2 socialization

(Duff & Surtees, 2018). L2 socialization ability supports international students in adapting their lives to a new academic community as well as the larger environment of the target language country.

The impact of globalization on higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Altbach et al 2010), has been facilitated in part by global electronic communication forms. Especially under the unexpected circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, online communication, and its role in higher education, has come to exceptional prominence (Burns, 2020). As a result, the Internet has become a crucial context for international students to maintain communicative interaction, and thus an increasingly important site for L2 socialization. The use of a variety of social media applications (e.g., Facebook; Twitter; Instagram; etc.) provides more opportunities for international students' social interactions.

### **Research Perspectives and Philosophical Worldview**

As quantitative research helps to extract thoughts and opinions from a group of people via studying a sample of them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and qualitative research support researchers to look for creating a detailed understanding of the problem under a study (Creswell, 2009), the mixed method approach was deemed most appropriate for exploring the influence of the IELTS AC Speaking test preparation in L2 socialization. This research study is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and the combination of the two approaches will be used to explore perspectives from international students in Canada.

My work as a researcher in the field of English language learning was informed and guided by an interpretivist perspective and a constructivist perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 5 international students, and then analyzed in combination with the findings from a previous quantitative questionnaire. Together, these two

methods provided data to understand the influence of the IELTS AC Speaking test preparation on international students' L2 socialization. According to Anglin and Ley (2002), a constructivist view considers that learners are more likely to absorb different things from a class. As well, a constructivist discourse has worked efficiently to explain students' learning process (Gordon, 2009).

Additionally, interpretivism represents the process of understanding meanings and actions, and based on experiences and interactions in what ways people build them (Crotty, 1998). Guided by this interpretivist perspective, the meaning of the IELTS AC Speaking test preparation with respect to how students use these experiences to assist with life in Canada can be explored.

### **Problem Statement**

According to Duff and Talmy (2018), generally speaking, language socialization is a lifelong process and it is not a simple one. With regard to L2 socialization specifically, relevant studies include a wide range of topics. For instance, some L2 socialization research tends to pay attention to purely academic contexts (oral presentations, academic discourse, writing discourse) (Duff, 2011; Duff & Anderson, 2015; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015; Farrell, 2019); while other L2 socialization research aims at exploring particular aspects, such as social interaction, negotiation and peer feedback (Duff & Talmy, 2018).

In particular, international students face challenges in their L2 socialization process when studying abroad; this can include unfamiliar idioms, various accents and different cultural backgrounds (Duff & Anderson, 2015; Malaysia, 2013; Leary, 2012; Ortaçtepe, 2013; Tweedie & Kim, 2016). When students are involved in some intensive IELTS preparation courses before they study abroad, it helps them to realize the importance of spoken English and also helps to

improve in speaking ability (Allen, 2016), and therefore potentially support their L2 socialization in the future. What is underestimated is how previous IELTS Speaking test preparation might impact students' L2 socialization.

Apart from that, little research has been done on L2 speaking socialization under informal settings, except in class (Duff & Anderson, 2015; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2017). Considering the lack of research focus on L2 socialization as well as the need to connect these processes with IELTS Speaking test preparation, a mixed method is well-suited as a tool for this inquiry. In light of the lack of research into L2 socialization in informal settings, both questionnaire and interview were collected.

Semi-structured interviews (Duff & Talmy, 2018) with participants provide details of how international students prepare their IELTS Speaking test and how they have been supported by some of these experiences in Canadian life. Quantitative data collected through a questionnaire will supplement the investigation by providing demographic data on study majors; time spent in Canada; duration of English study, etc.

The questionnaire helped to collect general ideas and thoughts to define open-ended questions or items that can be used to explore further in the follow-up semi-structured interview sessions. Taken together, this qualitative and quantitative data provided researchers with more insights to explore the connection between IELTS Speaking test preparation and international students' L2 socialization in Canada, as well as shed light on some useful strategies that might support them to adapt to life in Canada.

Additionally, the results of this study will inform future researchers, and perhaps other international students in Canada, with real world previous experiences and suggestions about how

students gain benefits from their previous IELTS Speaking test preparation, and how those benefits might be used to support their adaptation to life in a new country.

### **Research Questions**

Through a review of relevant literature on both IELTS Speaking test preparation and L2 socialization, a gap was revealed: little research connects these two topics.

The goal of this present study, then, is to explore how international students' IELTS Speaking test preparation influences their L2 socialization in Canada, by attempting to answer the following two major research questions, and five sub-research questions.

1. Do previous IELTS Speaking test preparation strategies affect international students' L2 socialization in Canada? If so, in what ways?
  - 1.1 What kind of IELTS Speaking preparation strategies have international students used previously?
  - 1.2 How do international students use social media to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test?
  - 1.3 How does IELTS Speaking test preparation support international students' L2 socialization in Canada?
2. According to international students' perspectives of lived experiences in Canada, what will support them in their L2 socialization?
  - 2.1 What are international students' perceptions of L2 socialization in Canada?
  - 2.2 What can they do to improve and enhance their L2 socialization?

### **Researcher Interest**

As a graduate student who majors in language and literacy in Education as well as being an English as a second language (L2) learner myself, I have always been interested in the process of how L2 learners improve their English ability to achieve a satisfying language proficiency

level. Proficiency in English is critical to participate fully in both the University community and Canadian society at large. To be more specific, my research centers on language proficiency tests, which are required of all international students and newcomers to Canada, and specifically the IELTS test.

My thesis research topic considers the role such tests play in helping (or hindering) the language socialization process of international students to life in Canada. This research topic allows me to closely explore two areas of particular interest to me: the learning and teaching of English as an additional language. I have chosen to research the experiences of international students, since they make an important contribution to University life, but are too often kept on the sidelines by limited English language proficiency.

I am an international student myself and this is the third year that I have lived in Canada. I have found that many international students around me are facing challenges in adapting to life in Canada, especially with respect to their spoken English proficiency. They experience difficulties in using English to communicate, to socialize, and to integrate themselves into the local community, although they have already passed language proficiency tests required for university admission. Personally, I had taken the IELTS test four times, and I had been involved in IELTS Speaking preparation for around 1 year.

During my life in my new country, I have been supported by my previous IELTS Speaking preparation experience, as I still keep using some tips or other relevant test preparation things now that I am in Canada. My starting point of conducting this research is based on my own experience and some similar challenges for friends around me. My intention is to explore whether previous IELTS Speaking preparation also helps international students when they just arrive in an unfamiliar English-speaking country.

In my thesis, I also explore the role that social media plays in L2 learners' lives in Canada. The current generation is growing up with various technologies and they are exposed to many types of social media like YouTube or Instagram. If teachers or students could utilize social media in a positive way for language learning and for language test preparation, this would provide an efficient method to improve their English ability.

Overall, I believe my research will shed light on the teaching, learning, and testing of English proficiency, and therefore support a more thorough integration of international students into Canadian universities and society.

### **Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis research is divided into five chapters, drawn upon the “Thesis and Dissertation Rubric” from the Werklund School of Education. In Chapter 1, I introduce the main topic of this research and also provide an overview of important elements which inform the study. In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I examine relevant literature on the major topics in this research. In the Methodology chapter (Chapter 3), an explanation will be provided of the rationale for using mixed methods as the research design; a timeline will be given for conducting the research; ethical considerations in this research will be discussed; and the chapter will conclude by reviewing the limitations of this research. Chapter 4 explains the analyses of the survey and interview data respectively, along with the findings. The final chapter concludes with a discussion of the research and considers some potential implications of the findings.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

Chapter 2 is divided into four major parts below. The first part focuses on the research target population: international students in Canada. Following that, the next section considers previous literature in the area of second language (L2) socialization. The third part of this chapter is related to IELTS test preparation, and the IELTS Speaking test preparation in particular. The final section of Chapter 2 connects the various themes from the literature review as they intersect with this particular study.

### **International Students in Canada**

Currently, Canada has become the most attractive study abroad country only after the United States and Australia (El-Assal, 2020). In 2019, there were more than 640,000 international students in different levels of study in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2020). El-Assal (2020) also pointed out that the number of international students in Canada has increased at a significant fast pace in the past two decades.

Due to the large number of this particular population and the ever-increasing trend, international students in Canada represent an ideal target population for researchers to conduct relevant research. Additionally, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has already promoted a variety of different policies that aimed at encouraging international students from all over the world choose to study in Canadian education institutions, no matter if it is under the COVID-19 pandemic or not.

Universities in Canada (as well as other English-speaking countries) expend considerable effort to attract more international students as it can bring many benefits, such as generating higher revenue (Government of Canada, 2020; Wu et al, 2015). For instance, Pearson (2019)



indicated that international students contributed to a vital source of revenue for many tertiary educational institutions. At the same time, international students gain exposure to new cultures and new ideas, which provides advantages to international students themselves. In addition, the Canadian government views international students as a source of new immigrants, and it has established more than 80 pathways to support international students to become permanent residents in Canada (El-Assal & Thevenot, 2020).

### **Challenges for International Students**

Although international students have already obtained required language scores and passed the language proficiency test before being enrolled in various post-secondary institutions in Canada, they still have the great possibility of facing real life challenges in living in the host country. Li's (2004) research about the exploration of Chinese international students in Canada showed that the academic studies and life are more difficult and complicated than simply passing a language proficiency test. Adding more details to this point, Tweedie and Kim (2016) identified that a perceived feeling of international students is that they have fewer opportunities for authentic social interactions through using English with others, such as native speakers or local students.

A gap exists between what international students have learned in language courses in their home country or during preparation for specific language tests and what they really need to use when they are situated in the target language country. For example, Rajendram et al (2019) pointed out the disconnect between the content in the IELTS Speaking preparation class and the actual speaking tasks they are required to do in university academic classes.

## **International Students' Utilization of Social Media**

Another apparent characteristic of international students, and of the present generation in general, is that they grow up with exposure to the internet and various technologies (Khoshsima, Toroujeni, Thompson, & Ebrahimi, 2019), which exerts great influence on them (Iordache & Lamanuskas, 2013). University students in particular regard social networking websites (SNSs) as an important part of their life (Iordache & Lamanuskas, 2013). Specifically, in the research of Nomura and Yuan (2019) the utilization of Facebook was seen to provide L2 learners an access to the target language (TL) community. Although there is some existing research to discuss how using social media technologies supports international students' life in different countries (Dressler & Dressler, 2016), it is still an area that deserves more research.

## **Theoretical Framework**

According to Duff (2011), L2 socialization is a lifelong but complicated and challenging process for learners. Following Okuda and Anderson (2018), I have utilized L2 socialization as a guiding theoretical framework for this study. I have drawn upon Duff's (2011) definition of L2 socialization (mentioned below in this chapter under L2 socialization sub-heading) as a foundational concept of this research, as this study aims at exploring the relationship between L2 socialization and different contexts, including social media (an online, out-of-classroom community) which does not belong to strictly educational settings. As Duff (2011, p. 580) pointed out, L2 socialization research normally involves "a variety of media" and "a great deal of prior lived experience".

The utilization of a mixed methods research methodology helps to explore the role of IELTS Speaking test preparation in international students' L2 socialization in Canada. According to many L2 socialization related problems faced by international students in target language-

speaking countries and their previous common experiences of IELTS Speaking preparation, the connection between these two issues have potential to support international students in a wider dimension.

### **Second Language Socialization**

Guardado (2018, p.34) pointed out that the language socialization is “the process by which people are socialized both to use the language of their community and to become members of that community”. This definition describes under a series of different contexts how language and culture are learnt by L2 learners. Compared with general language socialization, second language (L2) socialization has a close relation with how in-class and out-of-classroom contexts, as well as how the target language culture impacts social interactions when newcomers try to integrate themselves into the target language community.

Duff (2011) referred to (L2) socialization as:

a process by which non-native speakers of a language, or people returning to a language they may have once understood or spoken but have since lost proficiency in, seek competence in the language and, typically, membership and the ability to participate in the practices of communities in which that language is spoken (p.564).

This process includes several relevant notions, such as foreign language socialization and heritage language learning as well as including many different contexts, online communities and classrooms (Duff, 2011).

Considering the population under study in this present research as mentioned above – international students in Canada - as well as based on the definition of L2 socialization described by Duff (2011), L2 socialization in this research particularly represented the process that international students, also as typical additional language (English) learners in Canada, look for

spoken English improvements and participation or deeper involvement in Canadian life. Overall, this present research aimed at exploring the influence of post-secondary international students' IELTS Speaking preparation experiences (before arriving in Canada) on their L2 socialization when they started living in Canada.

Generally speaking, relevant research that focuses on both international students in Canada and the L2 socialization process is not abundant. Some exceptions are included below, notably Okuda and Anderson's (2018) study. In this section, I will consider the available literature that encompasses these two subjects.

Anderson (2017) explored internal and external academic socialization sources of seven Chinese international PhD students who studied at a Canadian university. Most of them felt less proficient regarding their self-socialization, compared with their “expert-level” peers or classmates. Work as graduate teaching assistants played an important role for these students as it presented possibilities to provide more socialization opportunities. Although the results shows that these students had certain socialization ability to handle real-life situations, they still had problems in other situations, for instance, less social participation in their particular academic departments and even feeling marginalized (expressed by an interviewee).

Regarding L2 academic socialization, Zappa-Hollman and Duff's (2015) research explored three Mexican undergraduate students' socialization in a Western Canadian University . This study supported the notion that students' social network and interactions with others would facilitate the exploration of students' L2 academic socialization process. The results showed that compared with their peers, students' professional teachers, tutors or other people who are at a higher-level position play a less important role in their academic socialization process.

Okuda and Anderson (2018) analyzed three Chinese graduate students' utilization of the writing center in a Canadian university, based on an L2 socialization perspective. In their academic communities, all three participants faced some challenges, whereas the writing center did not provide help as needed. In particular, the writing center was not able to assist students in socializing them into their desired academic literacy practices.

Morita (2004) examined the L2 academic socialization process of international students in a classroom at a Canadian university. According to Morita (2004, p. 586), "most of the focal students tended to be reticent in many of their courses". The results showed that students do face challenges in participating in a discussion under the classroom context, which might be caused by many factors, such as the language, culture and so on. Similarly, after that, Morita (2009) conducted research to explore a doctoral student's L2 academic socialization in Canadian university. One of the participants, Kota, regarded the participation in class as the most difficult part in his doctoral study, and the analysis indicated that insufficient language/English ability was the most challenging barrier for him. In addition, Morita (2009, p.449) pointed out that "socializing with his peers, especially his fellow doctoral students in his department, outside the formal classroom setting was also a challenge for him". Overall, the L2 socialization in both formal classroom settings and other contexts might pose challenges for international students.

Zappa-Hollman's (2007) study, also undertaken in a Canadian university, focused on the role of the academic presentations in students' academic discourse socialization process. Students faced common feelings of challenge in academic presentations and felt disadvantaged when compared with native speaker students, even those with high-proficiency language levels. Apart from that, students were willing to be socialized into the local school community, although

it might have been difficult and time-consuming. The study illustrates the desire that students have for integration into Canadian society, not only the school environment.

Duff (2011) points out that most L2 socialization research focuses more on young children instead of adolescents and adults. Thus, it was crucial to explore this issue specifically in international students in Canada, especially when we considered the large number of this particular population, and obstacles they might face during their studying and everyday life in Canada.

### **Social media in L2 socialization**

Previous research focus on L2 socialization includes a wide range of topics, social media included. Thorne et al (2009, p.14) stated that “what occurs online, and often outside of instructed educational settings, involves extended periods of language socialization, adaptation, and creative semiotic work that illustrate vibrant communicative practices.” In addition, Dressler and Dressler (2016) also indicated that through exploring L2 learners’ utilization of different types of social media, it was possible for researchers to attain a deeper knowledge of international students.

Lee and Ranta (2014) explored ESL students’ utilization of Facebook and their social contact with English speakers in Canada. The result showed that the majority of ESL students used Facebook accounts. Although they did not have a lot of native speaker friends, they still used Facebook in English with others and maintained social connections with them. According to Lee and Ranta (2014, p.39), “Participants who have a higher Facebook intensity score were likely to have engaged in more interaction and therefore more practice”. Thus, the utilization of Facebook brought many benefits to students; in particular, they gained more opportunities to use the target language and socialize with others not only in the classroom, but also after class.

Student participants (73 in number) in Shiri's (2005) research lived in Tunisian Arabic homestays for around eight weeks in length. A surprising phenomenon was that a large number (86%) of them kept in touch with their host families via social media afterwards. It brought up the possibility of the utilization of social media for sustainable interactions through using the targeted language. In addition, Lam (2004) explored Chinese teenagers' L2 socialization in online chat rooms. The results of the research indicated that participation in online chat rooms helped students to make friends and it provided more opportunities with them to communicate with others; participation even made them psychologically braver to socialize with others in English.

Ota's (2011) research of L2 learning of Japanese pointed out that L2 learning via using social networking sites (SNS)s outside the classroom is an underdeveloped area of study, despite the fact of the undeniable popularity of these tools among students. SNS communities related to Japanese language learning were investigated (10 in total), instead of using individuals as the research population. Two SNS were chosen for study, due to their popularity: Facebook and mixi (Ota 2011). This research indicated that L2 learners who started utilizing and joining SNSs were shown to use them as helpful tools to learn and use the targeted L2.

## **IELTS Speaking Test Preparation**

### ***Overview of the IELTS Speaking Test***

The IELTS test is the world's most popular high stakes English language test with over three and half million tests being taken around the world in 2018 (IELTS, 2020), and widely used internationally, with tests conducted in over 140 countries (IELTS Partners, 2017). The IELTS test is predicted to be even more popular in the future as individuals are required to take the IELTS test to prove their English proficiency level all over the world (Pearson, 2019). It is

widely-accepted that if students fulfil the requirement of language proficiency as described by IELTS scores, then students would have at least met the minimum language levels needed for qualified academic performance in English-medium universities in the future academic studies (Murray & Murray 2015).

The academic version of the International English Language Test System (IELTS) measures international students' English Proficiency in four modules: reading, listening, writing and speaking, which plays an important role in making admission decisions for higher education (IELTS, 2020; Gan, 2009).

The Speaking module lasts between 11-14 minutes and is divided into three parts, which is an audio-recorded process. The speaking test consists of an oral interview between the test-takers' and an examiner. According to Karim and Haq (2014, p.152), the format of the three parts of the IELTS speaking test are:

- Phase 1 is an introduction which is carried out in a series of short questions and answers in order to make the candidate comfortable and to develop some familiarity with the candidate. The examiner asks very simple questions about candidates' own self like his/her home, family, country, work, study, interests, etc. For example: "Why did you decide to study Engineering?" "What are some of the most popular drinks in your country?"
- Phase 2 is an individual long turn where the candidate has to speak on a selected topic for 2 to 3 minutes. Each candidate is given a topic and he/she has to talk about it in the form of a monologue in limited time (i.e. 2 to 3 minutes). The object or topic to be described is general in nature like a river, beach or a film, etc.



- Phase 3 comprises a two-way discussion or dialogue between the candidate and the interviewer. It is thematically linked to the topic of the long turn i.e., phase 2.

After the examination, IELTS examiners grade each test taker according to their individual test performance, which includes 4 key criteria: Fluency and Coherence; Lexical Resource; Grammatical Range and Accuracy; Pronunciation respectively. The IELTS Speaking band score are reported on a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 9 (the highest) (e.g., Band 9 = Expert user). Test takers receive four band scores for each criteria and are then awarded a final score calculated from the average scores.

The IELTS test is widely accepted and recognized by schools and universities all over the world, and the Speaking test is well-known as it utilizes the special one-on-one format (IELTS Canada, 2020). In addition, according to Quaid (2018, p.8), “The IELTS speaking sub-test displays strong evidence of high reliability”. The IELTS Speaking test format is special due to the fact that it endeavors to imitate the real conversation happens in real life with various topics. Compared with talking to the computer/machine (e.g., TOEFL Speaking test), the IELTS Speaking test enables test takers to situate themselves in a more realistic environment and they had access to examiners’ body language or eye contact no matter whether it is a face-to-face format or a video-conferencing format.

Seedhouse (2019) explored what role topics play in the IELTS Speaking test. After analyzing topic development, the results indicated that some strategies used by test-takers who achieve high scores have the potential to be used in many other contexts.

Students choose to take the IELTS test for a variety of reasons, educational and immigration purposes included. The IELTS test results can be used as a proof of English ability proof for international students and it plays an important role in helping universities screen

students whether they were capable of academic success in an English-speaking country (e.g., University of Calgary, 2020). In Canada, IELTS test results can also be used as a proof of language ability for students who plan to apply for permanent residence of immigration purposes after they graduate (Government of Canada, 2020; Pearson 2019; Quaid 2018). Even in the workplace, employers sometimes regard higher IELTS test results as an advantage when they need to choose an employee among a variety of candidates (Pearson, 2019).

### ***IELTS Speaking Preparation***

Standardized testing has become popular and test preparation is a billion-dollar industry (Cavanagh, 2015, February,4). In many countries, a “shadow” education system (Zhang & Bray, 2020) which prepares students for academic test success forms a significant part of the national economy. Language test preparation is a crucial part for test takers who decide to use the score to apply for higher educational institutions in the target language country. From another perspective, in some countries, the test preparation industry with regard to high-stakes language proficiency tests, such as the IELTS test and TOEFL test, also has great potential to make profit and is a very already a popular industry (Saif et al, 2019).

Hu and Trenkic (2019) examine the role of coaching as a preparation strategy, and state that “dedicated test-preparation programmes, also known as test coaching, are on offer to candidates who need to pass high-stakes tests” (p. 3). In this research, over half of the study’s participants had been involved in IELTS preparation programs. Besides, participation in test preparation courses have possibilities to bring many benefits to students; as Zahedkazemi (2015, p.1518) stated “Test preparation training is likely to have some effects on test performance”. However, much of the available research literature on IELTS preparation does not focus specifically on the Speaking test; rather, it tends to cover the whole IELTS test (four

components) (Chappell et al 2019; Gan 2009). Relevant research has been conducted using a variety of methods to consider how students were assisted to prepare for the IELTS test, but investigations of test preparation for IELTS Speaking is an area needing further exploration.

Gan (2009) pointed out that participation in IELTS preparation courses is likely to enable students to learn and practice English under many other conditions, including in preparation courses and out-of-class situations. In Yang and Badger's (2015) research, two oral activities in the IELTS Speaking preparation class are included. Students asked and answered questions based on an IELTS Speaking topic or sometimes according to a video they just watched, and one student described a picture and the other reconstructed the picture without seeing it, respectively. Followed by these two activities, teachers gave feedback and students had follow-up discussions (whole-class discussion and small group discussion). The results showed that this type of IELTS Speaking preparation course helped students to develop their confidence in speaking and avoid silence in future academic classes.

Unlike Yang and Badger (2015), Allen (2016) did not mention preparation courses, instead, participants in this study prepared for the IELTS test independently. Especially for the IELTS Speaking preparation, most students were utilizing test preparation materials / resources such as past exam collections, textbooks, and practiced spoken English according to the IELTS Speaking test requirements. From Allen (2016)'s view, another issue that deserved more attention was that taking the initial IELTS test helped students change their preparation method and resulted in more effort on the Speaking module. This was because after taking the first IELTS test, participants realized the importance of practicing and preparing for the productive skills, and they started to have a sense of how to practice spoken English and how to prepare for the Speaking test.

Chappell et al (2019, p.19) in their study used a questionnaire to answer the research question “What do candidates do to prepare for the test?”. Although the survey result did not specifically point out which activity was targeted for the IELTS Speaking test, it showed that the popular preparation activity for students was practice sample tests. Additionally, speaking to fluent English speakers was also chosen by 15.1% respondents. Apart from that, Chappell et al (2019, p. 35) stated “Those who are involved with assisting test-takers to prepare should give more attention to strategies for improving language proficiency in everyday life”.

In a study by Saif et al (2019), Australia and Iran were considered as two contexts of relevance to IELTS test preparation; however, there were important differences between them. In Australia’s context of test preparation, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) focused more on the writing component, taught by teachers whose first language is English, as students have already been exposed to the English in their daily life. For Iran English language institutes, students were taught by teachers who are also English as a second language learners with advanced English proficiency levels.

Similarly, in Gan's (2009) research, a questionnaire was used to explore what kind of strategies were used before students took the IELTS test. Especially in section 4 of the research, learning strategies to practice IELTS test included watching television/movies; listening to radio programs; using IELTS software; and accessing IELTS online resources. Although this research did not point out whether these strategies are used specifically for the IELTS Speaking test, it still shows believe that IELTS test preparation helped them improve their speaking skills in particular.

Issitt (2006) explored three types of non-traditional IELTS Speaking preparation strategies. The first strategy focused on encouraging students to speak and improve their

confidence. The next method paid attention to helping students think from different perspectives and then answering questions. The last strategy was helping students answer IELTS Speaking questions more accurately based on reference to the examination criteria. Overall, these strategies were helpful for students to improve their IELTS Speaking scores, although the sample size was small.

### **Connections between the IELTS Speaking Preparation and L2 Socialization**

The underestimated impact of IELTS preparation is deserving of more exploration by researchers (Gan, 2009), although there has already been some research that investigated this particular area. Former English for Academic Purpose (EAP) students, studied as participants in Tweedie and Kim's (2016) research, showed the perceived needs of students to fit into university social life and have more authentic interactions with local people, which is largely absent in traditional EAP curriculum. Similarly, McmeeKin (2016) pointed out the classroom settings are less likely to include all types of language use or practice. Additionally, Andrew (2012) indicated that having more opportunities for international students to socialize with others leads to a higher level of participation in the local community.

It seems obvious that preparation for the IELTS test inevitably takes improvement in test takers' grades as the first priority (Quaid, 2018), and it might not fulfil students' language needs in all dimensions, nor help them become a more competent member in the TL community outside of the academic community. However, due to the unique face-to-face interview format of the IELTS Speaking test, some preparation has great potential to work supportively for international students to facilitate the L2 socialization process in Canadian society.

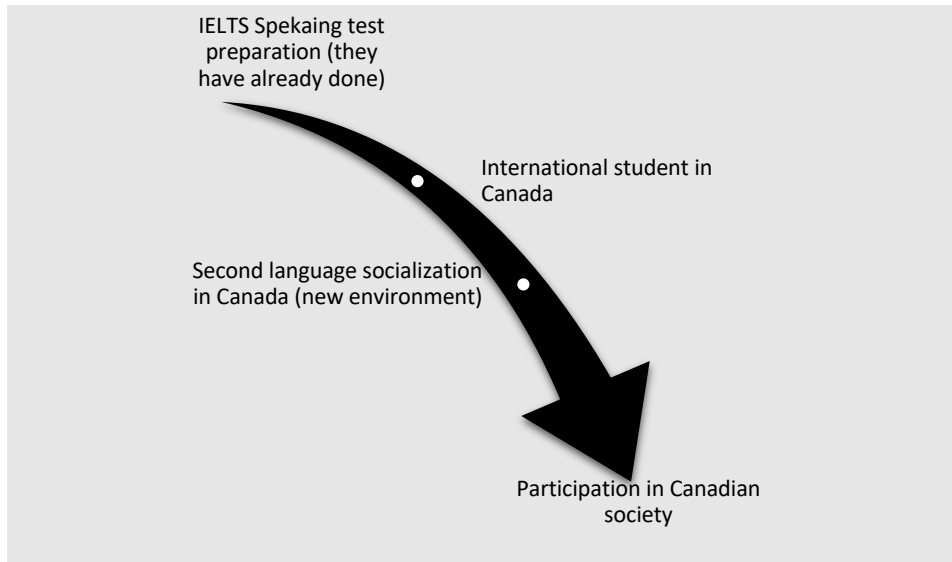
Preparation for the IELTS Speaking component is closely related to practice (Allen, 2016; Yang & Badger, 2015) and some relevant practice could also be used in students' normal

life in the TL community. To be more specific, part 1 of the IELTS Speaking test aims at testing test takers' speaking skills similar to daily normal talk (IELTS, 2020) and these topics are designed to be topics students are more likely to encounter in real life social interaction. Practicing these topics would help test takers both in gaining better performance in the IELTS Speaking test and in socializing well with others in English as spoken in native language countries. Allen (2016) found out that taking the IELTS test leads to the positive washback of productive skills, and speaking language ability in particular, as students pay more attention to it as well as practice more. :Language socialization also includes the process of learning a language (Lam, 2004).

Before international students study abroad in Canada, they have most often already had preparation experiences for the IELTS Speaking test. When they start living and studying in Canada, they normally have opportunities for authentic interactions with others and gain L2 socialization experiences. During this transition process (from home country to an English-speaking country), what they have already learned and how they have practiced in the particular session of the IELTS Speaking preparation might help them to socialize with others in Canada. Being well-prepared for the upcoming L2 socialization means they would be more likely to transition easier to a new life in Canada. It is assumed that most international students' final aim is to integrate themselves into the TL community and have fuller participation in Canada, no matter whether they will go back to their home country or immigrate to Canada after graduation. This research seeks to find the overlap between the IELTS Speaking test preparation and L2 socialization in Canada (See Figures 1 and 2).

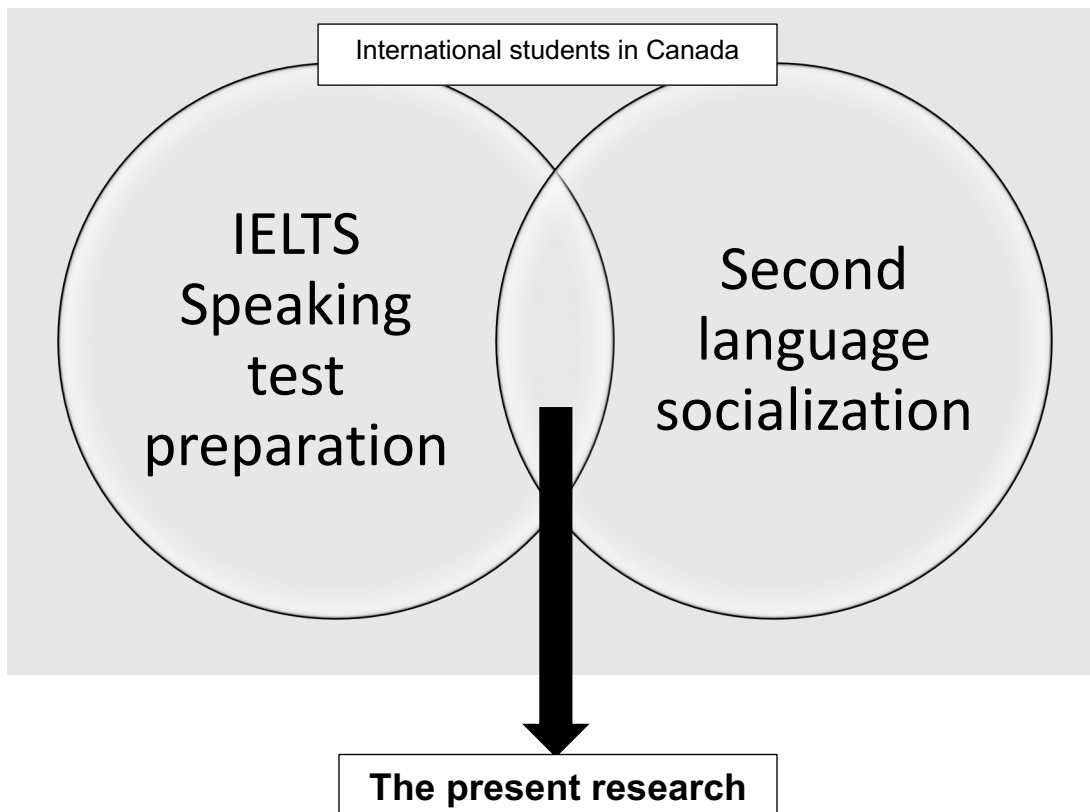
**Figure 1**

*The process of how international students participate in Canadian society*



**Figure 2**

*Present research: identifying areas of overlap between IELTS Speaking test preparation and L2 socialization*



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Overview**

Chapter 3 explains the research design and provides details of the particular methods utilized in carrying out this study. The quantitative method and the qualitative method are explained separately. Following that, the timeline of conducting this research is also listed before the description of the ethical consideration of the research. Finally, the last section discusses limitations and delimitations of the research.

### **Research Design**

A mixed methods approach was selected as the means to explore how the IELTS Speaking test preparation experiences support international students' L2 socialization process. The combination of quantitative methods and qualitative methods could lead to a more integrated result (Bazeley, 2015). In addition, the mixed methods comprises advantages of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, which is an effective way to explain the research problem comprehensively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fetters et al, 2013). The explanatory sequential mixed method design is a popular choice for students to conduct their research mainly because data can be collected separately. As well, when compared with other mixed methods, such as convergent design, the process seems more suitable for an emerging researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Both survey and interview questions were designed based using Wengraf's (2001) framework of Central Research Question (CRQ), Theory Questions (TQs) and Survey/Interview Questions (SQs /IQs), which enables every question to be constructed with a direct connection to the aim of this study. In addition, open-ended questions occur in both the qualitative and



quantitative phases of the research to give more space for survey respondents and interviewees to express their thoughts and ideas.

### **Quantitative Method**

The primary purpose of the survey is to find out whether the IELTS Speaking preparation sessions or experiences have an influence on international students' future life in Canada, academic and daily life included. Choosing the survey as the first phase of the research is helpful to gather quantitative data on the opinions of international students, regarding their previous experiences related to the IELTS Speaking test, and to inform the type of data collection in the subsequent qualitative portion of the research. The data collected in this phase closed at the end of January, 2021. As the pandemic of the COVID-19 coronavirus happened unexpectedly, the researcher created the survey via Qualtrics and then shared the survey link via several social media platforms, such as WeChat, email, International Student Services (at the University of Calgary), Facebook, etc. This allowed the sharing process to be convenient and safe as the researcher did not have physical contact with potential participants. Qualtrics software also has an additional benefit of providing an initial analysis of the data while participants were filling out the survey. Overall, compared with other forms of data collection like the phone call or mail, sharing the survey link through the Internet was more convenient, cheap and less time consuming, as well as the fact that the researcher can check on the collecting process at any time.

### **Survey Pilot**

After finishing the first draft of the survey questions, I asked a friend (an international student who lived in Canada for over 5 years) to do a pilot, an important part of the survey design process (Blair et al, 2014). I sent the survey to this friend, and we texted each other through WeChat while she was completing the survey, so I received on-the-spot feedback. She

pointed out that providing a progress bar or the total number of questions is necessary, as without at least one of these respondents would be unaware of the survey length. Overall, I received helpful feedback and suggestions for improving the survey's clarity.

In addition, during the pre-test pilot phase it was pointed out that I had also used some professional and academic phrases and words unintentionally, like *English speaking proficiency*. I subsequently revised the survey questions to remove such terms. My peer also suggested providing examples for open-ended questions, which might aid respondents to some extent in writing their own answers. She also suggested, with respect to utilizing rank order, that this might not be a suitable method, as is not easy to drag each option for a mobile phone user; I then decided to change the survey to a multiple-choice format, but with some open-ended questions with example responses. Overall, the survey pilot process made me aware of potential problems with the survey. Especially because the pre-tester's major was not related to the field of education, as an outsider to the discipline, her suggestions were particularly useful, and it enabled the survey to be more suitable for other outsiders without backgrounds in education.

## **Survey**

The length of the survey was designed to take 15 minutes or less, as advised by Blair et al (2014). Helpfully, the Qualtrics software provides an estimate of survey response times. In this present study, results of the survey are used to sharpen the focus of the subsequent interview questions. The survey design was based on three main topics (Ts): T1) IELTS Speaking test preparation; T2) L2 socialization experiences in Canada; T3) the utilization of the social media technologies in relation to the IELTS Speaking preparation and the L2 socialization process in Canada. Among those, T1) and T2) are closely related with each other as the aim of the research is to explore how T1) facilitates T2).

This survey included not only close-ended questions, but also some open-ended questions (see Appendix A) as it allowed the researcher to gather unanticipated information (Tweedie, 2013). There were also some questions aimed at gathering basic information before asking questions related specifically to three main topics, following Ortactepe (2011) and Quan (2008).

### **Qualitative Method**

Interviews were conducted with the aim of exploring details about what aspects of IELTS Speaking preparation sessions or methods helped international students adapt (or not) to their lives in Canada. All participants in the interviews were registered in Canadian universities or colleges as international students; as well, they had all had experiences of taking the IELTS Speaking test or preparing for the IELTS Speaking test. Compared with a survey, instead of finding a trend or phenomenon, qualitative interviews are more helpful to reveal specific details of how the IELTS Speaking preparation influences the L2 socialization process of international students. Besides, since there are many kinds of social media and ways to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test, an interview is an effective method to provide clear and relatively comprehensive answers to the research questions.

#### ***Semi-structured interview***

The analysis of the survey results also plays an important role in eliciting crucial information, which helps to design the follow-up interview questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). At the stage of conducting interviews, the design of semi-structured interview questions had to be considered carefully, so as to distribute questions equally among the three main topics (T1, T2, T3).

Gall et al (2006) recommend researchers practice interview skills before conducting formal interviews. Therefore I, as the researcher, practiced relevant skills in two informal

interviews and modified the interview questions accordingly. Being familiar with the Zoom technology, like the process of recording, proved very helpful in conducting the interviews smoothly. I also prepared a script (see Appendix B) which included a self-introduction; basic information for the interview; the consent form; transitions; and other relevant issues to facilitate interviewee clarification of the process. In the interviews, I observed that all interviewees are Mandarin native speakers, like the researcher. All participants had met at least their institution's minimum level of spoken English proficiency, so the interviews conducted in English proceeded relatively effectively.

Overall, the researcher conducted two rounds of interview sessions, as after the first round, she realized there were improvements to be made. At the original planned (first-round) interview session (see summary below), three interviewees volunteered to participate. One interviewee, while a Canadian permanent resident, had remained in China because of the COVID-19 situation. Although this participant has already been admitted by a Canadian university before the interview session, he was an international student without living experience in Canada. It meant that this participant was not directly suited for the present research, so this interview was not included in the data.

*Excluded first-round interview data summary*

Number	Included in data analysis	Reason
No.1 interviewee	No	No living experience in Canada
No. 2 and No. 3 interviewees	No	Less information input for this research

Also, in the first round, two other interviewees who had responded to an invitation call for participation were both international students who had come from China and were living in Canada at the time of the interview. However, it was noticed that during the interview session, interviewees were unintentionally talking or sharing experiences and opinions that were not related to the thesis topic. For instance, they would share thoughts about the IELTS Listening test experience, which was not related to this research. As an interviewer, the researcher asked questions restricted to the IELTS Speaking test, but these topic shifts continued regardless.

Because of the limited number of interviewees as well as the fact that I had gained useful interview skills from a MITACS internship, the researcher decided to reconduct interviews in a subsequent second round to collect more information from international students, and to use the improved interview skills.

Enhancements for the second round of interview sessions were done in several important aspects. First of all, because of the sequence of quantitative survey data collection and analysis, it was important that the interviews be informed by quantitative data analyzed after the first round of interviews, keeping in mind that interview questions aided in answering research questions as well as help to gain more details. In addition, the researcher learned in the first round that the organization of the interview questions could be made clearer, and that interviewees needed to be reminded to limit responses on test experiences to specifically the IELTS Speaking test; this enabled efficiency in qualitative data analysis and more thorough alignment with the research focus.

After the first round, NVivo analysis was very time-consuming, since the responses were often off-topic from the central research questions, thus taking a long time to read and categorize each utterance. Clearer organization of interview questions for the second round made analysis

much less time-consuming. Additionally, I ensured that each question related to IELTS drew the respondents' attention specifically to the Speaking component, so as to avoid collecting some irrelevant information. So that the details of the interview were still fresh, in the second round I began checking transcriptions and at the same time planning and scheduling the next interview.

### **Timeline**

The methodology (mixed methods) was discussed and decided with the academic supervisor between September 2019 and December 2020. The ethical application was drafted in March 2020 and approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) on May 28, 2020. The survey was sent out in June 2020 and survey data collection stopped in January 2021. The interview sessions were conducted and completed in March 2021.

### ***Chronology of events and procedures.***

- May 2020: CFREB research ethics approval granted
- June 2020: survey conducted
- October 2020: initial interviews conducted
- January 2021: survey data collection and analysis completed
- February 2021: decision to re-conduct interviews was made
- March 2021: second round of interviews conducted
- March 2021: interview data collection and analysis completed

### **Ethical Considerations**

The survey begins with a consent by specific action screen, where clicking on an *Agree* button grants consent and begins the survey. The anonymous survey presents a series of questions, both closed and open-ended for participants to complete. An invitation at the end of the survey invites non-compulsory participation in a follow-up interview; participants who

complete the survey but opt not to participate in the second stage just leave the last question section blank, and those who wish to join this second stage of data collection are invited to provide an email address. With respect to the interviews, only the student researcher knows the identity of the interviewee, and even then, in Zoom sessions camera use was not mandated.

Before beginning the interview, confidentiality procedures were explained to each participant as part of the consent process. Participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview that the data is confidential, and that transcription of the data will have any identifying information removed. In order to protect the identity of each research participant, all names used in this thesis and any future presentation of the findings are pseudonyms. Besides, as the student researcher is also an English as a second language speaker, there is the potential to put participants at ease more so than in the case of a native English speaker.

With regard to withdrawal data from the research study, the survey consent screen made clear that while those who completed the questionnaire could no longer withdraw data, in the actual process of the survey, all participants were free to discontinue at any time. With the interview, the consent form made clear that participants were free to stop the interview at any point or refuse to answer any or all questions. Even if they completed the interview, but then later decided to withdraw their participation, they could do so by emailing the student researcher, and their interview would no longer be considered as data for the research study.

The ethical processes as described here were approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB), University of Calgary, before proceeding with the research.

### **Limitations**

Although utilizing mixed methods leads to a variety of benefits, it also brings several limitations. The researcher has to be familiar with both quantitative and qualitative methods as

well as this type of research costs more time in collecting or analyzing the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since the ideal population of the survey session is international students in Canada, the researcher used the snowball sampling strategy to share the survey link via personal social networks. Interview participants are all Chinese international students in Canada. While a limitation, there are also some advantages to this, which will be explained in more detail in the conclusion and discussion of Chapter 5.

Another limitation is that survey participants were not forced to answer each survey question, in that the researcher's intention was to ease the pressure of answering all questions, and therefore gain a better overall completion rate. However, some questions were not answered by over half of the survey participants, especially open-ended questions or those questions that required text-input from participants. As in any survey research, participants' responses such as length of responses or their willingness have the possibility to be influenced by their mood, which can be considered as a limitation.

### **Delimitations**

The advantage of conducting an explanatory sequential mixed methods design is that qualitative interview data collection is based on the quantitative survey results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In my research, after analyzing survey data, I designed the follow-up interview questions to ask and collect more relevant information. This delimitation complemented the study's focus on gaining depth and breadth of participants' experiences.



## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

### Overview

This chapter will explain the process by which both quantitative survey and qualitative interview data were analyzed. First, I present the initial data cleaning step for the quantitative survey. After that follows an explanation of the kinds of method used to analyze survey data. Then, survey questions are divided into three major types for explanation, and initial results are provided. Following that, analysis of interview transcripts (using NVivo) is presented, with interview data organized according to each research question and sub-question. Finally, a brief chapter summary is provided, accompanied by a preview of Chapter 5.

### Quantitative Survey Analysis

#### *Data Cleaning*

After receiving survey responses, the first step was to clean the raw data. Overall, there were 84 survey responses; however, some invalid responses were also included. Before importing the raw data into the SPSS software (Version 26), most invalid responses were removed (Eagar, 2019). For instance, one respondent chose *no* for the instruction question (Q0). This response was removed as the respondent did not provide any information for the research topic. For question 4 (Q4), valid answers were limited to numbers only, so some answers were removed as respondents provided some invalid responses like Chinese characters, or English alphabetic characters. For Q8, one answer given was *I never live in Canada*, which did not meet the research topic's inclusion criteria (language socialization of international students living in Canada), so this question response was removed. In addition, some answers for Q8 (*How long have you lived in Canada?*) were deleted as participants provided invalid or unclear numerical input such as 29, and 1733. Similarly, for Q9 and Q10 (querying length of stay in third countries,

other than their home country or Canada), some answers provided unclear or irrelevant information and so these were removed before analysis.

Some questions asked respondents to provide “Other (please specify)” choices; however, only a few participants selected this option or provided text input. Considering that the SPSS software is intended primarily to analyze questions that require single choice input, “Other (please specify)” answers were subsequently re-categorized by the researcher. For example, since some text input for Q2 included no more than 10 extra countries; the researcher decided to add these countries to the choice list and remove “Other (please specify)”. Similarly, for text input of Q6, Q7, Q8, Q10, Q11 and Q12, these answers were categorized again and re-formed as new selection choices instead of text input answers.

### ***Survey Data Categorization***

After these procedures were taken in cleaning the raw data, there remained a total of 60 valid responses, which were then considered for analysis. As the researcher’s specialization is in educational research, without a background in statistical analysis, it was necessary to seek help and consult with others with more expertise. Via e-introductions from the researcher’s supervisor, the researcher had chances to discuss survey data analysis with two colleagues who possess expertise with SPSS (see next section).

For particular types of questions and answers such as multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions, it was not suitable to use SPSS for analysis. The researcher decided to analyze these types of answers using an Excel file format. Removing invalid answers for these two types of questions was the first step: where respondents chose “Other (please specify)” but did not provide more information (such as in Q17, Q20, Q21 and Q29), these responses were removed.

## ***Descriptive Statistics***

To ensure the researcher utilized survey data in an appropriate way and gained enough valuable information, it was necessary to consult and discuss the survey analysis process with colleagues more proficient with the use of SPSS. Dr. Kim Koh (University of Calgary) and Shimeng Liu (University of Calgary) agreed to provide suggestions through consultation. Through these consultations, the researcher identified a limitation of the survey: limits to the amount of information for analysis directly related to L2 socialization; and due to the fact that there were various types of questions, it was difficult to run tests such as a T-test.

The consultative sessions highlighted the importance of focusing on the interview sessions as a way of further fleshing out the data gained from the quantitative survey. Considering the number of valid participant responses (60), and the fact that each question did not require a mandatory response from participants (e.g., only 26 participants provided answers for Q23), it was decided that descriptive statistics were most suitable for inclusion in this research (Hanson, 2013).

### **Three Types of Questions in the Survey**

#### ***Single Choice Questions / Yes or No Questions***

First of all, the researcher decided to run basic frequency tests to gain an overview of single choice questions, regarding international students' thoughts and opinions on IELTS Speaking preparation as well as their L2 socialization process. A total of 16 single-choice questions were analyzed using SPSS. After data cleaning, all participants identified as non-English native speakers (60/60; see Table 1), consistent with the target research population, international students in Canada. In this next section, selected features of the data will be presented in table form, accompanied by explanatory information.

**Table 1***Non-English Native Speakers Participants*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	60	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 2***Percentage of Participants' Home Country*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	0	0	0
	Bangladesh	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	China	28	48.3	48.3	50
	Colombia	1	1.7	1.7	51.7
	France	16	27.6	27.6	79.3
	India	2	3.4	3.4	82.7
	Iran	1	1.7	1.7	84.4
	Pakistan	2	3.4	3.4	87.8
	Russia	1	1.7	1.7	89.5
	South Korea	1	1.7	1.7	91.2
	Turkey	1	1.7	1.7	92.9
	United States	1	1.7	1.7	94.6
	Venezuela	2	3.4	3.4	98
	Vietnam	1	1.7	1.7	99.7
	Total	58	100.0	100.0-0.5%	

Table 2 describes survey participants' home country information ( $n=58$ ). Around half (48.3%) of the respondents were Chinese international students; this might be due to the fact that

the researcher herself is Chinese and her personal social network – used for snowball sampling - is largely comprised of Chinese international students.

**Table 3**

*Frequency of speaking English in home country*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	0	0	0
	Always	4	6.9	6.9	6.9
	Frequently/often	10	17.2	17.2	24.1
	Hardly ever/rarely	11	19	19	43.1
	Never	5	8.6	8.6	51.7
	Occasionally	10	17.2	17.2	68.9
	Seldom	7	12.1	12.1	81
	Sometimes	11	19	19	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 describes the frequency of speaking English in participants' home countries. 19% of them indicated they rarely spoke English, whereas 17% of them also mentioned that they often speak English in their home country.

**Table 4***Length of stay in Canada*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	17	0	0	0
	1 year and under 2 years	8	18.6	18.6	18.6
	2 years and over	20	46.5	46.5	65.1
	3 months and 6 months	1	2.3	2.3	67.4
	6 months and 1 year	9	20.9	20.9	88.3
	Under 3 months	5	11.6	11.6	100.0-0.1%
	Total	43	100.0	100.0	

According to Table 4/question 8, nearly 50% of survey respondents had lived in Canada for over 2 years. The advantage of this relative to the research questions in this study was that their life experience or English socialization in Canada was of sufficient length; however, a disadvantage was that it had been a quite long time since their last IELTS (Speaking) exam.

**Table 5***Living in other English-speaking countries (except Canada)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	46	0	0	0
	Australia	1	7.1	7.1	7.1
	Japan	1	7.1	7.1	14.2
	Korea	1	7.1	7.1	21.3
	Singapore	1	7.1	7.1	28.4
	UK	3	21.4	21.4	49.8
	United States	6	42.9	42.9	92.7

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Vietnam	1	7.1	7.1	100.0-0.2%
Total	14	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows participants' previous living experience in other English-speaking countries. It can be seen that the United States was a popular choice for international students and 6 participants went to this English-speaking country before coming to Canada.

**Table 6**

*IELTS Speaking test score*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	12	0	0	0
	4.5	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
	5	2	4.2	4.2	6.3
	5.5	4	8.3	8.3	14.6
	6	5	10.4	10.4	25.0
	6.5	11	22.9	22.9	47.9
	7	12	25.0	25.0	72.9
	7+	10	20.8	20.8	93.7
	I haven't taken IELTS	3	6.3	6.3	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 reveals survey respondents' previous IELTS Speaking test results, and it can be seen that most of them achieved over Band 6 (68.7%). This phenomenon might be because international students need to achieve certain scores before being admitted to Canadian institutions, and Bands 6 or 6.5 are widely-used admission cut scores (Tweedie & Chu, 2019). In

addition, it is also worth noting that that 3 of the survey respondents (6.3%) indicated they had not sat for the IELTS test before.

**Table 7**

*Fluent in English (self-evaluated)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	0	0	0
	No, I cannot speak fluently.	9	15.5	15.5	15.5
	To some extent.	24	41.4	41.4	56.9
	Yes, I can speak fluently.	25	43.1	43.1	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 illustrates that a majority of participants (84.5%) believed they can speak English fluently or to some extent. Only 9 survey takers thought they could not speak English fluently.

**Table 8**

*Students' post-secondary institutions*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	9	0	0	0
	College	2	3.9	3.9	3.9
	English Training Agency	1	2.0	2.0	5.9
	Language school	1	2.0	2.0	7.9
	University	47	92.2	92.2	100.0+1%
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	



**Table 9***Level of students' study*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	19	0	0	0
	Master's student	19	46.3	46.3	46.3
	PhD student	8	19.5	19.5	65.8
	Undergrad alumni	1	2.4	2.4	68.2
	Undergraduate student	13	31.7	31.7	100.0-0.1%
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	

**Table 10***Students' major*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	9	0	0	0
	Arts	6	11.8	11.8	11.8
	Business	8	15.7	15.7	27.5
	Children childhood youth	1	2.0	2.0	29.5
	Economics	1	2.0	2.0	31.5
	Education	12	23.5	23.5	55.0
	Engineering	16	31.4	31.4	86.4
	Medicine	1	2.0	2.0	88.4
	Science	5	9.8	9.8	98.2
	TESL	1	2.0	2.0	100.0+0.2%
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Most participants (92.2%) are university students, as shown in Table 8. Among those, nearly 50% are master’s degree students (see Table 9). Students have different majors; 31.4% indicated an Engineering major, while 23.5% of them major in education (see Table 10).

**Table 11**

*IELTS Speaking preparation helps spoken English*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	15	0	0	0
	No	12	26.7	26.7	26.7
	Yes	33	73.3	73.3	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

When asking participants whether they believe IELTS Speaking preparation helps improve their spoken English, over half (73.3%) of them held positive attitudes toward it (see Table 11).

**Table 12**

*IELTS preparation helps one become a part of Canadian society outside of the classroom*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	15	0	0	0
	No	21	46.7	46.7	46.7
	Yes	24	53.5	53.5	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Almost the same number of participants held positive attitudes as held negative attitudes towards the statement: “IELTS preparation helps become a part of Canadian society outside of the classroom”, 24 (53.5%) and 21(46.7%) respectively (see Table 12).

**Table 13***Use social media as part of IELTS Speaking preparation*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	17	0	0	0
	No	16	37.2	37.2	26.7
	Yes	27	62.8	62.8	100.0
	Total	43	100.0	100.0	

Table 13 illustrates that more than 60 percent of participants had used social media to prepare for their IELTS Speaking test. To explore this issue in detail, more questions were designed for the follow-up interview session which asked about students' utilization of social media to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test.

**Table 14***Social media utilization on a daily basis to help prepare for the IELTS Speaking test*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	33	0	0	0
	1 hour and under 1.5 hours	7	25.9	25.9	25.9
	1.5 hour and under 2 hours	4	14.8	14.8	40.7
	2.5 hour and under 3 hours	1	3.7	3.7	44.4
	30 minutes and under 1 hour	8	29.6	29.6	74
	Under 30 minutes	7	25.9	25.9	100.0-0.1%
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

For the length of time social media was used to prepare for the Speaking test, under 1.5 hours per day was common for students (81.4%). The same number of participants chose “under 30 minutes” and “1 hour and under 1.5 hours”: 25.9%.

**Table 15**

*Using social media has a positive influence in your life in Canada*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	34	0	0	0
	No	1	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Yes	25	96.2	96.2	100.0
	Total	26	100.0	100.0	

Only 1 participant believed that using social media influenced their life in Canada in a negative way. According to Table 15, 96.2% participants agree with the idea that using social media has a positive influence in their lives in Canada.

**Table 16**

*IELTS Speaking preparation strategies are helpful in your daily life in Canada*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	19	0	0	0
	No	14	34.1	34.1	34.1
	Yes	27	65.9	65.9	100.0
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	

More participants held positive attitudes towards the notion that IELTS Speaking preparation strategies supported their daily life in Canada (see Table 16).

*Reliability Statistics.*

**Table 17**

*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.799	16

Single choice questions in the survey had acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .799, illustrated in Table 17.

Descriptive analysis for 16 single choice questions were used to collected basic personal information and opinions of survey respondents. There were a total of 60 survey respondents; however, they were not forced to answer every question. Question 2 to 10 collected respondents' basic personal information.

Overall, nearly half of respondents were international students coming from China. In their home country, they speak English at quite different frequencies: over 60% of participants speak English in their home country occasionally or more. Around 50% of participants have lived in Canada for more than 2 years. 47 respondents are studying in Canadian universities and 19 participants are master students. 16 respondents majored in engineering and 12 in education. 38 respondents achieved over Band 6 in the IELTS Speaking test. When asked about their spoken English ability, 24 of them believed they could speak fluently to some extent and 25 of them thought they could speak fluently. Only 14 participants mentioned they have stayed in other English-speaking countries and 9 of them pointed out that they went to the United States before coming to Canada.

Question 11 to 16 were designed to ask respondents' opinions related to their IELTS Speaking preparation, social media utilization, as well as life in Canada. 33 respondents believed

that IELTS Speaking preparation was helpful for their spoken English. 27 ( $n=41$ ) participants held positive attitudes towards the idea that IELTS Speaking preparation strategies supported their daily life in Canada. In addition, 24 respondents agreed that IELTS preparation helped them to become a part of Canadian society outside of the classroom.

23 respondents did use social media as part of their IELTS Speaking preparation; as well over 80% ( $n=27$ ) respondents used social media under 1.5 hours per day in their Speaking test preparation. Surprisingly, only 1 ( $n=26$ ) respondent did not think social media utilization had a positive influence on their life in Canada.

**Table 18**

*Single choice question information*

Number	Role	Table name
1.	Screen	Non-English Native Speakers Participants
2.	Basic info	Percentage of Participants' Home Country
3.	Basic info	Frequency of speaking English in home country
4.	Basic info	Length of stay in Canada
5.	Basic info	Living in other English-speaking countries (except Canada)
6.	Basic info	IELTS Speaking test score
7.	Basic info	Fluent in English (self-evaluated)
8.	Basic info	Students' post-secondary institutions
9.	Basic info	Level of students' study
10.	Basic info	Students' major
11.	Opinion	IELTS Speaking preparation helps spoken English
12.	Opinion	IELTS preparation help become a part of Canadian society outside of the classroom
13.	Opinion	Use social media as part of IELTS Speaking preparation
14.	Opinion	Social media utilization on a daily basis to help prepare for the IELTS Speaking test

Number	Role	Table name
15.	Opinion	Using social media has a positive influence in your life in Canada
16.	Opinion	IELTS Speaking preparation strategies are helpful in your daily life in Canada

### ***Multiple Choice Analysis***

After the consultation with another professional in analysis as well as the rough screening of survey results by the researcher herself, data analysis for extra text input was analyzed by using Excel and various ways of categorization. The most difficult part of the spoken English was lack of confidence for students (see Table 18). Besides, idioms and slang were two communication barriers mentioned as issues from participants.

**Table 19**

### *Difficult part of spoken English*

	Grammar	Pronunciation	Oral vocabulary	Lack of self-confidence	Lack of motivation	Idioms / slang
Frequency counts	18	10	28	40	8	3

According to Table 20 (Q12), 29 participants had prepared for the IELTS Speaking test by themselves. The second popular choice for them was taking IELTS preparation courses, as 18 of them chose this option. Nearly the same number of students had used paid tutors (12) and English for Academic Purposes courses (10) to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test.

**Table 20***Engaged in what kind of IELTS Speaking preparation strategies?*

	Self-preparation	Paid tutors	IELTS preparation courses	English for Academic Purposes courses	Talk with native speakers	Marketing
Frequency counts	29	12	18	10	1	1

Question 14 asked for participants' opinions on how IELTS Speaking test preparation strategies bring benefits to their speaking English ability. Half of participants believed that these strategies provided them with more opportunities to practice their spoken English. In addition, it also helped them to become more confident (20) and to learn skills from others (18; see Table 21).

**Table 21***IELTS Speaking test preparation brings what kind of benefits to Spoken English?*

	Providing more opportunities to practice/talk	Could get feedback from others	Learn skills from others	Making me more confident	Only for test purpose	None	Speaking time management
Frequency counts	30	16	18	20	1	1	1

**Table 22***IELTS Speaking preparation helps become a part of Canadian society outside of the classroom*

	Self-preparation	IELTS preparation courses	EAP courses	Paid tutors	Social media technologies	Meet-ups	Practice with native speakers
Frequency counts	18	11	2	7	11	1	1



IELTS preparation strategies which helped participants become a part of Canadian society outside of the classroom was asked (Q16) in the survey. Like Q12/Table 22, self-preparation was the most frequent choice selected by participants, which was chosen 18 times. IELTS preparation courses and utilization of social media technologies were each mentioned 11 times by students (see Table 20). As shown in Table 23, 20 students believed that these strategies helped them most when traveling.

**Table 23**

*Out-of-class settings that IELTS test preparation has helped you in*

	When I am traveling	In a shopping mall	In a supermarket	In a restaurant	Socialize with native speakers
Frequency counts	20	10	9	7	1

**Table 24**

*What kind of social media help you prepare for the IELTS Speaking test*

	Instagram	YouTube	Facebook	Twitter	Weibo
Frequency counts	8	22	9	1	1

Table 24 described what kind of social media technologies helped students prepare for the IELTS Speaking test. YouTube was the most commonly used social media, which was utilized by 22 participants. Around the same number of participants had used Facebook and Instagram: 9 and 8 respectively. Twitter and Weibo were also mentioned by participants.

**Table 25***How do you use social media to prepare the IELTS Speaking test?*

	Expand personal social networks	Engage in social activities	Know more oral expressions	Exam tips from others
Frequency counts	10	5	18	1

Table 25 illustrated ways participants make use of these social media technologies to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test. 18 participants believed social media helped them to know more oral expressions, while 10 participants thought social media supported them to expand their social networks. 5 participants believed that social media helped them to engage in social activities; however, only 1 participant mentioned that it helped them to get exam tips from previous test takers.

**Table 26***IELTS test preparation helps you to socialize with whom?*

	Friends	Classmates	Instructors	No socialization involved
Frequency counts	19	20	21	1

Table 26 shows that nearly the same number of participants (20) think IELTS test preparation strategies help to socialize with instructors, classmates and friends. 1 participant disagreed, pointing out that there is no socialization involved.

**Table 27***IELTS test preparation strategies helpful in what occasions?*

	No	None of these	Team meetings	Establish social networks	Maintain relationships with peers	Follow tips from previous test takers
Frequency counts	2	1	18	14	17	1

Table 27 described participants' opinions of the occasions in which IELTS test preparation strategies were helpful. Two popular choices were in team meetings and maintaining relationships with peers. However, there were two students who choose *no*.

**Table 28**

*Multiple choice question information*

Number	Table Title
1.	Difficult part of spoken English
2.	Engaged in what kind of IELTS Speaking preparation strategies
3.	IELTS Speaking test preparation brings benefits to Spoken English
4.	IELTS Speaking preparation helps become a part of Canadian society outside of the classroom
5.	IELTS test preparation has helped you in out-of-class settings
6.	Social media help you prepare for the IELTS Speaking test
7.	How do you use social media to prepare the IELTS Speaking test
8.	IELTS test preparation helps you to socialize with whom
9.	IELTS test preparation strategies helpful in what occasions

***Text-input Analysis***

For questions requiring participants to provide their own text input (forced responses were not used), the researcher decided to list them out as no more than 20 participants typed their opinions for each question. After cleaning the text input data, which included the use of Excel, invalid or inaccurate information was removed. During this process, the researcher used Excel to help organize and extract frequently mentioned reasons, as there were less text inputs and the utilization of the Excel software made the process more efficient.

Following are five Tables: Table 29 to 33, providing all text input from participants. According to Table 29, 10 respondents provided text input, and the common reason listed with

respect to how IELTS Speaking test preparation helped them outside of the classroom was that they had more opportunities to use English and communicate with others.

**Table 29**

*How IELTS Speaking test preparation has helped participants outside of the classroom*

List number	Reasons from participants
1.	Communicate with foreigners* <sup>1</sup>
2.	Speak more
3.	Watch plays
4.	Travelling to Europe and North America has helped me observe and better understand diversity and adjust my content accordingly.
5.	I have improved the quality of my usages of English language in my academic purposes. Besides, it helps to communicate with others.
6.	Everyday errands
7.	Gives me a lot of chance to use the language. Wide range of topics in the test ensure that I can cover all the actual communication needs when I'm in Canada.
8.	Find the key point when taking the lecture
9.	Making me life easier after I learned IELTS outside my country
10.	Built confidence and acquired some useful expressions which help me in classroom discussion or daily talking more or less

Table 30 describes what kind of benefits respondents thought the utilization of social media brought for their spoken English. Similarly, participants also frequently mentioned that social media gave them more communication opportunities with others. In addition, they also learned English from native speakers through social media, such as slang.

<sup>1</sup> \*Participants' statements are written as provided, without editing for grammar.

**Table 30***Social media brings what kind of benefits to your spoken English?*

List number	Reasons from participants
1.	Learning slang terms from native speaker
2.	Know a lot of local culture
3.	Provide more opportunities
4.	Connect my classmates
5.	a. Familiarize me with the idiomatic language & enrich my day-to-day vocabulary. b. Provide more opportunities to engage in social activities with the speakers whose first language is English (esp. the Canadian English variety).
6.	It helps me to connect more people so my communication circle has been increased. Because of that my communication skill has been improved, which makes me more confident in developing my soft skills.
7.	In most cases social activities involve public speaking with others which helps you gain more confidence and fluency
8.	Learn English use based on different contexts
9.	Real communication with English speakers
10.	I got a better knowledge of how real natural conversations look like
11.	More chance to communicate with native speakers, and more chance to get the slangs, vocabularies, and social manners
12.	Provide more opportunities to engage in social activities.
13.	Know about how to express English like a native person

Table 31 illustrates respondents' opinions of how IELTS Speaking preparation strategies aid their daily life in Canada. That IELTS Speaking preparation strategies helped them know how to speak politely was mentioned twice; similarly, one participant also mentioned s/he learned manners.

**Table 31***In what ways do IELTS Speaking preparation strategies help you in your daily life in Canada?*

List number	Reasons from participants
1.	They help me to know how to speak naturally
2.	Speak relaxed and confident
3.	They help me to know how to speak politely with supervisor
4.	They help me to know how to speak politely with others
5.	Manners, pronunciation
6.	Shopping
7.	Helped me control the length of my speech & better manage my speaking time.
8.	Communicating in university with friends, teachers and in market also.
9.	Know how to ask for addresses, information, buying stuff at the supermarket or pharmacy
10.	Know about the culture
11.	Helping me learn that making sense is the primary goal for communication

Table 32 shows how respondents think IELTS test preparation helps them to socialize with others. There are several popular reasons given here, such as being more confident, learning how to start or maintain a conversation, as well as learning of some daily expressions.

**Table 32***In what ways IELTS test preparation help students to socialize with others*

List number	Reasons from participants
1.	More confident to chat
2.	During group work
3.	I talk with others just like I practiced in class before.
4.	Be brave to start a conversation
5.	Answer question in class
6.	More academic expressions that makes my English more formal

List number	Reasons from participants
7.	By managing my speaking time better, making it crisp and concise!
8.	I realized how should I approach to any person with confidence.
9.	In class I learned the basics to engage a conversation with others
10.	Talk in systematic way with proper grammar
11.	Provide some speaking resources
12.	Group and project discussions
13.	I can talk in a more logical and organized way
14.	My English turned more fluent and I have more confidence when communicating
15.	It helps for interviews
16.	Apply the words and express I learned in IELTS into real life
17.	To make my language more fluent without repetition

Table 33 describes how IELTS test preparation strategies were helpful on some occasions (mentioned in Q27- a multiple choice question). Some respondents mentioned that similar topics they have practiced during IELTS test preparation could be used in real life. It was also mentioned that IELTS test preparation helped them become more confident and provide them more communication opportunities.

**Table 33**

*How IELTS test preparation strategies helpful in these occasions*

Number	Reasons from participants
1.	The preparation helped me less stressful.
2.	Easier to make friends
3.	Make me feel more confident while I introduce myself to other students
4.	I have done practice and it makes me relaxed
5.	I have done some similar practice and it makes me feel less stressful.
6.	Communicate with team members

Number	Reasons from participants
7.	Talk with friends
8.	I gather and practice with people
9.	I followed the tips given by the people who had already taken the test - taking a mental note of the important tips & following them. (I never rehearsed or practice speaking English for the IELTS exam)
10.	Team meeting is a good place for getting tested on my skill so the feedback from other members help me to improve my skill.
11.	I always try to practice with my other non-English speakers friends so we can all improve.
12.	Doing projects with peers
13.	Part 3 of IELTS speaking is basically alike discussions in class. Now, I feel at ease talking to people in class
14.	I am more familiar with pattern of thinking of native speakers when practice with native speakers I know when I was preparing for IELTS
15.	Practice with native speakers will be helpful.
16.	The situation is same between in book and in reality
17.	Make me sound more professional

Overall, Table 34 below showed all five text-input question information, which included the titles of five tables.

**Table 34**

*Text-input question information*

Number	Table Title
1.	How IELTS Speaking test preparation has helped participants outside of the classroom
2.	Social media brings what kind of benefits to your spoken English
3.	In what ways do IELTS Speaking preparation strategies help you in your daily life in Canada



Number	Table Title
4.	In what ways IELTS test preparation help students to socialize with other
5.	How IELTS test preparation strategies helpful in these occasions

### Qualitative Interview Analysis

Below is provided a table of five interview participants, explaining basic demographic information including pseudonym; gender; country of origin; level of study; and major. 4 females participated in the interviews, and 1 male. There were 3 master's students and 1 undergraduate student, as well as 1 PhD student. 3 participants majored in engineering but under different branches, 1 participant majored in educational research, and 1 participant majored in management. All of them (5) are Chinese international students in Canada, which is more likely due to the fact that the researcher is a Chinese international student in Canada, and she used snowball sampling to find volunteers to participate in interview session based on her own social networking. All of them have stayed in Canada over 1 year, and one of them stayed in Canada around 4 years.

**Table 35**

*Basic information of interview participants*

Name	Gender	Origin country	Level of Study	Major	Length of stay
1. Alice* <sup>2</sup>	Female	China	Master	Educational research	2 years
2. Bree	Female	China	Master	Petroleum Engineering	1 year
3. Cherry	Female	China	Undergraduate	General Management	4 years
4. Danny	Female	China	Master	Environmental Engineering	2 years
5. Evan	Male	China	PhD	Biomedical Engineering	1 year

<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms, assigned by the researcher, according to alphabetical order.

The interviews included two 7-point Likert scale questions to collect information. The first one was “Could you please pick a number from one to seven to best describe your second language socialization level?”; and the second question was “Could you also please pick a number from one to seven to best describe to what extent IELTS speaking preparation strategies have helped you for your second language socialization ability in Canada?”. While a semi-structured interview allows considerable latitude in participants’ responses, these two questions were designed to ensure specific connection to the research question.

Three of them evaluated their L2 socialization level as 5; however, it was interesting that one participant picked the highest level and the other one picked 3 or 4.

**Table 36**

*Self-evaluated L2 socialization level*

Participant	Alice	Bree	Cherry	Danny	Evan
L2 socialization level	3 or 4	5	8 (7)	5	5

**Table 37**

*IELTS preparation information of each interviewee*

Name	Length of preparation	IELTS preparation strategies
Alice	Around one year or two	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. XDF courses</li> <li>2. Kou Yu Tuan (online WeChat homework)</li> <li>3. Online course (less detailed)</li> <li>4. Homestay type courses</li> <li>5. The second online course</li> <li>6. Summer school in Vancouver</li> <li>7. IELTS BRO</li> <li>8. Ying Yu Liu Li Shuo</li> </ol>

Name	Length of preparation	IELTS preparation strategies
Bree	No more than two hours	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practice exercise repetitively</li> <li>2. Went to the United Kingdom</li> <li>3. IELTS BRO</li> </ol>
Cherry	Half year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English course</li> <li>2. Influencers' articles</li> <li>3. Watch videos</li> </ol>
Danny	Half year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reference books</li> <li>2. XDF IELTS</li> </ol>
Evan	One month	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Friends help to practice the interview</li> <li>2. IELTS BRO</li> </ol>

According to the Table above, all interviewees pointed out at least two types of IELTS Speaking preparation strategies that they had been involved in before, as well as one social media or app they had used previously. Findings from this Table help to answer the research question 1.1 “What kind of IELTS Speaking preparation strategies have they used before?” and 1.2 “How do they use social media to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test?”.

### ***Research Question 1.1***

1.1 What kind of IELTS Speaking preparation strategies have they used before?

Two interviewees mentioned they had taken IELTS preparation courses, surprisingly, one of them (Alice) had been taken three relevant courses before and she also went to summer school in Vancouver.

#### ***Alice***

Alice spent the longest time (among the five participants) in preparation for the IELTS Speaking test, which she estimated to be around one year or two years. Besides, Alice shared 7

types of preparation strategies and she provided her personal feelings, such as whether she thought each one was helpful or unhelpful.

The first type Alice mentioned is an English course and she held relatively negative attitudes toward it. Alice said “I took classes in XDF, the first time. I think I have taken two or three courses, but I don't think it's helped a lot. Because it's just tell you everything detailly, like to introduce a test<sup>3</sup>”.

Alice had taken two online courses: for the first one, she tried an online course in WeChat. Alice said “It's called like Kou Yu Tuan. It's like they have some homework for you to do, and then you may follow the teacher's instruction to prepare.” After that, she had taken the other online course, however, she did not provide many details for this one.

The fourth strategy she had used was courses provided via a homestay format during her holiday, which she found not helpful. She commented “It's you're living with the students together and it's actually four parts of the test, but it's also have the oral speaking part. And that's not really ... Before that, I don't think it's help a lot.”

For the fifth one, she praised her spoken English teacher who she found helpful. She described the course as:

They (the course) have around five real time courses, after that, they have the courses for you so you need to do the questions every day. You write your own answers and then you just prepare it. And it's actually every question you meet in your real test.

In addition, she also pointed out “I think the estimated one, the last IELTS Speaking teacher, the speaking one, it's really helpful”.

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<sup>3</sup> As with text input in the survey, participants' statements from interviews are written as spoken, without editing for grammar. XDF is a test preparation website application.

Regarding her experience in summer school, which was not specifically targeted at the IELTS Speaking test, she said:

Although it's kind of students from all over the world, but actually like 90% students are Chinese. One is from a European country and the other is Japanese, so we have some ... in class the teacher ... One of the teacher are from Dong Bei, but (laughs) every time we have to talk in English in class, but after class... some of my friends, they have the opportunity to went to the pub or something with other students, but most of time I just in library or in my dorm to practice IELTS.

Overall, Alice has various experiences of taking IELTS Speaking preparation, and she has a clear feeling of which ones were helpful and which ones were not.

### ***Bree***

Although Bree did not take IELTS preparation courses, her experience shared some similarities with Alice, as she went to an English-speaking country, the United Kingdom (Alice went to Vancouver, Canada). However, the main aim of her stay in the UK was not for the IELTS test, but IELTS was the explanation she used for her parents. Bree believed this experience helped her to improve her English significantly. She said “I was taking some courses in UK, and also spent my holiday there. And I spent about one month there and find that my language has improved a lot, compared to this one year in Canada.”

For actual or real preparation, she only used limited time and prepared by herself. She said: “Just doing the exercise again, again, again... and then it's just mistake and correct it. It's the strategy.”

### ***Cherry***

On the opposite side, Cherry only had taken an English course in China, instead of English-speaking countries. Besides, she mentioned one tip she learned from this course. She said “I went to some classes to practice my speaking” and “I remember one thing. They told me don't use "mm" that much ... (laughs) (laughs) when I'm thinking. (laughs). But I can't control myself”.

### ***Danny***

Unlike three of them, Danny had not taken any English courses, whereas she mainly used some reference book to help her to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test, such as the Cambridge IELTS book. Danny stated:

I will teach all those references book firstly, and also I need to remembers, few thousands of vocabularies of IELTS in the same times. And after that, when the exam time is closing, was closing, I also need to practice the whole process in the Cambridge IELTS books, you know, from - (silence)

So I think their coming out for 14 right now, so I practice the that of the Cambridge IELTS book also.

### ***Evan***

For Evan, he also did not take any English courses; instead, his asked his friends to help him. Evan explained “I ask my friends to help me. Mainly because the interview”.

### ***Research Question 1.2***

1.2 How do they use social media to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test?

IELTS BRO (a test preparation application) was the most common application for interviewees, which had been used by three participants when they prepared for the IELTS

Speaking test. The main reason to use it was that this application helps them to practice speaking topics included in the real IELTS Speaking test. Alice described:

I use that sometimes because, although some of the questions on it, it's not all that accurate at all, but you can still, because it has really clear format for you, so you can prepare everything and you can record your speaking, you can know which one you have practiced, which one you never tried.

Similarly, Bree had used IELTS BRO for most of the time before the IELTS Speaking test and she said:

As I just mention, I spend normally about no more than two hours on speaking preparation. And these two hours were basically spent on some apps, forum. Such as following the past topics that had have appeared. And also trying to record my answers and compare it with the high score answers. So I think the apps are just helpful”. And “Well, I'll- maybe, I've used two apps, but I can only recall one of them. Uh, (Laughs). IELTS BRO (Laughs).

Evan used it to practice for nearly the same reason. He stated “Because there are many documents for our speaking English exams in that app.”

Alice also mentioned another application, which she used it less frequently. She explained:

But like I might try something like, there is an app called Ying Yu Liu Li Shuo. It may have some like BBC radio or something, but I don't really use it quite often, because when I was in high pressure, I prefer to watch some video in Mandarin, Chinese (laughs).

Cherry's utilization of social media was slightly different compared with other interviewees. Instead of using IELTS BRO, she had read articles from influencers and watched

videos. She believed it was helpful as she said “Yes. I sometimes, I read some influencers' articles. They will talk about how to better learn English. So, I think that kind of help”. In addition, she also said “I like to watch English videos sometimes. So I think that would help”.

Danny mentioned another application named XDF IELTS, whereas it shared a lot in common with the IELTS BRO, as she explained:

I think there are so many social medias or applications in China's. They provide me some topics of speaking part or some, some topics from the exams before me. So I can prepare it. For example, the XDF IELTS. I think it's the majority is speaking, but it also has the Cambridge IELTS practice set.

### ***Research Question 1.3***

1.3 How do IELTS Speaking preparation support their L2 socialization in Canada?

The second Likert scale question was asked to directly answer research question 1.3. According to the Table 38 below, two of them chose the same number 6, although they had different opinions regarding this number. Their reasons for picking 6 are different, one of them believed the IELTS Speaking preparation enable her feels less stressed when she actually talking with English speakers. Whereas the other participant thought that IELTS Speaking preparation cover many same speaking topics in real life.

For instance, Cherry explained “The IELTS Speaking preparation helps me learn to how to talk to people and I feel like it makes me feel relaxed and easier to communicate with others”. On the other hand, Danny explained her reason as “Because when I study the IELTS, I think most topics, it covered. I used in Canada's. Most topics they covered and they're all useful, when you study abroad, especially in Canada”.



**Table 38**

*IELTS Speaking preparation (ISP) support L2 socialization*

Participant	Alice	Bree	Cherry	Danny	Evan
ISP help L2 socialization	5	2	6	6	4

Apart from that, one interviewee picked the number 5, and she also provided detailed examples to explain her reason. Alice stated:

I actually think about this question when I done your questionnaire the first time. And I talked to my roommates. I feel it's helped me a little bit. When I first come here, we have some presentation in the first semester, I actually think about, he have taught me some really useful phrases. I couldn't remember exactly for now, because I gradually forgot everything, but (laughs), but at that time I probably used some phrases, maybe some from my perspective or something you can't just help you to introduce your opinions. And they have some different ways for you to use, not only I think, I believe they teach you some of other things you never learn in the English class, during high school or undergraduate, but not really helpful for now because I just forget everything.

Evan chose number 4 to describe his feelings of to what extent IELTS Speaking preparation support his L2 socialization. He said “For most of us, we take an IELTS exams for the (Laughs) the requirement or for admission. We will choose academic exam. However, (Laughs) the academic exam is not very good for (Laughs) daily speak”.

Only one participant held relatively negative attitudes towards the influence of IELTS Speaking preparation on L2 socialization. Bree said “I would not say it's totally not helpful, but

actually maybe only helpful on the exam taking, but not actually quite helpful in daily life living in Canada”.

### ***Research Question 2.1***

2.1 What are international students’ perceptions of L2 socialization in Canada?

Participants’ opinions of L2 socialization were also collected from several other questions during the interview session, which helped to answer research question 2.1. When asked, “According to your previous living experience in Canada, do you think second language socialization is a barrier for you?”, 4 of 5 interviewees believed L2 socialization is a barrier. Among those, 2 of them also pointed out that their English ability influences their L2 socialization ability in daily life. For example, Chery answered “Yes, of course. In class, sometimes I feel like because I cannot speak English fluently, so, sometimes my classmates may not want to talk to me because I cannot express myself very well”. In addition, she said “I don't think my speaking is good enough to talk to people, so, I feel so nervous to talk to people. And, basically in class, I don't start the conversation first (laughs)”.

As well, Evan said “I think so because, because (Laughs) I know my English level is not high” as well as “Because I often find that I can't express myself clearly”. He stated his English is not good and he had problems expressing himself in English.

On the other hand, Bree shared different opinions regarding it, she stated “I think so. Yes, sometimes I find out Canada is a bit different compared to other English-speaking countries. You don't have a lot of chance to use your speaking or writing parts. Basically, I'm just taking course and making notes, and also when I'm around with my Chinese friends. There are not many chances to use that.”

However, although Danny believed L2 socialization is a barrier, she still holds relatively positive attitudes toward it. She said: “(laughs), as an international student, I think yes, but it is not the barriers I can go over. I think it should be fine if I work hard”.

Unlike others, Alice did not regard L2 socialization as a barrier for her, according to her overall life experience in Canada. She explained by giving examples of her work experience:

I feel it's okay, as long as I don't really have an opportunity to, really working with local people a lot. Although I have a part-time job, but it's still teaching Chinese, I just sometimes use English to talk to the parents, because some of them are from Hong Kong, I need to use English. And with students like now, long conversation in English, just mix English and Chinese, so far it's okay.

### ***Research Question 2.2***

2.2 What can they do to improve their L2 socialization?

Three interviewees mentioned some ways of how to improve L2 socialization. The common idea of it was to make friends and have more opportunities to speak English. For instance, at the end of the interview, Alice suggested “It's just you find a native boyfriend and you have (laughs) more opportunities to use English, but I don't really have a chance, so yeah”. However, at the same time, she said “I think like so far I've found like the most useful way for speaking are not real IELTS, just the general speaking or the social skills”.

Similarly, Bree pointed out to engage in more activities, she stated “Try to take some activities. But about the last hours part, I would say, the only suggestion is that every time before you plan for exam, just consider the fees that you hand in for taking that exam, and that will be quite, intriguing and helpful”.

Cherry also stated “I would say make more friends (laughs). Be open-minded.” As well as “I will try to join them and talk to them and be part of them”.

### **Summary**

This chapter has described the analysis process and initial results of the quantitative survey and qualitative interview data considered in this study. Detailed explanation of analysis process was provided, and initial findings for three types of quantitative survey questions were illustrated, respectively. Qualitative interview analysis was provided and organized by answering each research question and sub-question. In Chapter 5, following, I will discuss my overall research findings, as well as suggest some implications for future related research.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion**

### **Overview**

This final chapter will provide an overall finding, in response to the two major research questions. After that, the discussion is divided into three parts: survey participants and interview respondents; social media utilization; and the influence of IELTS Speaking preparation on L2 socialization, respectively. Finally, implications of the research and suggestions for further research are provided.

### **Conclusion of Findings**

To re-state, the two major research questions, and five sub-research questions in this research are:

1. Do previous IELTS Speaking preparation strategies affect international students' L2 socialization in Canada? If so, in what ways?
  - 1.1. What kind of IELTS Speaking preparation strategies have they used before?
  - 1.2. How do they use social media to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test?
  - 1.3. How do IELTS Speaking preparation support their L2 socialization in Canada?
2. According to international students' living experiences in Canada, what will support them in their L2 socialization level?
  - 2.1. What are international students' perceptions of L2 socialization in Canada?
  - 2.2. What can they do to improve their L2 socialization?

More research participants think their previous IELTS Speaking preparation experience influences their L2 socialization ability in Canada, although there is also certain number of them holding negative attitudes towards it. Students who hold the positive attitudes towards it expressed different opinions, such as feeling less stressed because of the preparation experience

of the IELTS Speaking test and some IELTS Speaking similar topics similar to real life. Students have used or been involved in different kinds of IELTS Speaking preparation and social media also play an important role in this process. Most of them have participated in more than one particular IELTS Speaking preparation before.

International students have mixed feelings regarding L2 socialization ability and process. Some of them think their less competent spoken English hinders their L2 socialization with others in Canada. Some of them also expressed that is challenging for them, but they have a desire to make more effort and solve it in the future. Participants provided some suggestions of how to improve their L2 socialization ability, including finding more communication opportunities and engaging in more social activities.

## **Discussion**

### ***Participant Characteristics***

This research used a mixed method approach, which included a quantitative survey as the first part, followed by qualitative interview sessions. Overall, survey respondents are all English as an additional language (L2) learners and international students in Canada. Among that, around half of them are of Chinese nationality, nearly 30 percent of them are from France, and the others come from 11 different countries. Almost half of the survey participants have lived in Canada for over 2 years and 14 of them mentioned that they have living experiences in English-speaking nations other than Canada. Most of the survey respondents are university students and nearly half of them are in master's degree programs; around 30 percent of the respondents are engineering students.

However, unlike survey participants, all five interview participants were of Chinese nationality. They also share some similarities with survey respondents; like survey participants,

most (three) of them have lived in Canada for over two years and most (three) of them are students in master's degree programs. In addition, two of them mentioned that they have experiences lived in other English-speaking countries for some time and three of them are engineering majors.

Overall, survey respondents and interview participants fit the intended target research populations, as international students in Canada. It is also important to mention that whereas the survey participants are international students from various countries (14 different countries in all), all interview participants are international students of Chinese nationality who now live in Canada. The predominance of Chinese students is unintentional, but most likely caused by that the fact that this research is using online snowball sampling to recruit participants, which is based on the researcher's own personal social network for both the survey and interview sessions.

While survey participants and interview respondents' basic background information share many things in common, it still needs to be noted that all interview participants are from the same country of origin. The similarities among interviewees - all from China and all students at the same Canadian University- must be considered a limitation to this study. However, two factors may counter this limitation. First, the diversity of nationalities represented in the survey provides some balance to the overrepresentation of Chinese students who agreed to participate in interviews. Second, Chinese students make up the largest proportion of international students in Canada (Luedi, 2020), a demographic reality that has remained consistent over time, despite the many other nations which are sources countries of international students (Statistics Canada, 2020 June 15). While ideally interview data would have been collected from a more diverse group of nationalities, these two factors do serve to mitigate the disadvantages to some extent, and can still provide valuable information for future relevant research.

## **Social Media Utilization for IELTS Speaking Test Preparation**

In this research, survey respondents and interviewees expressed differences with regard to their experiences in using social media to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test. Nearly 60 percent of survey respondents indicated that they utilized social media as part of their IELTS Speaking test preparation. As well, over 80 percent of them indicated a use of social media under 1.5 hours per day as they prepared for the IELTS Speaking test. 22 survey participants acknowledged that they used YouTube as a part of their IELTS Speaking test preparation. Only one survey respondent did not think the utilization of social media resulted in a positive influence in their life in the target language country. It is widely known that the utilization of social media is widespread and popular among students (Ota, 2011), and the findings of this present study are consistent with this. In Iordache and Lamanuskas 's (2013) research on Romanian students, YouTube is seen to be one of the most popular social networks for students to use and most of them use it several times per day. Besides, a majority of ESL students also use Facebook for many purposes (Lee & Ranta, 2014).

During the interview sessions, all five participants indicated a use of social media to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test. Surprisingly, instead of YouTube, the most common application interviewees have used before is an application named “IELTS Bro”, which was mentioned by 3 of them, with one interviewee using another similar application named “XDF IELTS”. IELTS Bro is a popular application targeted at helping IELTS test-takers to prepare for the test, and includes a series of IELTS resources (encompassing all four components), and is said to be used by around 400,000 IELTS test-takers per year (IELTS Bro, 2019). Interviewees use this application to help them to practice mainly spoken English, and relevant skills targeted in the IELTS Speaking test in particular.



The findings reveal that it is common to see that international students use social media as part of their strategies in preparing for the IELTS Speaking test. Besides some well-known and widely popular social media like YouTube and Facebook (Dressler & Dressler, 2016; Lee & Ranta, 2014), surprisingly, there are some emerging applications interviewees mentioned in this research. These emerging applications are designed and targeted specifically at helping IELTS test-takers to prepare for their upcoming tests and these applications have proved popular among students. For instance, IELTS Bro is an application for interviewees in this research.

### **The Influence of IELTS Speaking Preparation on L2 Socialization**

There are various different contexts that might include L2 socialization for international students, such as school, workplace, and vocation (Duff, 2007). The findings of this study confirm an assertion made by Gan (2009), who pointed out that involvement in IELTS test preparation has the potential to encourage students to learn and practice English even after class. Test preparation classes have been shown to be useful in this regard (Zahedkazemi, 2015).

For the influence of IELTS Speaking preparation on L2 socialization in this research, according to both quantitative and qualitative analysis, slightly more students tend to think that IELTS Speaking test preparation supports their L2 socialization in Canada. In this present research, 27 survey respondents out of 60 survey respondents were holding positive attitudes towards the notion that IELTS Speaking preparation strategies are helpful in their daily life in Canada. For interviewees, there are two who felt IELTS Speaking test preparation supported their L2 socialization in Canada. Two of them also held relatively neutral attitudes, and only one interviewee held a relatively negative attitudes toward this issue, mainly because she believes it is more helpful in exam-taking more than in her general life in Canada; however, even she pointed out that IELTS speaking preparation is helpful in some respects.

The perceptions of participants in this research are consistent with a claim made by the IELTS test developers: that the assessment's special nature and design make the IELTS Speaking test interactive in nature and effective in imitating real-life situations (IELTS, 2017). Similarly, interviewees noted that they had practiced some IELTS Speaking topics in the process of preparation, and that these topics actually appeared in daily life in Canada and in social contexts. The results of this present research indicate the potential that involvement in IELTS Speaking test preparation holds in supporting students' L2 socialization to life in Canada.

The IELTS test has come under extensive criticism from numerous angles, including its focus on inner circle Englishes (Kachru, 1985) and therefore lack of attention to English as an international language (G. Hu, 2012); questions of reliability because of its insistence on single marking (Green, 2019; Uysal, 2010); an undue profit orientation (Pearson, 2019); its low predictive validity (Johnson & Tweedie, 2017, 2021); negative curriculum washback (Green, 2007); its detrimental effect on English for Academic Purposes programming (Johnson & Tweedie, 2021); and its inconsistent reflection of actual English proficiency (R. Hu & Trenkic, 2019), among others.

While acknowledging all of these criticisms of the IELTS test, the findings of this research shed light on a surprising and, to the best of this researcher's knowledge, previously undiscovered effect: the positive role preparation for the IELTS Speaking test may play in second language socialization.

This finding has important implications which are discussed in the last section.

## **Reflections**

### ***Implications and Further Research***

This study focused on international students' lived experience of IELTS Speaking test preparation and L2 socialization life in Canada, and has implications for future international students themselves, IELTS test-takers and educators. Students do face very real challenges in starting a new life in an unfamiliar country and it is necessary to seek practical solutions. This research suggests that, perhaps surprisingly, the IELTS Speaking test presents one such solution. Most students are involved in test preparation activities in order to gain a language proficiency test score that is suitable for admission to their chosen university program. These preparation courses, while overwhelmingly test results-oriented, in this research seem to have a positive impact on students' speaking ability, and therefore on their second language socialization. Although international students regard admission to post-secondary institutions as their first priority, and the reason they are preparing for IELTS, if their previous Speaking test preparation could also simultaneously be seen to support them in their language socialization, it would be highly effective and time-saving.

For educators, the findings from this research challenge the view that such language tests are detrimental to English for Academic Purposes courses and curriculum (Johnson & Tweedie, 2021). In fact, the results-oriented focus of test preparation may lead to gains in speaking proficiency which wash forward positively to everyday life. While this has been the claim of the IELTS test developers for some time (IELTS, 2017), educators have often held the view that an emphasis on test preparation is undercutting "the real business of learning the language" (Gan, 2009, p. 25). The findings from this study, although based on a small number of participants, would seem to indicate otherwise educators involved in designing English for Academic Purposes curriculum, rather than trying to fight against the tide of students' focus on test preparation, may want to consider how language tests can positively feed into pedagogy with

real world applications to second language socialization. Similarly, test preparation instructors may consider giving recognition to the role instruction in test strategies plays in helping students outside the narrow confines of the test.

The findings from this research, although based on a small sample size, may remind language educators of the important role that language, particularly speaking, plays in supporting international students, not only in improving test scores, but also help them in making the transition from their home country to their nation of their target language. This study also identifies the importance of social media in supporting language learning, and test preparation specifically, and educators may want to consider how these technological tools can enhance teaching and learning.

Many future study ideas or topics on international students' test preparation and lived experience could be inspired by this present study. Due to the limitation of the time and the influence of the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic situation, a limited number of survey participants were studied and, as noted, interviews were only conducted with Chinese international students. Future researchers could attempt to investigate the role of test preparation in L2 socialization with a wider range of nationalities, and the diverse range of nationalities in Canada's population of international students lends itself well to this. The result would be findings that have wider generalizability.

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## Appendix A

### Survey questions

#### Instruction

What strategies in IELTS preparation that support international students' adaptation in Canada?

#### 1. Investigators

Dr. Gregory Tweedie, Associate Professor, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary (Principal Investigator)

Tian Lei, Language and Literacy, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

#### 2. Invitation to participate

You are being invited to participate in this research study about international students' experience of undertaken preparation for the IELTS Speaking test and living experience in Canada as you are an international student who is enrolled in Canadian post-secondary education.

#### 3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how and in what ways different types of IELTS Speaking preparation activities influence the L2 socialization process of international students in Canadian daily life.

#### 4. Procedures

Every participant will complete a 15-minute online survey using the University of Calgary Qualtrics® software. The anonymous survey will begin with an implied consent screen, where clicking on an Agree button grants consent and begins the survey. It will present both closed and open-ended questions for participants to complete. These questions will be

relevant to the connection between IELTS Speaking preparation and L2 socialization in informal settings.

5. Risks

There is no risk to participants. Participation in the online survey is anonymous, and completely voluntary.

6. Benefits

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study, but the questions in this survey may help many further international students live smoother in Canada. The information gathered and the result of this study may inform universities' internationalization policy in supporting international students.

7. Right to withdraw

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and anonymous. You have the right to discontinue the survey at any time when completing it and you are free to decide not to answer any or all questions. However, participants who complete the anonymous survey cannot withdraw their data from the study.

8. Confidentiality

Your survey responses and your personal information (if you decide to participate in follow-up interviews) will be collected using a secure online survey platform called UCalgary



Qualtrics. It uses encryption technology and restricted access authorizations to protect all data collected. The data is stored on Qualtrics server in Canada.

#### 9. Compensation or incentives

There is no cost to participate in this study and no compensation will be given for participation in this study.

#### 10. Rights of Participants

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decide to participate in this study or not. If you give consent to participate in it, you have the right to skip some individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will not pose any threat to academic standing.

#### 11. Contact Information

If you have questions about this research study please contact Tian Lei at [tian.lei@ucalgary.ca](mailto:tian.lei@ucalgary.ca).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca). This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

#### 12. Consent

Clicking on the Agree button means that you agree to participate in the survey and you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary and you are aware that you may choose to discontinue your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

By completing this online survey, you have given consent for the researcher to use your anonymous data as part of the research study.

Do you agree to participate in this study by completing this anonymous online survey?

- Agree
- Disagree

Q1 Is English your first language?

- Yes
- No

Q2 What is your home country?

- China
- France
- India
- South Korea
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3 How often do you speak English in your home country?

- Always
- Frequently / often
- Sometimes
- Occasionally
- Seldom
- Hardly ever / rarely
- Never

Q4 What were your most recent IELTS Speaking scores?

- 7+
- 7
- 6.5
- 6
- 5.5

- 5
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q5 Do you think you are fluent in English?

- Yes, I can speak fluently with others in English.
- To some extent, I cannot speak fluently at a higher level (please specify your level like: beginner; intermediate; advanced, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
- No, I cannot speak fluently.

Q6 What part of speaking in English do you think is the most difficult? (check that all apply)

- Pronunciation
- Lack of self-confidence
- Lack of motivation
- Grammar
- Oral vocabulary
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q7 What kind of post-secondary institution do you study at?

- University
- College
- Polytechnic
- Language school
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q8 How long have you lived in Canada?

- Under 3 months

- 3 months and 6 months
- 6 months and 1 year
- 1 year and under 2 years
- 2 years and over
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q9 Total time in other English-speaking countries (except Canada). (Please specify the country and the length of time)

- Country \_\_\_\_\_
- How long have you stayed in these English-speaking countries? \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 Which of these best describes you?

- Undergraduate student
- Master's degree student
- PhD student
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q11 What is your major?

- Business
- Science
- Education
- Engineering
- Arts
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q12 How many types of IELTS Speaking preparation strategies have you engaged in before you began studying in Canada? (select all that apply)

- Self-preparation
- IELTS preparation courses
- English for Academic Purposes courses
- Paid tutors
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q13 Do you think that IELTS Speaking preparation strategies have helped you improve your spoken English?

- Yes
- No

Q14 How do you think these IELTS Speaking test preparation strategies bring benefits to your speaking English ability? (check all that apply)

- Providing more opportunities to practice/talk
- Could get feedback from others
- Learn skills from others
- Making me more confident
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q15 Some IELTS preparation strategies also help me become a part of Canadian society outside of the classroom.

- Yes
- No

Q16 What are these useful IELTS Speaking preparation strategies? (check all that apply)

- Self-preparation
- IELTS preparation courses

- EAP courses
- Paid tutors
- Social media technologies (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, etc.)
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q17 What are these out-of-class settings that IELTS test preparation has helped you in? (check all that apply)

- In a shopping mall
- In a supermarket
- In a restaurant
- When I am traveling
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q18 Please share about how preparing for the IELTS test has helped you in these places outside of the classroom. (For example, "I have learned how to communicate with others naturally from English for Academic Purposes courses and it helps me to make friends during a trip.")

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Q19 Did you use some social media technologies (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) to help you prepare for the IELTS Speaking test?

- Yes
- No

Q20 Which of these following social media technologies help you prepare for the IELTS Speaking test? (check all that apply)

- Instagram
- YouTube
- Facebook
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q21 In what ways do you use these social media technologies to prepare the IELTS Speaking test?

- Expand personal social networks
- Engage in social activities
- Know more oral expressions
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q22 How much time do you spend using social media technologies to help you prepare IELTS Speaking test every day?

- Under 30 minutes
- 30 minutes and under 1 hour
- 1 hour and under 1.5 hours
- 1.5 hour and under 2 hours
- 2 hour and under 2.5 hours



- 2.5 hour and under 3 hours
- 3 hours and over, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Q23 Using social media technologies has a positive influence on your life when you are living in Canada.

- Yes
- No

Q24 If yes, how do these technologies bring benefits to your spoken English? (for example, provide more opportunities to engage in social activities)

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Q25 Are IELTS Speaking preparation strategies helpful in your daily life when you are living in Canada?

- Yes
- No

Q26 In what ways do IELTS Speaking preparation strategies help you in your daily life in Canada? Please specify. (For example, they help me to know how to speak politely with others) \_\_\_\_\_

Q27 Do you feel IELTS test preparation strategies help you to socialize with others? If so, with whom? (check all that apply).

- Friends
- Classmates
- Instructors
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q28 In what ways? Please provide some details. (For example, I talk with others just like I practiced in class before.) \_\_\_\_\_

Q29 Are there any of the IELTS test preparation strategies helpful in these occasions? (check all that apply.)

- Team meetings
- Establish social networks
- Maintain relationships with peers
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q30 In what ways? Please provide some details. (For example, I have done some similar practice and it makes me feel less stressful.)

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Q31 As part of my research, I am inviting students to participate in a follow-up interview. If you are willing to be interviewed, you will need to provide an email address, so I can contact you to arrange a time for the interview. Would you like to participate in a research interview?

- Yes, I would love to. Here is my email address: \_\_\_\_\_
- No, thank you.

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Script**

#### **Recording:**

Self-introduction:

Good afternoon, my name is Tian Lei and I am the student researcher to conduct today's interview. The Principal Investigator is my supervisor Gregory Tweedie and he will directly supervise me to make sure complete awareness of responsibility to maintain privacy and confidentiality of each interview.

Introduction:

This interview will take around 30 minutes of your time. First of all, there is a consent form, please read it and if you agree to participate in this interview, sign your name and date at the end of the consent form. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. Please read it carefully as the results will be used in my [student researcher's] degree study. I [the student researcher] may also present findings from the anonymous data at academic conferences or publish in peer-reviewed academic journals.

Transition:

If you agree to participate, please know that the interview will be audio-recorded, and audio-recordings will be transcribed, with all identifying features removed. Audio recordings will be permanently deleted upon transcription.

During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions about your previous preparation strategies or practices for your IELTS Speaking tests and your current life experiences of learning English in out-of-class settings in Canada, and maybe some questions aimed at

exploring how you utilize strategies in real life and in various situations. You do not have answer any questions that you do not want to, you can stop the interview at any time. You will not be asked to give your name; only an email address, gender, country of origin, first language, and length of time in Canada. No other identifying information will be requested. All information will be kept confidential. There will be no interruption and you are free to talk.

Do you have questions or concerns?

Let us begin the interview now.

1. In your own opinion, could you please pick a number from 1-7 (1: lowest level; 7: highest level) to best describe your Second Language/English socialization level?
2. You picked the number XX, could you please explain the number you just chose in detail, for instance, you can use some adjectives.
3. Could you please pick a number from 1-7 (1: not helpful at all, 7: extremely helpful) to best describe to what extent (particular) IELTS Speaking preparation strategies have helped your Second Language/English socialization ability in Canada?
4. Could you please explain the number you just chose in detail?
5. What is your major? (Are you an undergraduate student or master student?)
6. How long have you lived in Canada as an international student?
7. In your own opinion, do you think the length of stay in Canada influence your Second Language/English socialization ability?
8. When you live in Canada as an international student, do you use English at a high frequency? (in your own opinion or compared with others)
9. According to your previous living experience in Canada, do you think Second Language/English socialization is a barrier for you?

10. Could you please give me some details about why you feel this way? (because English is your second language or you are not interested in socializing in nature?)
11. How long have you prepared for the IELTS Speaking test?
12. What kind of strategies you have used to prepare your IELTS Speaking test before you started studying in Canada?  
  
What are these helpful or not helpful strategies?
13. Among that, do you use social media as part of your IELTS Speaking preparation strategies (in what ways)? Tik Tok; YouTube; influencers; Ins.
14. Which app; in what ways; how long; how often? You start using it by yourself or maybe recommended to use it by your IELTS Speaking teacher?
15. Are these strategies help you to improve your Second Language/English socialization ability in Canada? If yes/no, why these are helpful/not helpful?
16. Do you plan to take IELTS test again in the near future, after living in Canada for a while (after Second Language/English socialization improvements), do you think it helps you to get a better score?
17. Could you pick one statement to best describe your feelings from two statements below?  
  
IELTS Speaking preparation strategies influence your Second Language/English socialization ability in Canada?  
  
Or  
  
After Second Language/English socialization improvements or living in Canada for a while, it will be more likely to influence your IELTS Speaking test score?

18. These are all my questions and thank you for participating! Before I end this interview, is there anything you want to talk related to IELTS Speaking preparation strategies or Second Language/English socialization?

Is there anything you want to talk more?

Closing: Thank you for participating!