Title of Project:
Investigating the Interactiveness of IELTS Academic Writing Tasks
and Their Washback on EFL Teachers' Test Preparation Practices

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Project Summary:

With two million administrations per year, IELTS is accepted by over 8,000 organizations worldwide as a language proficiency gate-keeping tool for immigration, academic, and vocational purposes. IELTS is required of non-native English speakers seeking access to study and work in English-speaking contexts. Important life-changing decisions are made based on the outcomes of this high-stakes test. Additionally, preparation for IELTS is, in many cases, the individuals' only opportunity to get acquainted with language requirements of the target context. IELTS validity and washback investigations, however, point to a mismatch between real-life language needs and IELTS test content. Furthermore, studies have shown discrepancies between test design intentions and test preparation courses. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, this study seeks to investigate the interactive capacity of the IELTS writing module and link it to the teachers' activities in test preparation classrooms in the EFL context of Iran. To this aim, a rigorous qualitative task analysis will be conducted in order to evaluate the extent of interactiveness in IELTS test tasks. In pursuit, 20 teachers and 200 students will complete questionnaires and the participating teachers will be observed and interviewed. Through data convergence, the mediating role of the teachers in the degree and direction of IELTS writing washback will be examined. In particular, the findings will shed light on teachers' classroom performance, their beliefs about the tests' representativeness of student needs, and the effect of the 'teacher factor' on the intensity of test washback.