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## Model Essay as a Feedback Tool in Task 2 of the IELTS Writing Exam Instruction for Slovene Students

### Summary

The paper discusses using a model essay as a feedback tool when teaching EFL writing to Slovene EFL students in the context of Task 2 of the IELTS Writing exam. In the present study, four IELTS students of two different levels were asked to write a response to a Task 2 IELTS Writing Exam question and compare it to a native speaker or a native speaker-like model essay by means of note-taking. The notes were then analyzed, and the findings offer an insight into what aspects of the English language Slovene students noticed and how frequently they noticed individual language items. An analysis of the differences and similarities in the quality and quantity of noticing depending on the students' level is also provided. A comparison with a Japanese study made by Abe in 2008 has been done. Finally, recommendations for future research are made.

**Key words:** model essay, IELTS Writing Task 2, noticing, feedback

## Esejski primer kot sredstvo za podajanje povratne informacije pri poučevanju naloge Task 2 pisnega dela IELTS izpita slovenskih kandidatov

### Povzetek

Članek obravnava vlogo, ki jo ima primer eseja kot sredstvo za podajanje povratnih informacij pri poučevanju angleščine kot tujega jezika Slovencev v kontekstu naloge Task 2 pisnega dela IELTS izpita. V raziskavi so štirje učenci, ki so se pripravljali na IELTS izpit, napisali odgovor na vprašanje iz Task 2 IELTS Writing Test in ga primerjali z esejem na ravni materinega ali kot-materinega govorca in svoja opažanja zapisali. Njihovi zapiski so bili analizirani. Rezultati kažejo, katere prvine jezika učenci opazijo in kako pogosto opazijo posamezne jezikovne vsebine. Narejena je analiza razlik in podobnosti v kvaliteti in kvantiteti opažanja glede na učenčevo stopnjo znanja. Dana je primerjava z japonsko raziskavo, ki jo je naredil Abe leta 2008. Nazadnje so podana priporočila za nadaljnje raziskave.

**Ključne besede:** esej kot vzorec, IELTS Pisni izpit 2, opazovanje, podajanje povratne informacije

# Model Essay as a Feedback Tool in Task 2 of the IELTS Writing Exam Instruction for Slovene Students

## 1. Introduction

Since Slovenia became a member of the European Union, more Slovenes than ever before have the opportunity to study abroad because it has become more accessible. In order to enter a foreign university, applicants are often required to achieve a certain Band Score on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Test, which is widely recognized as a language requirement for entering universities worldwide and is administered at over 6,000 institutions across 120 countries around the world.

In Slovenia most students who look for help with their preparation for the IELTS exam do so after they have already taken the exam at least once, but failed to achieve the required Band Score. This author's experience shows that the majority of Slovene IELTS students need help with academic essay-writing (students requesting this author's help with IELTS preparation have mostly requested help with writing skills), which is one of the four macro skills tested by IELTS.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, imperative to look into methods that would help students improve their writing skills in the context of Writing Task 2 IELTS Academic Module, as it is this task that brings the highest number points but causes the most difficulties.

Due to the many difficulties in learning how to write well in a foreign language, there has been a vigorous debate on what the most efficient and effective teaching methods of academic writing would be. According to several researchers, feedback plays an important role in foreign language instruction (Ferris and Hedgcock 1998; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz 1994; Hyland 2003). Feedback on a written task can be given by means of correction, where the teacher corrects the writing, by reformulation, where the teacher rewrites students' writing by means of leaving the content as it is and only changing the misused grammatical structures and vocabulary in order to bring it to native speaker or native speaker-like level, or by peer feedback, where students correct each other's writing. Finally, feedback may also be given in the form of a model essay written by a native or a native-like teacher of English, where the students compare their own piece of writing with the model one.

This study attempts to investigate the role of a model essay as a feedback tool for foreign language writing instruction and, more specifically, it intends to show how four Slovene students of English, two at a higher and two at a lower level, notice their mistakes and gaps in knowledge when comparing their own writing of IELTS Task 2 with a model native or native speaker-like essay written on the same topic. The case study is partially based on the study conducted by Makoto Abe from the University of Queensland as part of his master's thesis. Abe attempted to find out how Japanese students notice their mistakes when comparing their writing with a model native or native speaker-like piece of writing. His study was to an extent a replication of Qi and Lapkin's study on the reformulation method (2001), where by means of a think-aloud method

<sup>1</sup> Author's personal experience.

the researchers asked the participants to verbally comment on the differences between their own writing and the reformulated writing. In this way, the tendency of students' noticing was discovered. However, they investigated whether or not the participants improved their writing skills by using model essays, while this study looks at what aspects of language Slovene EFL students notice by comparing their own essays with model essays. Methodologies used in this case study were partly based on Hanaoka's study (2007), who measured noticing by means of note-taking. In addition, the research questions posed in this study to an extent followed those investigated by Abe, in order to enable a comparison between the quality of noticing of Japanese and Slovene students:

1. What aspects of language do Slovene EFL students notice by comparing their own writing with model essays?
2. Is there a difference in noticing between lower and higher level Slovene EFL students?
3. Is there a difference in noticing between Japanese and Slovene EFL students?

## 2. IELTS

IELTS is a test of English for academic and vocational purposes managed by three partners: the British Council, the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations and IDP IELTS Australia. The test measures the language ability of candidates who need to study or work where communication is done in English. Test scores are reported for overall performance and for individual sections in the form of bands at nine different levels from Non User to Expert User.

IELTS consists of two modules, General and Academic, and candidates choose one of them according to their reasons for taking the test. If a candidate intends to enter an undergraduate or postgraduate course, they are advised to take the Academic Module. If a candidate intends to continue their secondary education in English, to work or undertake training or to emigrate, they often need to take the General Training Module.

The test is divided into four sections: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing. Speaking and Listening tests are the same for both, the Academic and General Module, but Reading and Writing tests differ. The writing section consists of descriptive (Task 1) and argumentative (Task 2) essay-writing tasks. In Task 2 of the Academic Module, candidates are asked to write an argumentative essay in response to a problem, opinion or controversial proposition. They need to show that they can express and support an opinion by means of drawing on their experience and weighing their opinion against opposing views. The minimum length is 250 words.

Writing tests are assessed by Cambridge trained and certified examiners. Tasks 1 and 2 are marked individually and the total score is reported on a scale of 1 to 9 at intervals of 0.5. The total score is calculated from both tasks combined, but the weight of Task 2 is more than that of Task 1 as it is also longer. Below are the official IELTS assessment criteria for Writing Task 2 (UCLES 2007):

1. Task Response is the criteria on whether and/or to what extent the candidate's answer addresses individual parts of the task, if and/or to what extent it presents a relevant position in regards to the question and if and how well the ideas are supported.
2. Coherence and Cohesion criterion relate to overall clarity and the flow of ideas. In this respect, the quality of sequencing information and paragraphing are assessed. Coherence refers to the linking of ideas through logical sequencing whereas cohesion refers to the varied and proper use of cohesive devices.
3. Lexical Resource criterion is concerned with the range and accuracy of the vocabulary used to express nuances in meaning.
4. Grammatical Range and Accuracy criterion relates to the range and accuracy of the grammatical structures used.

### 3. Noticing and Feedback in L2 writing

Research on noticing has to a great extent focused primarily on the acquisition of spoken language; however, the basic principles outlined below can also refer to written language acquisition. Schmidt's own experience of learning Portuguese suggested, for example, that implicit correction techniques such as clarification requests made no impression, while hearing the correct version immediately after making an error allowed him to match his present level with the target (Schmidt and Frota 1986). Drawing on work from Schmidt (Schmidt 1990; Schmidt and Frota 1986), who claims that learners need to notice a form before they can acquire it and that L2 learners must become 'aware' of certain aspects of language, mainly the meaning, Swain (1995) outlines three major functions of output: noticing, hypothesis testing and metalinguistic awareness. The noticing or triggering function means that L2 learners become aware of what they cannot say in the target language: "In producing the target language (TL), learners may encounter a linguistic problem leading them to notice what they do not know, or know only partially" (Swain 1995, 129). In other words, learners notice the gaps between what they want to say and what they can actually say by making comparisons between the current state of their developing linguistic system as realized in their output and the target language system available as input.

In the research on noticing, focus on form and lexis has been looked into. In some studies, focus on form is planned in advance and learners are prompted, through task design and input enhancement, to notice certain features of the input. However, it has been pointed out that planned focus on form does not always match the actual attention focus of the students (Izumi et al. 1999; Kowal and Swain 1994; Long and Robinson 1998). Williams (2001) questions the effectiveness of planned focus on form (FonF) and argues that "[I]f the effectiveness of FonF is ultimately determined by learner's need, then it is essential to examine the episodes in which learners themselves choose to focus on formal aspects of language" (quoted in Hanaoka 2007). Ellis (1995) also points out that it is important to be aware of the learner's internal syllabus or what they feel they need to learn. In his analysis Ellis found that the students were more likely to incorporate a form into an utterance of their own if the noticing was self initiated (ibid.). In this respect, model essays seem an ideal tool for

studying noticing in SLA and especially in teaching one-on-one IELTS preparation where it is of the utmost importance to follow what individual students need to learn. This type of analysis also allows for designing a course that exactly suits the needs of the student.

Several studies acknowledge the role of noticing in SLA theory. Qi and Lapkin's study (2001) conducted on two Chinese ESL students of different levels found that the reformulation technique, where the teacher reformulates the text so that it is as close as possible to a putative target language model, allowed learners to notice the gaps between their output and the target language in the input. Furthermore, the findings also suggested that the more proficient student noticed differences with a higher level of awareness than the lower-level student.

Hanaoka (2007), who based his study on Qi and Lapkin, found that the participants noticed the gaps in their knowledge and found solutions for their linguistic problems in the model text. He also found that the participants noticed more lexical aspects than other categories and that more proficient learners noticed differences more frequently.

Abe's study conducted on 14 Japanese EFL learners investigated the role of noticing in comparing students' own text with model essays. He found that students noticed various aspects of language from model essays and that the quality and quantity of noticing depended on the level of the students. His study also proved that model essays have many advantages as a feedback tool (Abe 2008) and is therefore in accord with Johnson, who states that "the most useful feedback comes from those areas of mismatch which students are themselves able to identify, because those areas will accord with the stage of their skill (or interlanguage) development" (Johnson 1988, 93).

In empirical literature, many methods which are considered standard, such as peer review, teacher written corrections and teacher-learner oral writing conferences of providing feedback, have been questioned, which is relevant to this study in the sense that some traditional feedback proved to be discouraging for L2 learners (Hyland 1998) and that it can be confusing for L2 learners as they have difficulties in understanding what in their writing is non-target like from teacher's comments alone (Hedgecock and Lefkowitz 1994). Furthermore, learners may receive corrections passively (*ibid.*), possibly also because they tend to concentrate on the negative sides of their writing.

However, in using model essays as a feedback tool, errors are not pointed out and it is up to the learner to identify them. This makes students active rather than passive participants in learning, which encourages noticing (Adams 2003) that is a prerequisite for learning (Hanaoka 2007). Qi and Lapkin also found that positive modelling of native-like writing is more helpful to the learner than error correction (2001, 286)

## 4. The Study

For the present study, the participants were given a Task 2 IELTS writing exercise. The opportunity to notice linguistic problems in the context of IELTS assessment and gaps in knowledge was provided by asking the participants to compare their original draft with a native speaker-like model. After the students had written down what they had noticed, the data was collected,

statistically processed, analysed and interpreted. The results were compared to those found by Abe (2008). Although to allow comparison the study is to an extent based on Abe's, there are two significant differences. First, noticing in this study was measured by means of note-taking, while Abe used think-aloud protocols. Secondly, Abe studied noticing by giving the participants two tasks, IELTS Writing Task 1 and 2, whereas in the present study only Task 2 was used, as experience shows that this is the task that causes Slovene IELTS students most difficulties.

## 4.1 The Participants

The participants were 4 Slovene one-on-one students; two females and two males. Due to a low number of respondents, a similar study where a larger number of students would participate should be conducted in the future in order to confirm or refute the present results.

Two of the students participating in this study had to take the IELTS exam for the purposes of migration to Australia and were aiming at getting a Band Score 7 in the IELTS Academic Module, while the other two wished to continue their studies abroad, one in the UK and the other in Australia, and also required a Band Score 7. Two students (one of them planning to immigrate and the other to study in Australia, Student 1 and Student 2), who were more advanced than the other two had completed a university undergraduate course and had both studied English for ten years on and off. Of the other students (one of them wishing to immigrate and the other to study in the UK), one was in his fourth year of grammar school (Student 3) and had, therefore, studied English for eight years, while the other (Student 4) never completed her university studies and had studied English for eight years, ten years ago. At the time of the study they had all been attending one-on-one IELTS preparation courses for two months once a week for two 45-minute lessons at a time. As it was the author who had been teaching these students prior to the present study there was no need to assess the essays in terms of their proficiency because as their tutor the author was well aware of their levels, which were established by a placement test written before the start of the first lesson.

## 4.2 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection methods were partly replicated from Hanaoka's study (2007), where, after they had completed writing, the students were provided with a text and took notes on whatever problems they noticed, and partly from Qi and Lapkin's study (2001), who studied language related episodes (LRE).

The data collection was conducted in a small and quiet study room. To avoid any misunderstanding, all the instructions were given in Slovene. The data collection procedure consisted of two stages.

Stage 1: Writing (in English for 40 minutes). The Type 2 Academic Writing Task was given and the students were asked to write an essay in approximately 40 minutes, which is the time recommended for finishing the IELTS Task 2 Writing Exam on time. The students were not allowed to use books, dictionaries or computers since one of the aims of the study was to investigate what the participants could notice just from their own texts and model essays, without any other help.

Stage 2: Taking notes (in Slovene; 15 minutes). In this stage, which immediately followed the Stage 1 task, the students received sheets with a model answer to Type 2 IELTS writing task question and each participant was asked to write whatever they noticed as they compared their original text with the models. Each student received a paper with instructions in Slovene as follows: ‘Compare your own writing with the model essay and write down whatever you notice.’ The time given was 15 minutes, but since time management was of no importance for the study the students could take more time if they wished. When the students had all finished, their essays, model essays and their written observations were collected.

### 4.3 Instrument

The writing task was taken from a textbook for IELTS preparation edited by Scovell, Pastellas and Knobel (2004):

*You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.*

*Present a written argument to an educated reader with no specialist knowledge of the following topic:*

*Discuss when, if ever, capital punishment can be viewed as a valid punishment for crime.*

*You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience and support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.*

*You should write at least 250 words.*

The above Task 2, therefore, asks students to write an argumentative essay on the topic of capital punishment. The students were familiar with the topic as we had discussed it and they had to do a ‘crime and punishment’ vocabulary exercise taken out of Cambridge Vocabulary for IELTS (2009) for homework. The students were also familiar with the structure of an essay as it had previously been covered in lessons; they had written essays before but not on this topic.

The model essay used in this study was taken from the same textbook as the task. The model was at native speaker level and substantially more advanced than the writing of any of the four students participating in the study.

### 4.4 Data Analysis

Since the students needed to write essays which satisfied the IELTS assessment criteria, the classification of linguistic items was based on the following IELTS Task 2 assessment categories: Task Response referring to the content (opinions, knowledge, experiences, evidence, counter-evidence and supporting sentences), Coherence and Cohesion (logical sequencing, organisation



of paragraphs and cohesive devices), Lexical Resource (selecting words, phrases and expressions) and Grammatical Range and Accuracy (articles, plural, sentence structure, verb form, tense, prepositions, comparison of adjectives and adverbs, punctuation and spelling). Examples below show how the items were categorized.

### Task Response

“I wrote about advantages and disadvantages, but here only support of the writer’s opinion is expressed.” (Student 1)

Here the student noticed that the essay’s structure could be descriptive and not only argumentative, which is the type of essay he used.

### Coherence and Cohesion

“In cases where is a good connection. I should’ve used it.” (Student 1)

Here the student noticed that the phrase ‘in cases where’ is a good way to introduce an idea and make the text more cohesive.

“I didn’t give any examples but I should have.” (Student 4)

On the basis of the model essay which gives a specific example, the student noticed that he should have given an example as this contributes to the flow of the essay.

### Lexical Resource

“Abhorrent is a word that would bring a higher band.” (Student 3)

Student 3 noticed that “abhorrent” is a more sophisticated word and that it contributes to lexical range.

### Grammatical Range and Accuracy

“An If sentence would be good to use.” (Student 1)

Here the student noticed an if-sentence and noticed that he did not use it in his essay.

After all the data were put into different categories, descriptive statistics for each of the four categories were first calculated in order to answer the question of what aspects of language Slovene EFL students notice by comparing their own writing with model essays. Secondly, descriptive statistics were calculated to find out whether there is a difference in noticing between lower and higher level Slovene EFL students. Finally, the data collected in this and Abe’s research were compared in order to answer the third research question.

## 4.5 Results

1. What aspects of language do Slovene EFL students notice by comparing their own writing with model essays?



The first research question aimed at answering the question of which language items were noticed most frequently by the participants. The noticed items that the students wrote down in their notes were categorized into four categories in line with the IELTS assessment criteria. The frequency, proportion, mean and standard deviation are shown in Table 1.

*All participants (N = 4)*

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>MD</i>	<i>SD</i>
Task Response	21	21.87	5.25	0.58
Coherence and Cohesion	20	20.83	5.0	2.55
Lexical Resource	29	30.21	5.80	1.07
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	23	23.95	5.75	0.88
Other	3	3.12	0.75	1
<b>Total</b>	96	100	24.0	6.08

*Table 1. Frequency, proportion, mean and standard deviation of the lexical items.*

Table 1 shows that, altogether, the participants wrote down 96 language items that they noticed by comparing their own writing with the native-speaker like model and 24.0 on average. The largest proportion of the noticed items was lexical (28.12%, MD = 5.8), followed by grammatical (23.95%, MD = 5.75), Task Response (21.87%, MD = 5.25), followed by Coherence and Cohesion (20.83%, MD = 5.0), and finally, other (3.12%, MD = 0.75).

### Lexical Resource

The largest percentage of all the language items noticed by participants was lexical at 30.21%, MD = 5.80%. The students wrote down observations such as “I used a more general word for criminal and the model essay uses a word like *perpetrator*.” (Student 3) or “The word *abhorrent* is good.” (Student 4), or “I like the word *valid*.” (Student 3). Student 2 wrote: “Capital punishment is called *death penalty* – synonym is used – I only used capital punishment”. “*A valid means of punishment* is a good phrase.” (Student 3) Two students mentioned the item ‘*for example*’, but this language item was put under the category Task Response. Similarly, ‘*however*’, was classified as Coherence and Cohesion.

### Grammatical Range and Accuracy

The second most often noticed IELTS assessment category was Grammatical Range and Accuracy with 23.95%, MD = 5.75. Here students mainly noticed forms that they did not use. For example, they wrote “An *If sentence* would be good to use” (Student 4), “*must* is used a lot – I didn’t use enough *modal verbs*” (Student 2), “The rules of society are made and enforced...-*Passive Voice* is used – I also used it” (Student 1), or “There have been a number of examples of *Present Perfect*” (Student 3), or “I didn’t spell *reasonable doubt* correctly” (Student 3).

## Task Response

This category referred to opinions, knowledge, experiences, evidence, counter-evidence and supporting sentences and accounted for 21.87% of all noticed language items. In this way the students wrote down, “For example – I didn’t give an example but I should have” (Student 4), “In the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph there is the same example I have” (Student 2), and “Opinion is expressed only in the conclusion” (Student 2). Student 1 noted: “The structure of the model essay is different, I wrote about advantages and disadvantages, but here only support of opinion is expressed in the introduction” (Student 2).

## Coherence and Cohesion

This category included noticing of logical sequencing, organisation of paragraphs and cohesive devices and accounted for 20.83% of all noticed linguistic items. Notes included “*However* – I also used it” (Student 3), “*In this essay I intend to* – good phrase for introduction” (Student 2), “I forgot to write a conclusion” (Student 3) or “The model essay has 3 body paragraphs, but I only have 2” (Student 1) “There are no linking words used at the beginning of paragraphs, but the text is still coherent. I should’ve used the same technique.” (Student 1).

## Other

There were only 3 items which could not be categorized. These were: “I left an empty line between paragraphs” (Student 4), “Paragraph 3 only has 2 sentences” (Student 3) and “I wrote fewer words” (Student 4).

2. Is there a difference in noticing between lower and higher level Slovene EFL students?

Two of the participants were of a more advanced level (Student 1 and Student 2) and the other two were of a lower level (Student 3 and Student 4). The purpose of this research question was to find out whether the quality of students’ noticing in any way depends on their level of English. A quantitative analysis was made and the results are presented in Table 2.

	Higher level (N = 2)				Lower level (N = 2)			
	n	%	MD	SD	n	%	MD	SD
Task Response	13	23.21	6.50	0.5	8	20.0	4.00	1
Coherence and Cohesion	15	26.78	7.50	0.5	5	12.50	2.50	0.5
Lexical Resource	18	32.14	9.00	1	11	27.50	5.50	0.5
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	10	17.86	5.00	0	13	32.50	6.50	0.5
Other	0	0	0	0	3	7.50	1.50	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20.00</b>	<b>3.5</b>

Table 2. Descriptive statistics language items noticed by higher and lower level students.

In comparison with the higher level, it can be seen that the lower level students noticed far more grammatical items (32.50% vs. 17.86%) and less of all other items. A distinct difference

is Coherence and Cohesion, where the higher level students noticed 26.78%, MD = 7.50 of all items, while the lower level students noticed only 12.50%, MD = 2.50 of all language items. From these results it can be concluded that there is a difference in noticing between students of different levels. The research shows that higher level students noticed more language items overall (56 of 94). They noticed more items characterized as Lexical Resource and fewer items characterized as Grammatical Range and Accuracy than lower level students.

3. Is there a difference in noticing between Japanese and Slovene EFL students?

The names of categories in Abe's and the present research differ to some extent:

- Task Response = Content
- Coherence and Cohesion = Discourse
- Lexical Resource = Lexical
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy = Form

Below, the author's terminology in the context of IELTS is used.

	Slovene students (N = 4)				Japanese students (N = 14)			
	n	%	MD	SD	n	%	MD	SD
Task Response	21	21.87	5.25	0.59	107	26.80	7.64	2.92
Coherence and Cohesion	20	20.83	5.0	2.55	44	11.0	3.14	1.92
Lexical Resource	29	30.21	5.8	1.07	133	33.30	9.50	4.15
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	23	23.95	5.75	0.88	79	19.80	5.64	3.50
Other	3	3.12	0.75	1	36	9.0	2.57	1.34
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24.00</b>	<b>6.08</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28.50</b>	<b>5.73</b>

Table 3. Comparison of frequency, proportion, mean and standard deviation of the lexical items between Slovene and Japanese students (Abe, 2008).

In comparing the quality of noticing between Slovene and Japanese students it can be seen from Table 3 that on average the Japanese participants noticed 28.50 LREs (language-related episodes), while Slovene students noticed 24.00 language items. Furthermore, Japanese students noticed more items classified as Task Response in this research and Content in Abe's research than Slovene (26.8%, MD=7.64 vs. 21.87%, MD=5.25). As far as Coherence and Cohesion (or Discourse in Abe's research) is concerned, Slovene students noticed far more items (20.83%, MD=5.0 vs. 11.0%, MD=3.14). Moreover, in the Japanese study 33.3%, MD=9.50 of all noticed items were lexical, while in Slovene 30.21%, MD=5.8 items were lexical. Therefore, the category of Lexical Resource is the most noticed category in both studies. 23.95%, MD=5.75 items were classified as Grammatical Range and Accuracy in the Slovene study and 19.80%, MD=5.64 in the Japanese study. In terms of frequency in the Slovene study, the categories follow each other in the following order; Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy, Task Response, Coherence and Cohesion, and other, while in the Japanese study, the students noticed items

in the following order; Lexical Resource, Task Response, Grammatical Range and Accuracy, Coherence and Cohesion and Other.

	Advanced (N = 5)				Intermediate (N = 5)			
	N	%	MD	SD	n	%	MD	SD
Lexical	61	39.4	12.20	3.49	31	24.8	6.20	3.11
Form	25	16.1	5.00	3.32	36	28.8	7.20	4.32
Discourse	22	14.2	4.40	0.89	5	4.0	1.00	1.22
Content	33	21.3	6.60	2.07	41	32.8	8.20	3.96
Other	14	9.0	2.80	1.92	12	9.6	2.40	0.89
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>31.00</b>	<b>6.96</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>25.00</b>	<b>1.41</b>

*Table 4. Frequency, proportion, mean and standard deviation of LREs in Japanese students (Abe 2008).*

Like Slovene students, Japanese higher level students also noticed more items in general; 155 in comparison to lower level students, who noticed 125 items. Slovene higher level students noticed 56 items in comparison to lower level students, who only noticed 40. Furthermore, as Slovene lower level students, Japanese lower level students also noticed far more grammatical items than more advanced students (28.8%, MD = 7.20 vs. 16.1, MD = 5.00). Moreover, Slovene higher level students at 26.78%, MD = 7.50 and Japanese higher level students at 14.2%, MD = 4.40 noticed more language items categorized as Coherence and Cohesion or Discourse, respectively. Therefore, in both pieces of research higher level students noticed more language items overall, more items characterized as Lexical Resource, Coherence and Cohesion and fewer items characterized as Grammatical Range and Accuracy than lower level students did. However, Japanese lower level students noticed more items characterized as Content or Task Response (32.8%, MD = 8.20 vs. 21.3%, MD = 6.60), while Slovene lower levels students noticed fewer items characterized as Task Response than higher level students (20.0%, MD = 4.00 vs. 23.21%, MD = 6.50).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed at examining the role of a model essay in teaching Task 2 of the IELTS writing exam. The study has found that noticing plays a vital role as students generally noticed a significant number of language items. In addition, the results also revealed that there is a difference in the quality and quantity of noticing between higher and lower level EFL students. A comparison between the quality and quality of noticing of Japanese and Slovene students showed more similarities than differences.

Furthermore, the results showed that model essays encourage students to find their own gaps in knowledge and may therefore contribute to taking responsibility for their learning. They might also function as a suitable tool for one-on-one instruction as such exercises focus on students'

needs by allowing students to realize what they already know and what they still need to learn. Alternatively, model essays could also be used to introduce students to samples of poor writing.

Data analysis of the first research question revealed general tendencies in noticing gaps between students' own writing and a native speaker or a native speaker-like model among four Slovene students of English. Considering that the students noticed 24.0 (MD = 24.0) items on average, it can be presumed that a comparison of students' own writing with a model could serve as a successful tool in EFL, especially if we consider Schmidt's observations that learners need to notice a form before they can acquire it (Schmidt 1990).

In general, the largest proportion of the noticed items was lexical (30.21%, MD = 5.8), which is consistent with some of the previous research works which tested noticing by asking participants to compare students' original writing with a model text (Abe 2008; Hanaoka 2007).

In the present study grammatical items were the second most frequently noticed items (23.95%, MD = 5.75), which could be attributed to the fact that the four participants had spent a significant proportion of their studying English, learning grammar as part of their compulsory formal education and private IELTS lessons where a lot of their homework consisted of grammar exercises in the IELTS context.

The second research question attempted to provide an answer to whether there is a difference in noticing between higher and lower level Slovene students of EFL. Consistent with previous studies, which showed that higher level students generally notice more frequently (Abe 2008; Hanaoka 2007), the present study also showed that higher level students noticed more language items (MD = 28.0) than lower level students did (MD = 20.0). Higher level students also noticed more lexical items than lower level students: MD = 31.14 vs. MD = 27.50, which is consistent with Abe's results as well as Qi and Lapkin's study from 2001 and Hanaoka's study from 2007. On the other hand, lower level students paid more attention to noticing grammatical items with MD = 32.50 in lower level students and MD = 17.84 with higher level students. In addition, lower level students paid very little attention to coherence and cohesion with the difference between higher level and lower level students being nearly 10 items on average. This is also consistent with previous research (Abe 2008; Qi and Lapkin 2001) and might suggest that lower level students focus on form more than on any other aspect of language and that they might find it difficult to notice logical sequencing in paragraphs and linking.

The third research question aimed at looking at the quality and quantity of noticing in comparing students' original writing with a native speaker or native speaker-like model between Slovene and Japanese EFL students. It has been found that on average Japanese participants noticed more language items than Slovene ones did: 28.50 in comparison to 24.0 language items noticed by Slovene students. Furthermore, Japanese students noticed far more items classified as Task Response in this research and Content in Abe's research than Slovene students did (26.8%, MD=7.64 vs. 21.87%, MD=5.25). As regards Coherence and Cohesion, Slovene students noticed far more items (20.83%, MD=5.0 vs. 11.0%, MD=3.14). Moreover, in the Japanese study 33.3%, MD=9.50 of all noticed items were lexical, while in Slovene 30.21%, MD=5.8 items were lexical. Therefore, both, Slovene and Japanese students noticed lexical items most

frequently, which makes model essays a suitable tool for teaching lexical resource in the IELTS Task 2 instruction.

Both Slovene and Japanese higher level students noticed more items in general. Furthermore, similarly to Slovene lower level students, Japanese lower level students also noticed far more grammatical items than advanced students did (28.8%, MD = 7.20 vs. 16.1, MD = 5.00). Moreover, Slovene higher level students at 26.78%, MD = 7.50 and Japanese higher level students at 14.2%, MD = 4.40 noticed more language items categorized as Coherence and Cohesion or Discourse, respectively. However, Japanese lower level students noticed more items characterized as Content or Task Response (32.8%, MD = 8.20 vs. 21.3%, MD = 6.60), while Slovene lower levels students noticed fewer items characterized as Task Response than higher level students did (20.0%, MD = 4.00 vs. 23.21%, MD = 6.50).

The similarities in the results show that stimulating noticing by comparing students' original writing with a model essay may be a successful feedback tool, especially in building students' vocabulary and improving grammar. On the other hand, the differences might be the result of different instruction style, which pays attention to different aspects of the language.

As the present study was conducted on four Slovene IELTS students only and with one essay task, further research should be based on a larger sample with a variety of model essays in order to confirm the results. Attention should also be paid to both the efficiency of note taking and vocalizing as data collection techniques, as well as the students' response to the model essay by means of a questionnaire in order to find out to what extent, if at all, the students find it useful. Finally, research into the effectiveness of noticing would be supported by asking participants to write another essay after they have taken notes in the noticing stage of the research in order to see if and how their writing has improved and to what extent they have simulated the model essay.

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