

Reframing Listening and Pronunciation Pedagogy through IELTS-Oriented Tasks: Exploring Teacher Cognition in ELT Teacher Education

Manolya SAĞLAM

Biruni University, Faculty of Education, Department of English Language Teaching

ABSTRACT: This study explores the pedagogical potential of IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks within a first-year Listening and Pronunciation course in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program. Drawing on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), teacher cognition theory, and washback theory, the study investigates how engagement with IELTS-oriented tasks influences pre-service English teachers' listening and pronunciation development, communicative competence, pedagogical understandings, and perceptions of assessment-oriented learning. A qualitative case study design was employed with 48 first-year pre-service English teachers enrolled in an ELT program at a foundation university in Istanbul, Türkiye. Data were collected through reflective journals, classroom observations, and semi-structured focus group interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five interrelated themes. Participants developed greater awareness of spoken English and listening strategies, shifted from accuracy-oriented views of pronunciation toward communicative intelligibility, and increasingly perceived IELTS-oriented tasks as opportunities for meaningful communication rather than solely examination preparation. The findings further indicated that engagement with these tasks contributed to changes in teacher cognition by encouraging more communicative understandings of listening and pronunciation instruction. Participants also reconsidered traditional assumptions regarding the relationship between assessment and pedagogy and recognized the potential of assessment-related activities to support learning and interaction. The study suggests that IELTS-oriented tasks can function as effective pedagogical resources when implemented through communicative and task-based principles. It further highlights the potential of assessment-oriented activities to bridge language assessment and language pedagogy while supporting the preparation of reflective and communicatively oriented future English language teachers.

KEYWORDS: IELTS-oriented tasks; listening and pronunciation; teacher cognition; Task-Based Language Teaching; ELT teacher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening and pronunciation constitute two fundamental dimensions of oral communication in second language learning and play a crucial role in learners' ability to participate effectively in spoken interactions. Listening enables learners to process spoken language, interpret meaning, and engage in real-time communication, while pronunciation contributes to intelligibility and successful message transmission. Despite their interconnected nature, listening and pronunciation have frequently been taught as separate skills within traditional English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms, often through form-focused and accuracy-oriented instructional practices (Field, 2010; Levis, 2018).

Historically, listening instruction has tended to emphasize comprehension testing rather than the development of listening processes, with learners often positioned as passive recipients of information (Field, 2010; Rost, 2024). Similarly, pronunciation teaching has commonly focused on the accurate production of individual sounds and adherence to native-speaker norms, frequently overlooking the communicative purposes of spoken language (Derwing & Munro, 2017; Levis, 2005). Such approaches have been criticized for their limited capacity to prepare learners for authentic communication, where successful interaction depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on the ability to negotiate meaning, comprehend diverse accents, and communicate intelligibly in real-world contexts (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

In response to these limitations, contemporary language pedagogy has increasingly shifted toward communicative and learner-centered approaches that prioritize meaningful language use and authentic interaction. One of the most influential developments within this paradigm is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which positions meaningful tasks as the central unit of instruction (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014). Rather than focusing primarily on the mastery of discrete linguistic forms, TBLT encourages learners to use language to achieve communicative goals, thereby fostering interaction, fluency, and communicative competence (Ellis, 2018;

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Skehan, 1998). Within such learning environments, listening and pronunciation are viewed as interconnected resources that develop through participation in authentic language-use situations.

Alongside these pedagogical developments, increasing attention has been directed toward the educational potential of assessment-related tasks. Although high-stakes language examinations are often criticized for encouraging teaching to the test, recent scholarship suggests that assessment tasks can also support meaningful learning when embedded within pedagogically rich environments (Green, 2007; Hawkey, 2006). Among these examinations, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) includes listening and speaking tasks that require learners to process authentic spoken input, identify key information, negotiate meaning, and produce comprehensible spoken language. Consequently, IELTS-oriented tasks may provide opportunities to support language development beyond their traditional assessment purposes.

Recent scholarship has also challenged the traditional separation between assessment and instruction. Washback theory suggests that language assessments influence not only what learners study but also how teachers teach and how educational practices evolve (Alderson & Wall, 1993). While high-stakes examinations are frequently associated with test-oriented instruction, positive washback may emerge when assessment tasks encourage meaningful learning and communicative engagement (Cheng, 1998; Wall, 2005). From this perspective, IELTS-oriented tasks can be viewed as pedagogical resources capable of supporting both language learning and instructional development.

The pedagogical significance of such tasks becomes particularly important within language teacher education programs. Pre-service teachers do not merely develop language proficiency; they simultaneously construct beliefs and understandings about effective teaching practices. Teacher cognition research suggests that these beliefs are shaped through a complex interaction of prior learning experiences, educational contexts, and classroom practices (Borg, 2003; 2015). As a result, the learning experiences encountered during teacher education may substantially influence future instructional decisions and professional development.

Despite growing interest in Task-Based Language Teaching, teacher cognition, and assessment-informed learning, limited research has examined how these dimensions intersect within English language teacher education. In particular, little is known about how IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks shape pre-service teachers' language learning experiences while simultaneously influencing their pedagogical understandings of listening and pronunciation instruction. Addressing this gap is important because teacher education programs play a central role in shaping future teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the integration of IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks within a first-year Listening and Pronunciation course in an English Language Teaching program. Guided by Teacher Cognition Theory (Borg, 2003, 2015) and Task-Based Language Teaching (Ellis, 2003, 2018), the study examines how engagement with these tasks influences pre-service teachers' listening and pronunciation development, communicative competence, and pedagogical understandings. In doing so, the study contributes to current discussions on assessment-informed pedagogy, teacher learning, and communicative language education.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Despite growing interest in Task-Based Language Teaching, teacher cognition, and assessment-informed learning, limited research has examined how IELTS-oriented tasks function within English language teacher education. Existing studies have largely focused on language proficiency development, examination performance, listening instruction, pronunciation pedagogy, or washback effects independently. Consequently, little is known about how engagement with IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks influences both language learning experiences and pedagogical understandings among pre-service English teachers.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks, implemented within a first-year Listening and Pronunciation course, contribute to pre-service English teachers' listening and pronunciation development, communicative competence, and professional learning. More specifically, the study explores how engagement with these tasks shapes participants' pedagogical understandings of listening and pronunciation instruction, influences teacher cognition, and reveals the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating assessment-oriented activities into ELT teacher education.

1.2 Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How do IELTS-oriented tasks influence pre-service English teachers' listening and pronunciation development?

RQ2. How do IELTS-oriented tasks contribute to the development of communicative competence among pre-service English teachers?

RQ3. How do experiences with IELTS-oriented tasks shape pre-service teachers' pedagogical understandings and teacher cognition regarding listening and pronunciation instruction?

RQ4. What opportunities and challenges do pre-service teachers perceive in the integration of IELTS-oriented tasks within an ELT teacher education context?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Listening and Pronunciation as Communicative Competencies

Contemporary perspectives on second language acquisition increasingly conceptualize listening and pronunciation as interconnected communicative competencies rather than isolated language skills. Research suggests that listening comprehension and pronunciation development are mutually supportive processes, as exposure to authentic spoken language enhances phonological awareness, while greater sensitivity to phonological features facilitates listening comprehension (Field, 2010; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Despite this interrelationship, listening and pronunciation have traditionally been taught through form-focused instructional approaches. Listening instruction has often emphasized comprehension outcomes and correct responses rather than the cognitive and metacognitive processes involved in meaning construction (Field, 2010; Rost, 2024). Similarly, pronunciation teaching has historically focused on the accurate production of individual sounds and adherence to native-speaker norms, frequently privileging accuracy over communicative effectiveness (Levis, 2005).

Recent developments in pronunciation pedagogy have challenged these assumptions by shifting attention from native-like performance toward intelligibility, comprehensibility, and successful communication. Levis (2018) argues that pronunciation instruction should aim to help learners become understandable interlocutors rather than imitate native-speaker models. Likewise, Derwing and Munro (2017) emphasize that successful communication depends more on comprehensibility and fluency than on phonological perfection. These perspectives suggest that listening and pronunciation are most effectively developed within communicative learning environments that expose learners to authentic spoken language and meaningful interaction.

Such developments provide an important theoretical foundation for examining how IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks may support listening comprehension, pronunciation awareness, and communicative language development within teacher education contexts.

2.2 Task-Based Language Teaching and Communicative Language Development

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a communicative approach that views meaningful task completion as the primary mechanism through which language learning occurs (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014). Rather than emphasizing the practice of isolated linguistic forms, TBLT encourages learners to use language to achieve communicative goals and solve real-world problems.

According to Ellis (2003), tasks require learners to focus primarily on meaning while working toward identifiable outcomes. Through participation in task-based activities, learners engage in interaction, negotiation of meaning, and collaborative problem-solving, processes that are considered central to second language development. Such experiences promote language acquisition by positioning language as a tool for communication rather than an object of analysis (Ellis, 2018).

TBLT is particularly relevant to listening and speaking instruction because it creates opportunities for learners to engage with authentic input and produce meaningful output in communicative contexts. Skehan (1998) argues that task-based activities foster fluency, confidence, and interaction by shifting attention away from linguistic perfection toward successful communication. From this perspective, TBLT provides a useful framework for understanding how IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks can be implemented as learning opportunities rather than solely as assessment activities.

2.3 Teacher Cognition and Professional Identity in ELT Teacher Education

Teacher cognition encompasses the beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, and thought processes that shape teachers' interpretations of teaching and learning (Borg, 2003). Research in this area emphasizes that teachers' instructional decisions are influenced not only by formal training but also by prior learning experiences, contextual factors, and ongoing professional practice (Borg, 2015).

A central assumption of teacher cognition research is that pedagogical beliefs develop through experience and reflection. Experiential learning opportunities play a particularly important role in shaping how teachers conceptualize language learning, classroom interaction, and effective instructional practices (Barnard & Burns, 2012). Consequently, teacher education programs are increasingly viewed as contexts in which future teachers construct and reconstruct their understandings of teaching rather than simply acquire methodological knowledge.

Teacher cognition is closely connected to professional identity development. As pre-service teachers engage in educational experiences, they simultaneously negotiate beliefs about effective teaching and construct understandings of themselves as future professionals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Norton (2013) similarly argues that professional identities emerge through participation in social and educational experiences that shape individuals' perceptions of their roles within communities of practice. Accordingly, pedagogical experiences influence not only what teachers think about teaching and learning but also how they envision themselves as educators.

Within this framework, engagement with IELTS-oriented tasks may provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect on traditional assumptions regarding listening and pronunciation instruction and to develop new pedagogical perspectives. Such experiences are therefore relevant not only to language learning but also to teacher development and professional learning within ELT teacher education.

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2.4 Washback Theory and Assessment-Informed Learning

The relationship between assessment and instruction has long been a central concern in applied linguistics. Washback refers to the influence that language assessments exert on teaching practices, learning behaviors, curriculum design, and educational decision-making (Alderson & Wall, 1993).

Early washback research frequently emphasized the potentially negative consequences of high-stakes examinations, arguing that tests may narrow curricula and encourage teaching to the test (Cheng, 1998; Wall, 2005). However, subsequent scholarship has demonstrated that washback is not inherently negative. Assessment practices may also generate positive outcomes when assessment-related activities promote meaningful learning, learner engagement, and communicative language use.

Contemporary perspectives increasingly challenge the traditional separation between assessment and instruction by emphasizing their interconnected nature. Within this view, assessment-related tasks are not merely instruments for measuring achievement but can also contribute to learning when embedded within communicative and pedagogically meaningful environments. This perspective provides an important foundation for understanding how IELTS-oriented tasks may function as both assessment-related and learning-oriented activities.

2.5 IELTS-Oriented Tasks as Pedagogical Tools in Teacher Education

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is one of the most widely recognized English language proficiency examinations worldwide and is frequently associated with university admission, international mobility, and professional certification (Green, 2007). As a result, IELTS preparation has traditionally been viewed as a test-oriented activity aimed primarily at improving examination performance.

However, IELTS listening and speaking tasks incorporate many features associated with communicative and task-based learning. Learners are required to interpret authentic spoken discourse, identify key information, negotiate meaning, organize ideas, and communicate effectively in real-time situations. These characteristics align closely with principles of communicative language teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching, suggesting that IELTS-oriented tasks may function as learning opportunities as well as assessment-related activities (Green, 2007; Hawkey, 2006).

Despite growing interest in assessment-informed learning and positive washback, research on IELTS has focused predominantly on language proficiency outcomes, examination preparation, and assessment effects. Comparatively little attention has been paid to how IELTS-oriented tasks are experienced within teacher education settings or how such experiences influence pre-service teachers' understandings of language learning and teaching. This gap is particularly evident in relation to listening and pronunciation instruction, where assessment-oriented tasks have rarely been examined as pedagogical resources.

The present study addresses this gap by exploring how IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks are experienced by pre-service English teachers within a Listening and Pronunciation course. In doing so, it examines the potential of assessment-oriented activities to support language development, communicative engagement, and pedagogical learning within ELT teacher education.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks were experienced within a naturally occurring teacher education context. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to examine participants' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes rather than measure predetermined variables (Merriam, 1998).

The study was framed as an instrumental case study, which enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of a contemporary educational phenomenon within its real-life context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The case consisted of a first-year Listening and Pronunciation course in which IELTS-oriented tasks were systematically integrated into instruction over a fourteen-week semester. The case study approach provided a holistic framework for examining how pre-service English teachers experienced assessment-oriented tasks within a communicative learning environment and how they interpreted the educational value of these experiences. Accordingly, the design was well suited to investigating the complex relationship between assessment, language learning, and teacher education.

3.2 Context and Participants

The study was conducted in the English Language Teaching (ELT) program of a foundation university in Istanbul, Türkiye. The research took place within a compulsory first-year Listening and Pronunciation course that focused on the development of listening comprehension, pronunciation awareness, and oral communication skills.

Participants consisted of 48 first-year pre-service English teachers enrolled in the course. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21 years. Purposeful sampling was employed because all participants were directly involved in the instructional intervention and were therefore able to provide detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

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The course was redesigned to incorporate IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks and was implemented over a fourteen-week semester. These tasks formed an integral part of the instructional process and provided the educational context within which participants' experiences were examined.

3.3 Instructional Procedure

The instructional intervention was informed by principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (Ellis, 2003, 2018). Throughout the semester, participants engaged in a series of IELTS-oriented listening and speaking activities integrated into the Listening and Pronunciation course.

Listening activities included listening for gist and detail, note-completion tasks, information-transfer activities, identifying speaker attitudes, and interpreting spoken discourse. Speaking activities involved individual speaking simulations, pair and group discussions, opinion-sharing tasks, short presentations, and communicative problem-solving activities. Pronunciation instruction focused on intelligibility, stress patterns, rhythm, connected speech, and comprehensibility rather than isolated phonological features.

The instructional process emphasized task completion through interaction and language use. Participants were encouraged to engage in pair and group work, negotiate meaning, and reflect on their learning experiences throughout the semester. IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks constituted the primary instructional activities and provided the basis for the learning experiences examined in this study.

3.4 Data Collection

Multiple qualitative data sources were employed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and to facilitate methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2012).

3.4.1 Reflective Journals

Participants completed weekly reflective journals throughout the fourteen-week course. The journals encouraged students to document their experiences, perceived learning gains, challenges, emotional responses, and reflections on listening and pronunciation instruction.

3.4.2 Classroom Observations

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted throughout the semester. Observation notes focused on learner engagement, classroom interaction, participation patterns, and participants' responses to IELTS-oriented tasks. These observations provided contextual information that complemented the journal and interview data.

3.4.3 Semi-Structured Focus Group Interviews

At the end of the instructional intervention, semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with volunteer participants. Focus groups were selected because they enable participants to share experiences, discuss common concerns, and construct meanings through social interaction (Morgan, 1997). The interviews explored participants' perceptions of IELTS-oriented tasks and their experiences throughout the course.

The use of multiple qualitative data sources allowed the researcher to examine the phenomenon from different perspectives and enhance the credibility of the analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase analytical framework. Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic yet flexible approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns across qualitative datasets.

The analysis involved six stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of reflective journals, observation notes, and interview transcripts; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) searching for potential themes; (4) reviewing and refining themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the final report. Coding was conducted iteratively, with constant comparison across data sources to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns.

Through this process, a set of themes and sub-themes was generated to represent participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of IELTS-oriented tasks within the course context.

3.6 Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were employed. Credibility was supported through methodological triangulation across reflective journals, classroom observations, and focus group interviews. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants and inviting feedback regarding the accuracy of these interpretations.

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Dependability was enhanced through maintaining an audit trail documenting research decisions and analytical procedures. Confirmability was supported through reflexive memo writing throughout the research process, allowing the researcher to critically examine potential biases and assumptions. Transferability was facilitated through detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and instructional procedures, enabling readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and identifying information was removed from transcripts and research records. All collected data were stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes. The study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines and the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

4. FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of reflective journals, classroom observations, and focus group interviews generated five interrelated themes that captured participants' experiences with IELTS-oriented tasks in the Listening and Pronunciation course. The themes addressed listening and pronunciation development, communicative competence, teacher cognition, and participants' perceptions of assessment-oriented learning within teacher education.

4.1 Developing Awareness of Authentic Spoken English (RQ1)

The first theme concerned participants' increasing awareness of spoken English and their developing ability to process language in communicative contexts. Analysis of reflective journals, classroom observations, and focus group interviews revealed that engagement with IELTS-oriented listening tasks exposed participants to diverse accents, speech rates, and communication patterns. Unlike many of their previous listening experiences, which primarily emphasized comprehension questions and correct answers, participants reported becoming more attentive to how meaning is constructed through spoken interaction.

Many participants emphasized that the listening activities encouraged them to focus on overall meaning rather than individual words. Through repeated exposure to listening tasks, they reported developing greater confidence in identifying key information, predicting content, and interpreting speaker intentions. Several participants also indicated that they became more comfortable processing spoken language in real time, even when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary.

One participant reflected:

"Before this course, I tried to understand every single word when listening. If I missed one word, I felt lost. The IELTS listening activities taught me to focus on the main ideas and the overall message instead of individual words." (P7, Reflective Journal)

Similarly, another participant highlighted the value of exposure to different varieties of spoken English:

"The recordings exposed me to different accents and speaking styles. At first, it was difficult, but gradually I became more confident and less anxious when listening to unfamiliar speakers." (P14, Reflective Journal)

A third participant explained:

"I learned that successful listening is not about translating everything into Turkish. It is about understanding the speaker's intention and identifying important information." (P22, Focus Group Interview)

Several participants also reported improvements in their ability to anticipate content and use contextual clues during listening tasks. As one participant noted:

"The tasks encouraged me to predict what I was going to hear before listening. This strategy helped me understand longer recordings much more easily." (P31, Reflective Journal)

Classroom observations supported these perceptions. During the early weeks of the course, many participants appeared hesitant when engaging with longer listening passages and frequently requested repetition of audio recordings. As the semester progressed, however, students demonstrated greater confidence, actively discussed listening strategies with peers, and showed increased willingness to engage with spoken texts.

Participants also described extending listening practice beyond the classroom.

For example:

"I started listening to English podcasts and videos outside the classroom because I realized that this kind of listening practice was helping me improve." (P18, Reflective Journal)

Overall, the findings indicate that IELTS-oriented listening tasks contributed to greater listening awareness, strategic processing, and confidence in understanding spoken English. Participants increasingly approached listening as an active process of meaning construction rather than simply a comprehension exercise.

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4.2 Moving from Pronunciation Accuracy to Communicative Intelligibility (RQ1)

The second theme reflected a shift in participants' perceptions of pronunciation learning and teaching. Analysis of reflective journals, classroom observations, and focus group interviews revealed that many participants initially associated successful pronunciation with native-like speech and error-free production. However, engagement with IELTS-oriented speaking tasks gradually encouraged a more communicative understanding of pronunciation.

Throughout the semester, participants increasingly viewed pronunciation as a resource for facilitating understanding rather than as an isolated skill focused solely on accuracy. They frequently emphasized the importance of intelligibility, stress, rhythm, intonation, and comprehensibility in successful communication. As their confidence developed, many participants reported becoming less concerned with sounding "perfect" and more focused on expressing ideas clearly and effectively.

One participant explained:

"Before this course, I thought good pronunciation meant sounding like a native speaker. Now I think the most important thing is being understood by others." (P5, Reflective Journal)

Similarly, another participant noted:

"The speaking activities showed me that communication can still be successful even when pronunciation is not perfect. What matters is whether people understand your message." (P17, Focus Group Interview)

Several participants highlighted how pronunciation awareness extended beyond individual sounds to broader features of spoken communication.

As one participant stated:

"I became more aware of stress and intonation. These features helped me communicate more naturally than simply focusing on individual sounds." (P11, Reflective Journal)

Participants also reported that the communicative nature of the tasks reduced their anxiety about making pronunciation mistakes and encouraged greater willingness to speak.

For example:

"I was afraid of speaking because I worried about pronunciation errors. The tasks helped me focus on communication rather than mistakes." (P8, Focus Group Interview)

Likewise:

"The more I participated in discussions, the less I worried about sounding perfect. I became more comfortable sharing my ideas." (P21, Reflective Journal)

A recurring pattern across the data was the growing awareness that listening and pronunciation are closely interconnected skills.

One participant commented:

"Listening to the recordings helped me notice how people actually speak. This improved both my listening and my pronunciation." (P34, Reflective Journal)

Classroom observations further supported these reflections. During the initial weeks of the course, many participants appeared hesitant during speaking activities and frequently interrupted their speech to self-correct pronunciation errors. As the semester progressed, however, students demonstrated greater fluency, increased willingness to communicate, and higher levels of participation in pair and group discussions. Although pronunciation inaccuracies occasionally remained, participants appeared more willing to focus on meaning rather than linguistic perfection.

Some participants also connected these experiences to their future teaching practices.

For instance:

"This experience changed how I think about teaching pronunciation. In the future, I would focus on helping students communicate confidently rather than correcting every mistake." (P38, Reflective Journal)

Overall, the findings indicate that IELTS-oriented speaking tasks contributed to a shift from an accuracy-oriented view of pronunciation toward a communicative intelligibility perspective. Participants increasingly perceived pronunciation as a tool for effective interaction and developed greater confidence in spoken communication.

4.3 IELTS Tasks as Communicative Learning Opportunities (RQ2)

The third theme concerned participants' perceptions of IELTS-oriented tasks as opportunities for meaningful communication and language use. Analysis of reflective journals, classroom observations, and focus group interviews revealed a noticeable shift in how participants conceptualized IELTS-related activities throughout the semester. While many initially viewed IELTS tasks primarily as examination preparation exercises, they gradually began to perceive them as communicative learning experiences that facilitated interaction, collaboration, and language use.

Participants frequently reported that task-based listening and speaking activities encouraged them to use English for genuine communicative purposes rather than merely producing correct answers. Through pair work, group discussions, information-gap

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activities, and speaking simulations, students engaged in exchanges that required them to express opinions, negotiate meaning, and respond spontaneously to others.

One participant reflected:

“At the beginning of the course, I thought IELTS activities would only help me prepare for an exam. Later, I realized that the tasks actually encouraged real communication and meaningful interaction.” (P12, Reflective Journal)

Similarly, another participant explained:

“The speaking tasks felt more like real conversations than exam practice. We had to express our own opinions and react to what others were saying.” (P28, Focus Group Interview)

Several participants highlighted the role of collaborative learning during communicative tasks.

As one participant noted:

“I became more confident speaking English because the activities required us to express our own ideas rather than repeat prepared responses.” (P35, Reflective Journal)

Many participants emphasized that the tasks increased their willingness to communicate and reduced their fear of making mistakes.

One participant commented:

“I used to avoid speaking because I was afraid of making errors. The communicative tasks helped me focus on interaction rather than perfection.” (P24, Reflective Journal)

A recurring pattern across the data was the perception that IELTS-oriented tasks provided opportunities to connect classroom learning with real-world communication.

As one participant explained:

“The tasks reflected situations that people might actually encounter outside the classroom. This made learning feel more relevant and practical.” (P30, Reflective Journal)

Similarly:

“The course showed me that IELTS activities can be adapted for communicative teaching. They are not only about assessment but also about meaningful language use.” (P42, Focus Group Interview)

Classroom observations further supported these perceptions. Throughout the semester, students actively participated in pair and group-based activities, frequently negotiated meaning, exchanged opinions, and collaboratively completed communicative tasks. Increased levels of interaction and peer support were consistently observed during speaking activities. Participants also appeared increasingly willing to use English spontaneously despite occasional linguistic inaccuracies.

Overall, participants gradually reconceptualized IELTS-oriented tasks as opportunities for communication rather than solely as examination preparation activities. The tasks promoted interaction, collaboration, communicative confidence, and spontaneous language use, thereby supporting the development of communicative competence.

4.4 Transforming Teacher Cognition through Pedagogical Experience (RQ3)

The fourth theme highlighted the influence of IELTS-oriented tasks on participants' pedagogical beliefs and professional understandings. Analysis of reflective journals, classroom observations, and focus group interviews revealed that engagement with communicative listening and speaking tasks encouraged participants to reconsider many of their previous assumptions about language teaching and learning. In particular, participants described how their experiences in the course prompted them to reflect on effective instructional practices and their future roles as English language teachers.

Prior to the course, many participants viewed listening and pronunciation instruction as largely teacher-centered and accuracy-oriented processes focused on error correction, repetition, and examination performance. However, throughout the semester, participants increasingly questioned these assumptions and adopted more communicative perspectives.

One participant reflected:

“Before this course, I believed pronunciation teaching mainly involved correcting students' mistakes. Now I think the primary goal should be helping learners communicate confidently and effectively.” (P11, Reflective Journal)

Similarly, another participant explained:

“My previous teachers focused heavily on accuracy. This course showed me that communication and interaction can be more important than perfect pronunciation.” (P27, Focus Group Interview)

Many participants reported that their understanding of listening instruction also changed considerably. Rather than viewing listening as a tool for testing comprehension, they began to conceptualize it as a process involving active engagement, meaning-making, and strategic thinking.

As one participant stated:

“This course changed how I view listening activities. They should be interactive and meaningful rather than simply checking whether students know the correct answer.” (P6, Reflective Journal)

Another participant noted:

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“I realized that listening lessons can teach students how to understand meaning, predict information, and interact with spoken language instead of just answering questions.” (P19, Focus Group Interview)

Several participants also reported that the course influenced how they imagined designing future lessons.

One participant explained:

“The course taught me that assessment-related activities can also be used as learning opportunities. I would definitely integrate communicative tasks into my future classes.” (P38, Focus Group Interview)

Participants further indicated that the experience contributed to their emerging professional identities as future language teachers.

As one participant reflected:

“I started thinking not only as a student but also as a future teacher. I began asking myself why certain activities were effective and how I could use them in my own classroom.” (P9, Reflective Journal)

Classroom observations supported these reflections. Throughout the semester, participants increasingly engaged in pedagogical discussions regarding the effectiveness of communicative tasks, learner participation, and classroom interaction. Many students voluntarily connected their learning experiences to future teaching practices and reflected on how IELTS-oriented activities could be adapted for instructional purposes.

Overall, the findings indicate that IELTS-oriented tasks encouraged participants to reconsider traditional assumptions about listening and pronunciation instruction and adopt more communication-oriented perspectives. The experience also supported reflection on future teaching practices and contributed to the development of emerging professional understandings.

4.5 Negotiating the Tension Between Assessment and Pedagogy (RQ4)

The final theme concerned participants' perceptions of the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating IELTS-oriented tasks into an ELT teacher education context. While participants generally evaluated the experience positively, the findings revealed an ongoing negotiation between assessment-related expectations and communicative pedagogical goals. Analysis of reflective journals, classroom observations, and focus group interviews indicated that participants initially approached IELTS-oriented activities through the lens of examination preparation. However, as the course progressed, many began to reconceptualize these tasks as learning opportunities rather than solely assessment activities.

A recurring issue identified by participants was anxiety associated with the IELTS label itself. Many students reported that they initially perceived IELTS as a high-stakes examination characterized by strict evaluation, performance pressure, and linguistic accuracy. This perception generated concerns regarding task difficulty, time limitations, and fear of making mistakes, particularly during speaking activities.

One participant reflected:

“When I first heard that we would be using IELTS tasks, I immediately felt nervous because I associated IELTS with difficult exams and strict assessment.” (P8, Reflective Journal)

Similarly, another participant explained:

“At the beginning of the semester, I worried that I would not be able to complete the tasks successfully because IELTS seemed intimidating and demanding.” (P22, Focus Group Interview)

However, participants consistently reported that these concerns gradually diminished as they became familiar with the communicative purposes of the activities.

One participant noted:

“Over time, I realized that the activities were designed to help us improve rather than judge our performance. This reduced my anxiety significantly.” (P17, Reflective Journal)

Another participant explained:

“As the semester progressed, I stopped thinking about grades and started focusing on communication and learning.” (P40, Focus Group Interview)

A particularly significant finding was participants' growing awareness that assessment-oriented tasks could be adapted to support meaningful language learning. Many participants reported that the course challenged their traditional assumptions regarding the relationship between assessment and instruction.

For example:

“This experience showed me that exam-related activities can also be effective learning tools when they are used in communicative ways.” (P5, Reflective Journal)

Similarly:

“I always thought assessment and teaching were separate things. Now I realize that assessment tasks can also promote learning and interaction.” (P28, Focus Group Interview)

Several participants connected these insights to their future teaching practices.

One participant reflected:

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“As a future teacher, I would use assessment-oriented tasks differently. Instead of focusing only on scores, I would use them to encourage communication and participation.” (P12, Reflective Journal)

Despite these positive perceptions, some participants continued to identify challenges associated with integrating IELTS-oriented activities into teacher education. These challenges included varying proficiency levels, occasional task-related stress, and concerns about balancing communicative learning objectives with assessment expectations.

As one participant observed:

“Some tasks were challenging because students had different language levels. Teachers need to adapt activities carefully.” (P25, Reflective Journal)

Another participant commented:

“There is always a risk that students may focus too much on performance if assessment tasks are not implemented thoughtfully.” (P43, Focus Group Interview)

Classroom observations supported these perceptions. During the early stages of the intervention, students frequently demonstrated signs of performance anxiety and hesitancy during communicative tasks. These behaviors gradually decreased as participants became more familiar with the learning environment and the instructional purposes of the activities. Increased participation, peer collaboration, and willingness to communicate were consistently observed during later stages of the course.

Overall, participants experienced an ongoing negotiation between assessment-oriented perceptions and communicative pedagogical goals. Although IELTS-oriented tasks initially generated anxiety because of their association with high-stakes assessment, participants gradually came to view them as meaningful learning opportunities that supported both communication and language development.

Consequently, the findings indicate that IELTS-oriented tasks influenced participants' experiences as language learners and future teachers. Participants reported increased awareness of spoken English, adopted more communicative understandings of pronunciation, and increasingly viewed IELTS-related activities as opportunities for interaction and language use. The findings also suggest that engagement with these tasks encouraged participants to reconsider traditional assumptions about listening and pronunciation instruction and to reflect on the relationship between assessment and pedagogy within language teacher education.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study explored how IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks were experienced within a first-year Listening and Pronunciation course in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program. The findings indicate that engagement with these tasks supported language learning while simultaneously influencing participants' pedagogical understandings of listening and pronunciation instruction. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing discussions concerning communicative language teaching, teacher cognition, and assessment-informed learning within teacher education contexts.

The first major finding relates to participants' increased awareness of spoken English and their developing listening and pronunciation abilities. Consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of authentic input in listening development (Field, 2010; Rost, 2024; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), participants reported becoming more attentive to meaning-making processes, discourse features, and listening strategies. Similarly, their evolving perceptions of pronunciation reflected a movement away from native-speaker norms toward communicative intelligibility. This finding aligns with contemporary pronunciation research suggesting that pronunciation instruction should prioritize comprehensibility and effective communication rather than phonological perfection (Derwing & Munro, 2017; Levis, 2018). The findings therefore support communicative perspectives that conceptualize listening and pronunciation as interconnected competencies developed through meaningful engagement with spoken language.

A second important finding concerns the role of IELTS-oriented tasks in promoting communicative competence. Participants increasingly perceived the tasks as opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and spontaneous language use rather than solely as examination preparation activities. This finding strongly supports the central assumptions of Task-Based Language Teaching, which views meaningful communication and task completion as key drivers of language development (Ellis, 2003, 2018; Long, 2014). Through interaction, negotiation of meaning, and communicative problem-solving, participants engaged with language as a tool for communication rather than an object of study. The findings therefore reinforce previous research suggesting that task-based learning environments foster fluency, engagement, and communicative confidence (Skehan, 1998).

Beyond language development, the findings revealed notable shifts in participants' pedagogical beliefs and professional understandings. Engagement with IELTS-oriented tasks encouraged participants to reconsider traditional assumptions regarding listening and pronunciation instruction and adopt more communication-oriented perspectives. This finding is consistent with teacher cognition research, which emphasizes that pedagogical beliefs are shaped through educational experiences and reflective engagement with practice (Borg, 2003, 2015). Rather than simply acquiring new instructional techniques, participants appeared to reconstruct their understandings of effective language teaching. The findings further support research on professional identity development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Norton, 2013), suggesting that communicative learning experiences may contribute to both teacher cognition and emerging professional identities within teacher education.

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A particularly significant contribution of the study concerns participants' changing perceptions of the relationship between assessment and pedagogy. Initially, many participants associated IELTS with high-stakes assessment, performance pressure, and examination preparation. However, these perceptions gradually shifted as participants experienced IELTS-oriented tasks within a communicative learning environment. Interpreted through the lens of washback theory (Alderson & Wall, 1993), this finding suggests that assessment-related activities may generate positive educational outcomes when integrated into meaningful pedagogical contexts. Consistent with more recent washback research (Cheng, 1998; Wall, 2005), participants increasingly recognized that assessment-oriented tasks could support communication and learning rather than merely evaluate performance.

Taken together, the findings challenge traditional distinctions between assessment and instruction. The study demonstrates that IELTS-oriented tasks can support language learning, pedagogical reflection, and professional growth when implemented through communicative and task-based principles. In this respect, the findings extend existing research on IELTS washback by illustrating how assessment-related activities may function as meaningful learning experiences within ELT teacher education. Such experiences may be particularly valuable in contemporary contexts where future language teachers are expected to balance communicative teaching principles with assessment demands.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the pedagogical potential of IELTS-oriented listening and speaking tasks within a first-year Listening and Pronunciation course in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program. Guided by Task-Based Language Teaching, teacher cognition theory, and washback theory, the study explored how engagement with IELTS-oriented tasks influenced pre-service English teachers' language learning experiences and pedagogical understandings.

The findings indicate that IELTS-oriented tasks can function as meaningful pedagogical resources when implemented through communicative and task-based instructional principles. Participants reported increased awareness of spoken English, developed more communicative understandings of pronunciation, and demonstrated greater confidence in listening and speaking activities. Rather than viewing listening and pronunciation as isolated skills, they increasingly perceived them as interconnected communicative competencies developed through authentic language use and interaction.

The study further revealed that engagement with IELTS-oriented tasks influenced participants' pedagogical beliefs and professional understandings. Many participants reconsidered traditional assumptions regarding listening and pronunciation instruction and adopted more communication-oriented perspectives. In addition, they increasingly recognized that assessment-related activities can support learning, interaction, and learner engagement when integrated into meaningful instructional contexts.

A particularly important contribution of the study concerns the relationship between assessment and pedagogy. The findings suggest that assessment-oriented tasks need not be viewed solely as tools for evaluating performance. Instead, when implemented within communicative learning environments, such tasks can support language development, reflective learning, and pedagogical growth. In this respect, the study provides evidence that assessment-related activities may generate positive educational outcomes within teacher education contexts.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the value of incorporating communicative and task-based assessment-related activities into language teacher education programs. Experiencing such activities as learners may help pre-service teachers develop not only language proficiency but also pedagogical awareness, reflective thinking, and instructional flexibility.

Overall, the study demonstrates that IELTS-oriented tasks can serve as effective bridges between language assessment and language pedagogy. By integrating assessment-related activities into communicative learning environments, teacher educators can support both language development and professional learning while preparing reflective, adaptive, and communicatively oriented future English language teachers.

7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the study was conducted within a single English Language Teaching (ELT) program at a foundation university in Istanbul, Türkiye. Consequently, the findings reflect the experiences of a specific group of first-year pre-service English teachers and may not be directly transferable to other educational contexts.

Second, the study employed a qualitative case study design and relied on reflective journals, classroom observations, and focus group interviews. While these data sources provided rich insights into participants' experiences, the findings are based primarily on participants' perceptions and interpretations. Therefore, the study does not seek to establish causal relationships between IELTS-oriented tasks and language learning outcomes but rather to understand how such tasks were experienced within a particular educational setting (Yin, 2018).

Third, the instructional intervention was implemented over a single fourteen-week semester. Teacher cognition and professional identity development are dynamic processes that evolve over time (Borg, 2015; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Consequently, the long-term influence of IELTS-oriented tasks on participants' pedagogical beliefs and future teaching practices remains uncertain.

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Finally, the study focused exclusively on pre-service English teachers enrolled in a Listening and Pronunciation course. As a result, the findings may not fully represent how IELTS-oriented pedagogical practices function in other language skills courses or teacher education contexts.

Despite these limitations, the study offers several directions for future research. Longitudinal studies may examine whether the pedagogical understandings identified in this study are sustained during teaching practicum experiences and the early years of professional practice. Mixed-methods research combining qualitative data with quantitative measures of listening comprehension, pronunciation development, communicative competence, and learner engagement may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of IELTS-oriented pedagogical interventions.

Future studies may further compare IELTS-oriented tasks with other communicative and task-based instructional approaches to identify which features contribute most effectively to language development and teacher learning. In addition, research investigating technology-enhanced and AI-supported IELTS-oriented tasks may provide valuable insights into how emerging digital tools can support assessment-informed language learning and teacher development. Finally, similar studies conducted across different institutions, educational levels, and cultural contexts would contribute to a broader understanding of how assessment-oriented tasks can be transformed into meaningful pedagogical resources within ELT teacher education.

In conclusion, continued research at the intersection of assessment, pedagogy, and teacher education has the potential to deepen our understanding of how assessment-related activities can support language learning, teacher cognition, and professional development in contemporary ELT contexts.

Conference Presentation Note

A preliminary version of this study was presented as an oral presentation at the ICSAS 6th International Congress on Education, held in Izmir, Türkiye, on April 10–12, 2026, under the title “Reframing Listening and Pronunciation Pedagogy Through IELTS-Oriented Tasks: A Case Study in ELT Teacher Education.” The present manuscript represents a revised and expanded version of the conference presentation.

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Conflict of Interest

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