

**Perceived Stress and Self Esteem: Mediating Role of Self Efficacy among IELTS Test Takers Abstract**

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The study looked at the impact of self-efficacy (SE) in mediating the link between perceived stress (PS) and self-esteem (SE) among IELTS test takers. A correlational research design was employed to carry out the current research. 280 IELTS test takers were selected who already attempted one or more trials of IELTS, through purposive sampling strategy. The data were collected from 15 different academies for IELTS preparation in Lahore. The main finding of the study was that between perceived stress and self-esteem, there was a partial mediation impact of self efficacy among IELTS test takers. The results also revealed that those test-takers who gave more attempts of IELTS experience higher stress and lower self-esteem and self-efficacy. The findings were presented in terms of the necessity of offering professional support to participants in terms of increasing their self respect, self belief and overcome the stresses .

**Keywords,** Perceived Stress, Self Esteem, Self-Efficacy, IELTS Test Takers

Language test takers have been the subject of attention for research and practice in recent years. The study looked at how examinees' ambition and opinions of test utilization and composition are related to the examination practices, utilizing the general English component of a prestigious university entry exam as the focal point (Razavipour, Mansoori, and Shooshtari, 2020). In particular, this study found that growing trends in The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has an impact on test takers' reported stress, self-esteem, and self-efficiency. IELTS is essential for a person who wishes to migrate or needs to achieve their education in English-speaking countries or work in such countries. According to the British Council's IELTS report released in March 2019, globalization and migration for higher education and improved employment possibilities result in roughly 3.5 million people taking the IELTS exam each year (Sujath & Prabhakar, 2021). The researchers investigated stress hormone (cortisol) tendencies by comparing baseline days to high-stakes testing days and concluded that high-stakes testing is associated with stress hormone (cortisol) replies that are proportional to test presentation (Heissel, Adam & Doleac, 2021). The purpose of a recent inquiry for IELTS writing task 2 instructors and learners is to uncover recurring challenges and provide associated solutions (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). Seyyedrezaei (2021) investigated the

Iranian Non-English Ph.D. Students who prepared for English Proficiency Test (EPT) had a low degree of self-belief in the ability to pass the trial even with inspiration at a high level and further discovered a high rate of stress, test anxiety, hopelessness, anxiousness, family stress or tension, motivation, and a high percentage of university dropouts among participants. Breeze & Miller in 2008 found that IELTS is ranging from 1 to 9 band scores assessing four skills i.e. “reading, writing, listening, and speaking”, which is applicable for 2 years. 6.0 is interpreted as the red line among most of the institutes all around the world and academic failure is considered among below 6.0 band and which is unacceptable, (Taylor & Weir, 2012). The way of achieving required band people gets tense so the current study found that IELTS test takers given no of attempts to achieve required band would create perceived stress and also affect their self-esteem.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated an event put off or threatens the accomplishment of important goals and objectives and it put at risk the highly valued potential of a person is described as stress. As this language, proficiency tests are goal-oriented tests so failure or success in these tests affects the test taker's stress level, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Hans Selye (1956) introduced the Response model describe stress as a defense mechanism, followed by three phases “alarm stage, resistance stage, and exhaustion stage”. The Model supports the purpose of the current study that IELTS test takers attempted more trials of the test to overcome their stress level and achieved their goals and satisfied their self-esteem and efficacy. Moreover, the current trend investigated that a high level of stress may affect learners' capacity to concentrate on a certain subject (Seyyedrezaei, 2021). The present study found perceived stress and self efficacy may effectively influence self-esteem of test-takers of language proficiency tests.

Albert Bandura (1986) proposed the “self efficacy approach”. The theory's originator recognized that “self efficacy” is a type of cognitive evaluation that each individual is developing to the best of his or her ability. For that reason, one's self efficacy is to decide one's own ability to organize and organize one's activities to achieve certain results. Self efficacy theory supports the present research aim that perceived stress, self esteem and self efficacy of test-takers depend on No of attempts in the way of achieving the required band of tests.

Rosenberg (1965) defines that a comparatively secure feeling of overall self-worth is known as self esteem. Higher potential of self efficacy will generally be predicted by people who have come to perceive themselves as highly competent, significant, flourishing, and praiseworthy (Gardner & Pierce, 1998) people who taking IELTS are also competent and had high expectations with tests and outcomes of a test should affect their self-worth (Dev & Qiqieh, 2016).

### **Literature review**

It is important to find how Perceived stress, self esteem, and self efficacy were used in times of yore researches concerning different conditions. The current trends explored by using self-report measures, researchers discovered that mindfulness and self-efficacy had a negative association with anxiety, depression, stress, and shows that among Indian IT workers, self-efficacy acts as a mediator between depression, anxiety,

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stress, and mindfulness. (Sharma & Kumra, 2022). Choosing a Career revealed that self-efficacy significantly moderated the role of emotional intelligence and self-esteem on professional flexibility (Hamzah, Kai Le & Musa, 2021). ) Higher levels of perceived stress were strongly connected to higher levels of anxiety, which in turn were linked to worse sleep quality and exhaustion. Self-esteem mitigated the indirect effect of perceived stress on sleep quality by reducing the effect of perceived stress on anxiety. This demonstrated that the anxiety had a greater mediation impact in those who had low self-esteem than in people who had high self-esteem (Zhao, Lan, Li, & Yang, 2021). Some qualitative methodologies investigate how candidates' attitudes about self-directed IELTS preparation influenced the aesthetic, behavioural, and cognitive engagement with virtual instructor comments and feedback (Pearson,2022), as well as how professionals saw students' failure to fulfill predictable expert principles in information structure, timeliness, and L2 verbal communication narrative (Dressen-Hammouda, & Wigham, 2022). Vaezi and Fallah (2011) were studied "the relationship between self- efficacy and stress among 108 EFL teachers in Iran". Mahmud (2018) investigated "the washback effects of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), a high-stakes compulsory university entry test". While the present study seeks to explore IELTS test takers of Pakistan, IELTS is also a high stake test necessary requisite in foreign countries for immigration. The study investigated "the casual interaction between mindful awareness and perceived stress in university students, with the function of self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and personality factors as moderators" (Heidari & Morovati, 2016). The study found that "Academic achievement among immigrant college freshman is influenced by self-efficacy and perceived stress", While the current study concentrated on English language proficiency test takers' stress, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Zajacova, lynch, &Espenshade, 2005). Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, Cribbie (2007) studied "the impact of stress, social support, and self-esteem of first-year graduates while adjusting to university". According to Molero, Perez-Fuentes & Gazquez (2018), "positive attitudes about one's efficacy boost one's self worth and make people better able to cope with stressful events such as academic overload, examinations, and so on". The current study reveals a significant positive link between self esteem and self efficacy in English language proficiency test takers unlike earlier studies on nurses' workload.

### **The rationale of the study**

NNES (Non-native English-speaking) individuals must obtain recognized and credible proof of English language proficiency (ELP) following the requirements of gatekeepers (test-users) such as universities, professional, training organizations, self-employed persons, and immigration officials in international cross-border population migrations for career, educational, and family reasons. The requirement to consider a wide range of opinions is essential in this work, particularly Non-English individuals who prepared for the English Proficiency Test (EPT) faced fears, despair, tensions, and stress, which affected their degree of motivation and self efficacy views (Seyyedrezaei, 2021). The literature suggested a wash-back impact on English proficiency tests, and the majority of studies focused on selective proficiency (i.e. writing feedback, speaking, etc) and its effects (Pearson, 2022; Dressen-Hammouda et.al, 2022). Furthermore, Furthermore, the research explores the mediation relationship between self efficacy(mediator), perceived stress, and self esteem in a range of contexts (Hamzah,

et.al, 2021; Heidari, et.al, 2016). It is essential in this quest to assess the influence of IELTS on people who take it frequently to obtain the desired bands. Given the current paucity of knowledge, the current study intends to increase understanding about the perspectives of failing to achieve intended bands, which can affect an individual's self worth, self concept, and stress level.

### Aims and Objectives

The suggested study sought to ascertain the role of self-efficacy in mediating the link between self esteem and perceived stress in IELTS test takers. The study's goal was to assist IELTS test takers who were concerned about obtaining trials over and over again in maintaining their self-esteem and efficacy.

### Research hypotheses

H1= Self-Efficacy would most likely mediate the relationship among Perceived Stress and self-esteem of IELTS test takers.

H2= In IELTS test takers, perceived stress would most likely have a negative association with self-efficacy and self-esteem.

H3= There would likely to be a positive relationship between self-efficacy and self-esteem among IELTS test takers.

Figure 1. Theory Through a Set of Path Models

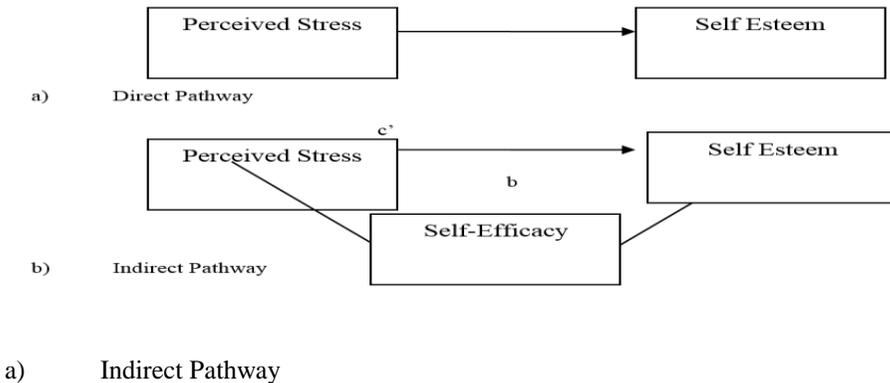


Figure 1. Generic mediation model being tested (based on Barron & Kenny, 1986). Proposed mediation model to estimate path towards self-esteem. Adapted from “The Moderator-Mediator Variable Distinction in Social Psychological Research: Conceptual, Strategic, And Statistical Considerations”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182.

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### **Method**

The correlation research design was used to investigate the association among perceived stress and self-esteem, with self efficacy functioning as a mediator. A quantitative research approach was utilized since the study concentrated on deliberate and statistical measurements, mathematical or numerical analysis of data obtained from scales.

#### **Sampling Strategy and sample**

Purposive sampling was employed to collect data in this study since the sample was drawn from the population with a specific goal in mind; it is also referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. The sample for the study consisted of 280 IELTS test takers who had previously taken one or more IELTS attempts. 75 percent of those who took the first two IELTS trials and 25 percent of people who took three or more trials were included in the research and were currently preparing for subsequent IELTS test attempts at academies. The sample was taken in the Pakistani city of Lahore. 350 questionnaires were issued, 300 of which were returned, and 20 of which were discarded because some were incomplete. A total of 280 questionnaires were completed correctly. As a result, the response rate was 80%.

#### **Assessment Measures**

The three evaluation measures used in this study were the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, 1994), the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) & the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

#### **Perceived Stress Scale**

This scale has 10 items, and the phrases on the scale ask about your sentiments and ideas from the preceding month. The responder will be asked to highlight the number of times they felt or thought a specific way in each situation. The responses were graded on a five-point Likert scale, with "0" indicating never, "1" suggesting nearly never, "2" indicating occasionally, "3" indicating rather frequently, and "4" indicating very frequently. PSS scores are computed by inverting the outcomes (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, and 4 = 0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, and 8) and then averaging over all rating scales. The Perceived Stress Scale has an accuracy of 0.80 (Cohen, 1994).

#### **General Self efficacy scale**

The questionnaire was used to examine participants' perceived self-efficacy in related to everyday discomforts and adjusting to stressful experiences. On a four-point Likert scale, the measure had 10 items. Respondents must choose one of four options: "1" means "not at all," "2" means "barely true," "3" means "moderately true," and "4" means "absolutely true." GSES scores are computed by adding every reply to arrive at a total amount grade. The marks range from 10 to 40. The overall dependability of the scale was 0.90. (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

### **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale**

A ten-item scale evaluates both positive and negative self-perceptions to assess overall self-worth. The scale was considered to be one dimensional. All items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating highly agrees, 2 indicating agree, 3 indicating disagree, and 4 indicating strongly disagree. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are scored in the opposite order. Give one point for "Strongly Disagree" and two points for "Disagree." "Agree" is worth three points, while "Strongly Agree" is worth four. Add up the points for all ten things. Keep a constant scoring scale. Better scores indicate a higher sense of self-esteem. The reliability of the scale was 0.88. (Rosenberg, 1965).

### **Procedure**

To begin, permission was acquired from the authors of the scales through email for data gathering. After obtaining authorization from the developers of the scales, the researcher began looking for IELTS academies. Data were collected from several IELTS academies in Lahore, Pakistan, where IELTS test takers were practicing for their upcoming trial. The respondents were given some information about the study and how to complete out the scales, as well as assurances that their information would be kept secret and solely used for academic purposes. Then, request that they read the entire questionnaire and answer it.

### **Statistical Analysis and results**

The entire data were recorded into SPSS version 21. The suitable statistical threshold was set at 0.05. Demographic information was evaluated using frequencies, percentages, averages, and standard deviations. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used to identify the correlations between variables, linear regression analysis was used to determine the first three assumptions of mediation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine the fourth assumption of mediation analysis.

### **Demographic characteristic**

Demographic characteristic describes there were more men than women who participated in the study. Most of the IELTS test takers were bachelor (42%) and master's degree holders (30%) and fewer are intermediate degree level (5%) and specialized in other degrees (13%). Most of the participants of the study were taking an academic module (66%) than a general module (34%) of IELTS. Maximum research participants attempted the first two trials (75%) of IELTS. Most exam takers intended to attain bands in the ranges of 7 to 8.5 (55%) and minimum were indented to gain bands in between 5.5 to 6.5 (45%), as specified by their preferred universities, professionals, and training organizations. In all of their IELTS tries, the majority of test takers received bands in the range of 4 to 6. Table 1 displays the findings of utilizing person product-moment correlation to determine the relationship between variables such as "perceived stress, self-efficacy, and self-esteem".

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**Table 1**

*Intercorrelations among “Perceived Stress, Self-Efficacy, and Self Esteem” among IELTS Test Takers*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Age	-	.42**	.14	-.24**	-.26**	-.07	.13	.09
2.Monthly income		-	-.05	.01	-.22**	-.01	.08	.05
3.Gender			-	-.12	-.10	-.05	.03	.01
4.IELTS modules				-	.03	-.08	-.03	.15
5. No of attempts					-	.75***	-.57***	-.61***
6.Perceived stress						-	-.49***	-.70***
7.Self efficacy							-	.34***
8.Self esteem								-

*Note. Gender is coded as 0 = men, 1= women; IELTS modules is coded as 0 = general module, 1= academic module.*

*df=278. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .*

The results showed that age had a positive significant relationship with monthly income ( $p < .05$ ); age had a negative relationship with IELTS module (general module) ( $p < .05$ ). Monthly income was a negative significant relationship with no of attempts at IELTS ( $p < .05$ ). The number of attempts had a strong positive relationship with perceived stress ( $p < .001$ ) while the Number of attempts had a strong negative relationship with self esteem and self efficacy ( $p < .001$ ) among IELTS test takers. Similarly, perceived stress has negative relationship with self esteem and self efficacy ( $p < .001$ ). The results also showed that gender and IELTS module has no significant association with perceived stress, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

### Mediation analysis

Mediation analysis was carried out using Barron and Kenny (1986) mediation model. Perceived stress was set as predictor (IV or X), self-esteem was the outcome (DV or Y), and self-efficacy was the mediator (M). In order for mediation analysis to be significant, four assumptions must be satisfied. The typical technique of mediation entails three processes of linear regression analysis to show the connection between variables. The first assumption is IV predicts DV step is to find the total effect (c) i.e. ( $X \rightarrow Y$ ), second assumption is IV predicts M and the step is to find indirect outcome referred as a ( $X \rightarrow M$ ), and the third assumption and step is referred to as b ( $M \rightarrow Y$ ) such as M predicts DV. The mediation is significant if direct effect X and Y is significant and indirect effect is zero. The indirect effect is smaller than direct, if the direct effect is still significant, it is called partial mediation.

The first assumption of mediation analysis was identified using linear regression analysis, the results demonstrated that perceived stress highly predicted self-esteem ( $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = -.69^{**}$ ), As a result, linear regression analysis revealed that IV predicts DV, validating the first premise of mediation analysis.

The second assumption was identified by linear regression analysis, Perceived stress substantially predicted self efficacy ( $p < .05$ ;  $\beta = -.49^{**}$ ), according to the findings. It has fulfilled the condition of the second assumption, thus we can go on to the third

assumption by performing linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that self efficacy significantly impacted self esteem ( $p < .05$ ;  $\beta = .34^{**}$ ).

The third premise of mediation is also made, which is that the mediator predicts DV. Then, using a hierarchy regression analysis, Table 2 shows the four final assumptions of mediation analysis that we identified.

**Table 2**

*Hierarchical Regression analysis predicting mediating role of self efficacy in perceived stress and self esteem among IELTS Test Takers*

Predictor	Block 1		Block 2		Block 3	
	B	S.E	B	S.E	B	S.E
Block 1						
IELTS modules	.13**	.36	.13**	.36	.10*	.32
Number of attempts	-.60**	.14	-.60**	.17	-.24**	.20
Block 2						
Self efficacy			.14*	.03	.05	.03
Block 3						
Perceived stress					-.52**	.03
<i>R</i>	.62		.62		.71	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.39		.39		.51	
<i>F</i>	89.42**		59.40**		71.57**	

*Note.*  $DF=278$  \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;  $\beta =$  standardized coefficients

Results showed that self efficacy partially mediated the relationship between perceived stress and self esteem. After introducing confounding factors (IELTS modules

and no of attempts), and self efficacy as a mediator perceived stress significantly predicted self esteem and the value of  $\beta$  is reduced from  $-.69^{**}$  to  $-.52^{**}$  ( $p < .05$ ). The value of the Sobel test (sobel=  $-6.83$ ,  $S.E=0.01$  &  $p = .01$ ) It was also discovered that significant mediating effect among perceived stress, self efficacy, and self esteem of IELTS test takers.

Figure 2 depicts a more practical explanation of the mediation analysis using the statistical model for research.

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**Figure 2 Statistical Model of Mediation**

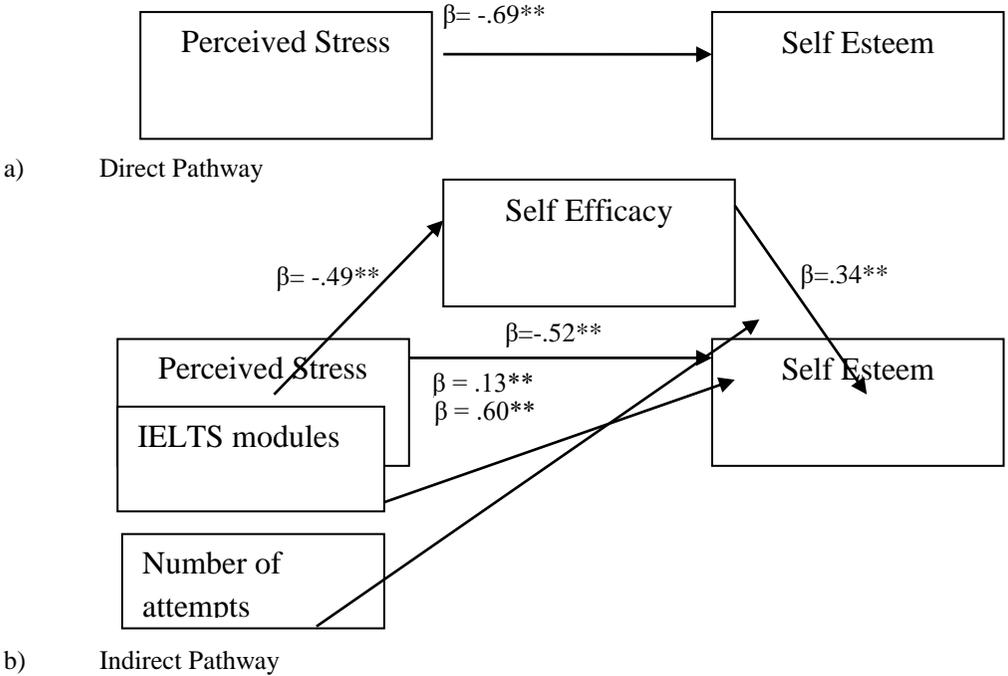


Figure 2 showed that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem after controlling the effect of confounding variables and mediator

## Discussion

The study investigated the association between stress, self esteem, and self efficacy among IELTS test takers. Past research supports the result that there is a negative relationship between self efficacy and perceived stress but self esteem and perceived stress had positive relationships (Reilly, Dhingra & Boduszek, 2014). Present research supported by the previous study that the individual's ability to cope in the threatening situations experience greater self efficacy and less stress as a consequence of their beliefs (Alden, 1986; Bandura, 1997; Chaplain, 1995; Nobile and McCormick, 2005). The study backs up previous research findings that there is a substantial link between higher education and depression, as well as worse self-esteem with rising perceived stress (Infantopoulou, Artemiadis, Triantafyllou, Chrousos, Papanastasiou and Daryiri, 2015). The study also investigated that self-esteem and self-efficacy had positive relationships among IELTS test takers such as if one increases then the other is also increases. The findings are compatible the current research approach that self-esteem and feeling of self efficacy are positively related (Popa & podea, 2013). The present study also explored that variables of study had no significant influence on the age and gender of IELTS test-takers, and results revealed that there is no specific age limit nor gender

specification in taking the IELTS test so there was no influence on “perceived stress, self-esteem, and self-efficacy”.

Perceived stress and self efficacy had no significant influence among types of IELTS while self esteem had a minor influence on types of IELTS. The outcome revealed that Both test types have the same topics and questions so there is no influence on perceived stress and self efficacy among IELTS types because both format and content is almost the same and both versions are purpose full like general is for immigration and implement the purpose and academic is for the medical profession and study purpose while both is used for those who want to work or study for English language countries (Alcisto,2016). Perceive stress had a positive significant relationship with No of attempt while self esteem and self efficacy negative significant relationship among language proficiency test takers. The outcome supports the past research that humanism in psychology shifted to focus on the following effective factors like anxiety, stress, feelings motivation and self esteem bring learning activities among language learners which in turn leads to learner’s success (Williams and Burden, 1997). Result also investigated the aim of the study that as no of attempts increased IELTS test takers experienced more stress and lower self esteem and self efficacy because test takers who compelled to try attempts of IELTS again and again but failed to achieve the required bands so IELTS test takers were disappointed and perceived high stress and lower sense of self worth.

The study also emphasizes responsibility of self efficacy as mediator among language proficiency test takers, and the findings show that self efficacy partially mediates the link among “perceived stress and self esteem, and perceived stress” significantly predicts self esteem after controlling for self efficacy. According to Leiter (1991), the conjunction of greater stress and poorer perceived efficacy in dealing with job demands may enhance people's vulnerability to burnout (Sahin & Cetin, 2017). The outcome of the current study supported the mediation model of the current study and there was a partial mediation effect. Results indicated that perceived stress significantly influenced self esteem directly while self efficacy was introduced as a mediator then the degree of significance is reduced, which was consistent with the findings of the research that the degree of relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction was reduced after self efficacy was introduced as a mediator (Lee, Kim & Wachholtz, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

According to the data, perceived stress was adversely connected to self efficacy and self worth, but favorably related to the number of IELTS test attempts. According to the findings, among IELTS test takers, self efficacy somewhat mediates the link between perceived stress and self efficacy. The study found that test takers who tried more IELTS tries were more stressed, which led in lower “self efficacy and self esteem”. The research shared purpose of the “stress, self-efficacy, and self-esteem” concerns that people confront when preparing for the IELTS. The research also advised that a counselling cell be established at IELTS academies to provide stress coping strategies and relaxation techniques to IELTS test takers in order to minimize stress and preserve efficacy and self-esteem.

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