

Practical Value and Emotional Pressure in IELTS One Skill Retake Washback among Vietnamese Candidates

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Abstract

IELTS One Skill Retake allows eligible candidates to retake one skill instead of repeating the full four-skill test. The study examined perceived usefulness, test anxiety, skill-specific self-regulated learning, and retake intention among 277 Vietnamese IELTS candidates at a private language center in Ho Chi Minh City. The study collected data through a structured questionnaire. The study analyzed the data using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and an independent-samples t-test. The results showed moderately positive perceptions of usefulness and retake intention. Retake intention was positively correlated with perceived usefulness, test anxiety, and skill-specific self-regulated learning. Multiple regression indicated that perceived usefulness and test anxiety significantly predicted retake intention, while skill-specific self-regulated learning was not significant when the other variables were included. The findings suggest that IELTS One Skill Retake can be conceptualized as a retake-related washback factor shaped by candidates' practical evaluation and emotional pressure. The findings imply that teachers and test centers should provide accurate guidance to support informed retake planning.

Keywords: IELTS One Skill Retake; IELTS washback; perceived usefulness; retake intention; self-regulated learning; test anxiety; Vietnamese IELTS candidates

Introduction

IELTS is widely used as a high-stakes English language test for study, work, migration, and institutional admission. In Vietnam, its role has expanded beyond that of a proficiency certificate: IELTS scores are now tied to university admission, graduation, scholarship opportunities, and employment planning. Recent research on young IELTS learners in

Vietnam shows that IELTS preparation has become salient even among adolescents. It is closely linked to their educational aspirations and to IELTS-related policies (Dao et al., 2024). Given these consequential uses, IELTS can shape how candidates prepare, how they judge their strengths and weaknesses, and how they respond when a skill score falls short of a required band. Such influence is commonly

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discussed through the concept of washback, which refers to the effects of testing on teaching, learning, and preparation behavior (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng et al., 2004).

In Vietnamese educational contexts, recent studies have shown that IELTS washback can be both positive and negative. Nguyen (2023) found that using IELTS as an English-language proficiency exit test influenced the psychology and learning behaviors of final-year English majors. In a related line of inquiry, Nguyen (2025) reported that IELTS test factors predicted psychological and behavioral aspects of student learning at a Vietnamese university. Taken together, these studies suggest that IELTS does more than measure language proficiency, as it also shapes learners' motivation, anxiety, strategy use, and preparation decisions. However, most of this research has treated IELTS as a full four-skill, high-stakes test, overlooking newer retake options that may change how candidates respond to a weak component score.

One such change is the IELTS One Skill Retake, which allows eligible candidates to retake one of the four skills (Listening, Reading, Writing, or Speaking) instead of sitting the full test again. According to official IELTS information, candidates must take the One Skill Retake within 60 days of the original test and may use it once per original test (British Council, n.d.; IDP IELTS, n.d.; IELTS, n.d.). This option matters because many candidates reach their target in most skills but fall short in a single component. For these candidates, One Skill Retake opens a new pathway to recover their score. It may therefore influence not only their retake planning but also their preparation behavior and emotional responses to the test.

The relevance of such options becomes clearer when retake policies are viewed more broadly within high-stakes English language assessment, where candidates tend to interpret test outcomes against institutional score requirements and component band thresholds. Pearson (2019) showed that IELTS candidates' responses to test failure depended on whether their scores met target requirements, and Pearson (2023) underlined the importance of inquiry, resit, and retake policies in high-stakes English language proficiency testing. Specific to IELTS One Skill Retake, official IELTS research drew on a live database of more than 20,000 One Skill Retake test takers, questionnaire responses from 507 test takers, and interviews with 27 test takers. This research reported generally positive perceptions, with test takers citing advantages such as focusing on one skill, saving time, relieving stress, and saving money (Lee & Bruce, 2024). Nevertheless, this evidence is largely official and international in scope. Independent quantitative evidence from specific local contexts, including Vietnam, remains limited.

To address this gap, the present study conceptualizes IELTS One Skill Retake as a potential retake-related washback factor. Rather than examining IELTS preparation in general, it focuses on how candidates respond to a testing option that shifts the logic of retaking from repeating the whole test to repairing one weak skill score. This focus is timely because One Skill Retake is now available in Vietnam and is likely to become more relevant to candidates who face skill-level band requirements. To explain candidates' responses to this option, the study draws on four related theoretical perspectives.

The first is washback theory, which explains why changes to a high-stakes test may influence candidates' learning behavior, emotions, and preparation decisions (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng et al., 2004). The second is perceived usefulness from the Technology Acceptance Model, which explains why people intend to use a new option when they see it as beneficial for achieving their goals (Davis, 1989). Although One Skill Retake is not a digital technology, the construct remains applicable because candidates are likely to evaluate it by its practical value in improving scores and making retakes more efficient. The third is test anxiety theory, represented through the affective component of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, which explains why worry and tension about IELTS outcomes may be associated with retake intention (Pintrich et al., 1991). The fourth is self-regulated learning theory, which describes how learners set goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies during preparation (Zimmerman, 2002). More recent reviews add that self-regulated learning involves cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, behavioral, and emotional dimensions of learning (Panadero, 2017).

Drawing on this framework, the study examines three predictors of retake intention: perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake, IELTS test anxiety, and skill-specific self-regulated learning. Perceived usefulness refers to candidates' belief that One Skill Retake can help them focus on a weak IELTS skill, make retaking more efficient, and support score planning when only one skill is below the required band. IELTS test anxiety refers to candidates' worry, nervousness, and tension about IELTS outcomes and weak-skill

performance. Skill-specific self-regulated learning refers to candidates' ability to set goals, monitor progress, and adjust preparation strategies for particular IELTS skills. Finally, retake intention refers to candidates' willingness to consider using One Skill Retake if one of their IELTS skill scores falls below their target requirement.

Accordingly, this study aims to describe the perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake, IELTS test anxiety, skill-specific self-regulated learning, and retake intention among Vietnamese IELTS candidates; examine the relationships among these variables; and determine the extent to which the first three variables predict retake intention. Four hypotheses are tested: perceived usefulness positively predicts retake intention (H1); IELTS test anxiety positively predicts retake intention (H2); skill-specific self-regulated learning positively predicts retake intention (H3); and the three predictors jointly explain a significant proportion of the variance in retake intention (H4). By addressing these aims, the study contributes to IELTS washback research by positioning One Skill Retake as a new retake-related washback factor in high-stakes English language testing.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. This design was appropriate because it examined Vietnamese IELTS candidates' perceptions of IELTS One-Skill Retake, IELTS test anxiety, skill-specific self-regulated learning, and retake intention at a single point in time. A survey approach was also suitable for measuring relationships among

psychological and behavioral variables across a relatively large group of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants

The study was conducted at a private IELTS center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The target participants were Vietnamese IELTS candidates preparing for the IELTS, planning to take it, or who had recently taken it. Recruitment invitations were distributed to accessible learners through classes and the center's learner communication channels. A total of 293 questionnaires were received. Eleven were excluded because they were incomplete, and five were excluded because the respondents did not satisfy the participant eligibility criteria. The final analytical sample therefore consisted of 277 participants. Convenience sampling was used because the study focused on accessible IELTS learners within the selected center. Although the sample was not randomly selected, it was appropriate for an initial quantitative investigation into perceptions of IELTS One Skill Retake among Vietnamese IELTS candidates.

Instruments

The study used a structured questionnaire. The first part collected demographic and IELTS background information, including gender, age group, current IELTS status, academic or work status, target IELTS band, weakest IELTS skill, awareness of IELTS One Skill Retake, and recent IELTS test-taking experience. The second part measured four constructs: perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake, IELTS test anxiety, skill-specific self-regulated learning, and retake intention. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5

(strongly agree). Higher scores indicated higher levels of the measured construct. Each construct was measured with three items, giving a total of 12 Likert-scale items.

The questionnaire items were adapted from established theoretical constructs and contextualized for the IELTS One Skill Retake setting. The authors adapted perceived usefulness from Davis's (1989) construct. They contextualized it using official IELTS One Skill Retake information from IELTS, British Council, and IDP IELTS. IELTS test anxiety was adapted from the test anxiety component of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich et al., 1991). Skill-specific self-regulated learning was adapted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire learning strategy components and Zimmerman's (2002) self-regulated learning framework. Retake intention was adapted from behavioral intention theory, especially the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (Ajzen, 1991; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Contextualization involved framing perceived usefulness around weak-skill focus and retake efficiency, test anxiety around worry about IELTS outcomes, self-regulated learning around goal setting and strategy adjustment for specific IELTS skills, and retake intention around willingness to use One Skill Retake when one skill was below the target band.

Data Collection

Data were collected over four weeks from 3 to June 30, 2026. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed of the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also informed that the survey was anonymous and that no

identifying information, such as name, phone number, or student ID, would be collected. No financial or academic incentive was provided. Prior awareness or use of One Skill Retake was not required for participation. The questionnaire included a brief explanation of IELTS One Skill Retake before the construct items so that participants understood the basic meaning of the retake option before responding. Only responses meeting the eligibility and completeness criteria were retained for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using R within the RStudio integrated development environment (Posit team, 2025; R Core Team, 2025). Frequency analysis was first conducted to describe participants' demographic and IELTS background information. We then calculated descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, for the four main constructs. Reliability analysis used Cronbach's alpha to assess each scale's internal consistency, a common indicator for multi-item questionnaire scales (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to inspect whether the 12 items loaded onto the expected four constructs. Before factor extraction, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were examined to assess whether the item correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis. Principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation was used because the constructs were expected to be related rather than completely independent.

Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake, IELTS test

anxiety, skill-specific self-regulated learning, and retake intention. Multiple regression analysis was then conducted to determine whether perceived usefulness, IELTS test anxiety, and skill-specific self-regulated learning predicted retake intention. Retake intention was entered as the dependent variable, while the three predictors were entered as independent variables. Variance inflation factor values were examined to assess multicollinearity among the predictors. Finally, we conducted an independent-samples t-test as a supplementary analysis to compare retake intention by gender.

Findings and Discussion

Finding

The final dataset included 277 Vietnamese IELTS candidates. The study examined four main constructs: perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake, IELTS test anxiety, skill-specific self-regulated learning, and retake intention. IELTS One Skill Retake was introduced to participants as an option that allows eligible test takers to retake one IELTS skill rather than the full four-skill test, in line with official IELTS One Skill Retake information (British Council, n.d.; IDP IELTS, n.d.; IELTS, n.d.).

As shown in Table 1, female candidates accounted for 59.9% of the sample, while male candidates accounted for 40.1%. The participants represented different educational or employment statuses, including high school students, university students in Years 1 to 4 or above, and graduates or working candidates. This profile indicates that the sample included candidates from different stages of IELTS preparation and academic progression.

Table 1*Participant Profile (N = 277)*

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	166	59.9
	Male	111	40.1
Current status	High school	48	17.3
	Year 1 university student	49	17.7
	Year 2 university student	58	20.9
	Year 3 university student	56	20.2
	Year 4 university student	44	15.9
	Graduate or working	22	7.9

Note. Percentages are based on the full sample.

Internal consistency and factor loading patterns were examined before the main analyses. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .82, indicating adequate sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(66) = 1510.30$, $p < .001$. These results suggested that the item correlation matrix was

appropriate for factor analysis. Principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation produced a four-factor solution that explained 64% of the cumulative variance. The pattern matrix showed that all items loaded on their expected constructs.

Table 2*Reliability and Expected Factor Loadings of the Main Scales*

Fields	Items	Cronbach's α	Loading range
Perceived usefulness of OSR	3	.827	.738–.821
IELTS test anxiety	3	.852	.798–.817
Skill-specific self-regulated learning	3	.839	.782–.816
Retake intention	3	.843	.730–.848

As presented in Table 2, all four constructs showed acceptable to good internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .827 to .852. The loading range was .738–.821 for perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake, .798–.817 for IELTS test anxiety, .782–.816 for skill-specific self-regulated learning, and .730–.848 for retake intention. These results

supported using the four composite variables in subsequent analyses.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among the main variables. Mean scores ranged from 3.22 to 3.47 on a five-point Likert scale. Perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake had the highest mean score ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.95$), followed by retake intention ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.99$), skill-specific self-regulated

learning ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.99$), and IELTS test anxiety ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.00$). These results addressed the first research objective by showing moderate levels of perceived

usefulness, test anxiety, skill-specific self-regulated learning, and retake intention among the participants.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations among the Main Variables

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4
Perceived usefulness of OSR	3.47	0.95	-0.153	-0.916	—			
IELTS test anxiety	3.22	1.00	-0.054	-0.880	.23***	—		
Skill-specific self-regulated learning	3.34	0.99	-0.097	-0.808	.22***	.17**	—	
Retake intention	3.43	0.99	-0.244	-0.741	.54***	.42***	.23***	—

Note. $N = 277$. OSR = IELTS One Skill Retake. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The correlation results addressed the second research objective. Retake intention was positively correlated with perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake, $r = .54$, $p < .001$; IELTS test anxiety, $r = .42$, $p < .001$; and skill-specific self-regulated learning, $r = .23$, $p < .001$. The three predictor variables were also positively

correlated, with coefficients ranging from $r = .17$ to $r = .23$. These findings indicate that candidates who perceived One Skill Retake as useful, experienced higher IELTS-related anxiety, or reported stronger skill-specific self-regulated learning tended to report higher intention to use One Skill Retake.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Predicting Retake Intention

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF
Perceived usefulness of OSR	0.469	0.051	.452	9.11	<.001	1.09
IELTS test anxiety	0.296	0.048	.301	6.13	<.001	1.07
Skill-specific self-regulated learning	0.078	0.049	.078	1.59	.113	1.07

Note. Dependent variable = retake intention. OSR = IELTS One Skill Retake. Model summary: $R^2 = .386$, adjusted $R^2 = .379$, $F(3, 273) = 57.25$, $p < .001$.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to address the third research objective. As shown in Table 4, the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 273) = 57.25$, $p < .001$, and explained 38.6% of the variance in retake intention. Perceived usefulness of the IELTS One Skill Retake was a significant positive

predictor of retake intention, $B = 0.469$, $SE = 0.051$, $\beta = .452$, $t = 9.11$, $p < .001$. IELTS test anxiety was also a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.296$, $SE = 0.048$, $\beta = .301$, $t = 6.13$, $p < .001$). However, skill-specific self-regulated learning was not a statistically significant predictor in the regression model ($B = 0.078$, $SE = 0.049$, $\beta = .078$,

$t = 1.59$, $p = .113$). VIF values ranged from 1.07 to 1.09, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern.

A supplementary independent-samples t -test was conducted to compare retake intention by gender. Levene's test was not significant ($p =$

.360). The difference between female candidates ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.96$) and male candidates ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.03$) was not statistically significant, $t(275) = -0.45$, $p = .651$. Because this comparison was not part of the main research objectives, it is interpreted as supplementary evidence only.

Table 5
Multiple Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Perceived usefulness of OSR positively predicts retake intention.	Supported
H2	IELTS test anxiety positively predicts retake intention.	Supported
H3	Skill-specific self-regulated learning positively predicts retake intention.	Not supported
H4	Perceived usefulness, IELTS test anxiety, and skill-specific self-regulated learning jointly explain a significant proportion of variance in retake intention.	Supported

Table 5 summarises the hypothesis testing results. H1 was supported because the perceived usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake positively predicted retake intention. H2 was supported because IELTS test anxiety also positively predicted retake intention. H3 was not supported because skill-specific self-regulated learning did not significantly predict retake intention after perceived usefulness and IELTS test anxiety were included in the model. H4 was supported because the three predictors jointly explained a significant proportion of variance in retake intention.

Discussion

The findings suggest that IELTS One Skill Retake was perceived as a relevant retake option among Vietnamese IELTS candidates. Participants reported moderately positive perceptions of its usefulness and moderate

retake intention. This pattern aligns with the official description of One Skill Retake as an option that lets eligible candidates retake one IELTS skill instead of repeating the full four-skill test (British Council, n.d.; IDP IELTS, n.d.; IELTS, n.d.). In a high-stakes IELTS context, candidates may view this option as useful when most skill scores meet their target, but one component remains below the required band.

The strongest finding concerns perceived usefulness. Perceived usefulness had the largest standardized coefficient in the regression model, and its coefficient ($\beta = .452$) was about one and a half times larger than that of IELTS test anxiety ($\beta = .301$). This suggests that candidates' intention to use One Skill Retake was shaped more strongly by their practical evaluation of the option than by emotional pressure alone. This finding supports adapting behavioral intention models to the One Skill Retake context (Ajzen,

1991; Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Although One Skill Retake is not a technology system, candidates appear to evaluate it in terms of usefulness: whether it can help them focus on one weak skill, save preparation time, and improve score-planning efficiency. This pattern aligns with Lee and Bruce (2024), who also reported that One Skill Retake test takers valued the ability to focus on one skill and perceived time and money savings.

IELTS test anxiety also significantly predicted retake intention. This finding suggests that One Skill Retake may be perceived as a score-recovery opportunity by candidates who experience worry or pressure about IELTS outcomes. This does not mean that anxiety is beneficial. Rather, anxiety appears to shape decision-making in a high-stakes test where one weak skill score may affect admission, graduation, employment, or migration plans. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that IELTS can influence learners' psychological and behavioral responses in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2023; Nguyen, 2025), and with Pearson's (2019) observation that candidates often interpret IELTS outcomes in relation to target institutional requirements.

Skill-specific self-regulated learning was positively correlated with retake intention. However, it did not remain a significant predictor in the regression model. This result does not imply that self-regulated learning is unimportant for IELTS preparation. A possible explanation is that self-regulated learning reflects a longer-term learning habit involving goal setting, monitoring, and strategy adjustment. In contrast, the decision to use One Skill Retake may be a more immediate response to a weak skill score. In this sense, retake

intention may function less as a general learning-planning decision and more as a time-sensitive score-recovery decision. When perceived usefulness and test anxiety were included in the same model, these more immediate practical and emotional factors explained retake intention more directly than candidates' general capacity to regulate skill-specific learning. This differs from the pattern reported by Nguyen and Nguyen (2026), whose study of EOP speaking tests in a Vietnamese university found significant washback effects on students' self-regulated learning. The difference may reflect the outcome examined: their study focused on changes in self-regulated learning itself, whereas the present study examined whether self-regulated learning independently predicted intention to use a specific retake option.

Theoretically, this study contributes to IELTS washback research by providing initial evidence that IELTS One Skill Retake may operate as a retake-related washback factor. Previous washback research shows that high-stakes tests can influence learners' attitudes, emotions, and learning behaviors (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng et al., 2004). The present findings extend this line of research by showing that a retake option may also shape candidates' score-planning behavior and emotional response. One Skill Retake changes the logic of retaking from repeating the whole test to repairing one weak skill score, and this change may create a more targeted form of washback.

Practically, IELTS teachers and preparation centers should provide candidates with structured guidance about One Skill Retake. Because perceived usefulness and test anxiety were the two significant predictors, this

guidance should address both the practical suitability of One Skill Retake and the emotional pressure surrounding retake decisions. Candidates should understand that One Skill Retake may help when only one skill score falls below a requirement. However, it should not replace balanced preparation across all four IELTS skills. Teachers can help candidates develop a short-term weak-skill action plan within the One Skill Retake time window by identifying the specific subskills that caused difficulty, setting a realistic retake target, allocating weekly practice time, and monitoring progress through focused tasks. Test providers and recognizing institutions should also clearly communicate One Skill Retake conditions, especially eligibility, timing, score reporting, and institutional recognition so that candidates can make informed decisions.

The study also has limitations. First, it used convenience sampling and collected data from 277 candidates at a single private IELTS center in Ho Chi Minh City, limiting generalisability. Second, the cross-sectional design can show associations among variables but cannot establish causal relationships. Third, each construct was measured with three Likert-scale items. However, reliability and factor-loading results were acceptable; short scales may not fully capture complex constructs such as test anxiety and self-regulated learning. Fourth, the study measured self-reported intention rather than actual One Skill Retake registration or post-retake performance. Finally, the regression model explained 38.6% of the variance in retake intention, suggesting that other factors, such as cost, institutional recognition, previous IELTS scores, target band requirements, and admission or graduation deadlines, may also

influence candidates' decisions. Future research should use larger, more diverse samples; examine actual One Skill Retake behavior; and use longitudinal designs to explore how candidates' perceptions and preparation change before and after IELTS score release. Future studies should also examine whether cost, institutional recognition, previous IELTS scores, target-band requirements, and admission or graduation deadlines explain additional variation in actual retake decisions.

Conclusion

This study examined IELTS One Skill Retake as a potential retake-related washback factor among Vietnamese IELTS candidates. Using survey data from 277 participants, the study found that candidates reported moderately positive perceptions of the usefulness of IELTS One Skill Retake and retake intention. Retake intention was positively associated with perceived usefulness, IELTS test anxiety, and skill-specific self-regulated learning. However, only perceived usefulness and IELTS test anxiety significantly predicted retake intention in the regression model, while skill-specific self-regulated learning did not remain a significant predictor when the other variables were included.

These findings suggest that candidates' intention to use IELTS One Skill Retake is shaped more directly by their practical evaluation of the retake option and their emotional response to high-stakes IELTS outcomes than by their general capacity to regulate skill-specific learning. The study contributes to IELTS washback research by suggesting that IELTS One Skill Retake should not be understood merely as an administrative retake option, but as a testing

change that may influence candidates' perceptions, emotions, and score-planning behavior. More specifically, the findings indicate that retake-related washback may arise not only from the test's demands but also from changes in the options available to candidates after receiving a weak component score.

The findings imply that IELTS teachers, preparation centers, test providers, and recognizing institutions should provide clear, accurate guidance on IELTS One Skill Retake. Candidates need to understand when this option may be appropriate, whether their target institution accepts it, and how to prepare to retake a weak skill realistically. At the same time, interpret the findings with caution because the study used convenience sampling at one private IELTS center, relied on self-reported intention rather than actual retake behavior, and used a cross-sectional design. Future research should include more diverse samples, examine actual IELTS One Skill Retake registrations and score outcomes, and explore how candidates' perceptions change before and after the release of IELTS scores. Such evidence would help determine whether the intentions observed in this study translate into actual retake behavior and whether One Skill Retake produces sustained changes in candidates' preparation decisions over time.

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