



EXPLORING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON IELTS SPEAKING PREDICTION TEST: DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

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Abstract: *This study investigates the students' performance on the IELTS Speaking Prediction Test among fifth-semester students of the English Education program at Universitas Bina Bangsa Getsempena. This study applied a quantitative approach, in which students participated in an IELTS Speaking Prediction Test, assessing key aspects of speaking skills, including fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation, the ability to deal with questions and body language. The findings reveal that students generally performed well in fluency, pronunciation, ability to deal with questions, and body language, but show variability in lexical resource and grammatical range. The study emphasizes the importance of interaction and feedback in enhancing speaking proficiency. Additionally, the study identifies areas for improvement in vocabulary diversity and grammatical consistency, highlighting the need for targeted intensive practice and valuable feedback. The study concludes that while students possess a strong foundation in basic speaking skills, ongoing and intensive practices and the integration of self-regulated learning strategies are essential for achieving higher performance in the IELTS Speaking test.*

Keywords : *IELTS Speaking Test, Prediction Test, Speaking Performance, University Students*

INTRODUCTION

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a comprehensive examination designed to assess the level of English language proficiency of people whose first language is not English but who want to study or work in countries or regions where English is the primary language of communication (Peltekov, 2021). The International English Language Testing System, or IELTS, is a standardized test designed to show potential learners that they will be able to thrive in a university or country where English is the predominant language of teaching. This includes the master's and PhD levels in the majority of European countries. IELTS was founded in 1989 and is now becoming increasingly well-known around the world Peltekov, (2021). IELTS Australia, the British Council, and IDP: Cambridge Assessment English are all partners in ownership of the corporation. A substantial number of empirical studies have focused on IELTS testing (for example, Liao, 2021; Peltekov, 2021;

and many more). Similarly, IELTS is an English language test designed to assess a person's English language skills, particularly for those who want to study or work in English-speaking countries (Syamsu et al., 2024). It measures four key skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The majority of candidates taking the test are planning to study or work in English-speaking countries, but some simply want to measure their English ability. The IELTS tests both academic and general English proficiency. In this context, we will focus on the speaking skill, which involves interacting with the target language through comprehension and production. The IELTS speaking section consists of three parts, taking 11 to 15 minutes in total. Part 1 (introduction) focuses on test-takers' personal life including themselves, families, work/study, interest, and a variety of common topics; Part 2 (individual long turn) requires test-takers' talk on a specific topic provided on a cue card, and Part 3 (two-way discussion) engages test-takers into the issues which are thematically related to the prompt topic in Part 2 (Seedhouse, 2019). Rogers (2015) provides the detailed breakdown of the speaking test as follows:

Part 1: Introduction and interview (4-5 minutes). The examiner will introduce her/himself, and the test-taker is expected to do the same. The examiner will ask straightforward questions about the test-taker, such as family, hobbies, and studies. As it communicates about oneself, this part is ideal for calming and preparing for the next section.

Part 2: Individual Long Turn (3-4 minutes). The examiner will distribute a prompt card containing a conversation topic. This card also specifies the points that must be addressed during speaking. After obtaining the card, the test-taker will have one minute to jot down brief notes to prepare the spoken answer for two-minute long.

Part 3: Two-way discussion (4-5 minutes). The test-taker in this two-way conversation session will be prompted to talk about similar issues covered in the previous part. In this part, the test-taker will engage in more reciprocal engagement with the examiner rather than simply providing responses orally. Issues discussed here might get broader and more abstract.

The IELTS Speaking test is a critical component of the IELTS exam, widely recognized as a measure of English language proficiency for non-native English speakers. For university students, particularly those aiming to study in English-speaking countries, excelling in the IELTS Speaking test is crucial for academic success and future career opportunities (Sharif et al., 2023). However, predicting performance in this test has been a challenge, given the complex interplay of language skills, test anxiety, and individual differences among learners.

Speaking skills, as one of the four language competencies assessed in the IELTS, require not only fluency and coherence but also a robust lexical resource, grammatical range, and accuracy (Heidari Vincheh et al., 2024). Interaction in the target language is the goal of speaking skill, which calls for both production and comprehension (Solihin et al., 2023). The speaking test is administered face-to-face with a qualified examiner (Ganji & Nasrabad, 2021; Seedhouse, 2019).

The IELTS Speaking test is considered highly difficult for test-takers (Fitria, 2024). Aridasarie and Tabiati (2022) emphasize that the IELTS Speaking test heavily relies on the test-taker's ability to quickly and effectively

respond to the examiner's questions, including providing concrete examples and cogent arguments to sustain a meaningful interaction, with a diverse range of vocabulary. Those with lower English proficiency may find it challenging to speak in part 2 of the test where they have to talk in full two minutes (Seedhouse & Harris, 2011). In the second part of the IELTS speaking test, candidates are given topics they are unfamiliar with, which can be significantly different from the topics discussed in the first part (Seedhouse, 2019). This becomes challenging when they have limited time to prepare. They must quickly think about what to say, what words to use, and how to express their ideas on topics they have little knowledge about.

In addition, Ahmed (2021) found that IELTS candidates struggle most with the speaking module compared to listening, writing, and reading. This is especially challenging for non-native English speakers who experience anxiety despite adequate preparation. Speaking, as a real-life face-to-face interaction, requires more focused practice and effective implementation in English language classrooms. The IELTS speaking test involves a face-to-face conversation with an examiner on specific topics. Candidates often feel nervous and anxious due to the psychological pressure of this real-life interaction. The discussion highlights that IELTS speaking primarily focuses on emotional factors like anxiety, stress, and the candidate's impression. Reducing psychological complexity can increase candidate confidence. However, effective preparation, practice, and production are essential. As the test involves face-to-face interaction, candidates should practice natural conversation and discussion.

Research by Aregu (2013) further supports the notion that self-regulated learning strategies, such as self-monitoring, goal-setting, and reflection, can lead to significant improvements in speaking proficiency. These strategies empower learners to take ownership of their language learning process, thereby enhancing their ability to perform well in high-stakes tests like the IELTS Speaking test.

Moreover, the increasing emphasis on prediction tests as a tool for preparing students for the IELTS Speaking test has gained traction in recent years. These tests, designed to simulate the actual IELTS Speaking test, provide students with an opportunity to assess their speaking abilities under test conditions. According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2019), prediction tests can serve as a valuable diagnostic tool, helping students identify their strengths and weaknesses in speaking. This allows for targeted practice and improvement in specific areas, ultimately leading to better performance in the actual test.

The IELTS Speaking test is a critical component of the overall IELTS exam, particularly for university students seeking admission to English-speaking institutions (IDPIELTS, nd). To maximize their performance in this section, many students opt for preparation through prediction tests. These tests, designed to simulate the actual IELTS Speaking exam, provide valuable insights and practice opportunities that significantly enhance students' readiness (Ultimateeducation, 2023).

Prediction tests familiarize students with the format and structure of the IELTS Speaking test (Preptical IELTS, 2023). This familiarity reduces anxiety and nervousness, allowing students to approach the exam with greater confidence (IELTSSingapore, nd). By understanding the three parts of the test – the introduction, the long turn, and the discussion – students can allocate time effectively and tailor their responses accordingly (Preptical

IELTS, 2023).

Prediction tests expose students to a wide range of potential topics and questions. This exposure enables them to develop a broader vocabulary and a deeper understanding of various subjects. By practicing with diverse topics, students can improve their ability to think critically, organize their thoughts, and express themselves fluently.

Furthermore, prediction tests offer opportunities for students to receive feedback on their performance. Experienced examiners or language instructors can assess students' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and coherence (Britishcouncil, nd). This feedback helps students identify areas for improvement and tailor their preparation accordingly (Ultimateeducation, 2023). By addressing their weaknesses, students can significantly enhance their overall language proficiency.

Hence, prediction tests play a crucial role in preparing university students for the IELTS Speaking test. By familiarizing students with the format, exposing them to diverse topics, and providing opportunities for feedback, these tests empower students to approach the exam with confidence and achieve their desired scores (Ultimateeducation, 2023).

However, despite the potential benefits, there remains a gap in research on the effectiveness of prediction tests for university students. While there are studies that explored various aspects of speaking assessment, there is limited empirical evidence on how the tests predict IELTS Speaking test outcomes. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the test takers' prediction test performance and specific aspects that need improvements to help increase speaking scores.

Additionally, the use of prediction tests as a preparatory tool offers promising potential for improving student outcomes in the IELTS Speaking test. Thus, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge by examining the predictive validity of these tests and their implications for university students.

Students preparing for the IELTS Speaking test often struggle to accurately gauge their abilities before the actual exam, given the complexity of the required skills, including fluency, coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range, and accuracy.

While studies such as Fitria (2024) and Hao (2021) have shown the test preparation strategies required to enhance speaking abilities, there is still a lack of sufficient empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of prediction tests in forecasting actual results in the IELTS Speaking test. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the effectiveness of IELTS Speaking prediction test among university students, as well as how the test can be used to identify their strengths and weaknesses in speaking before taking the actual exam.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach to explore and understand phenomena by focusing on measurable data and statistical analysis, and then draw meaningful interpretations and conclusions about the relationships between variables (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). Data in this study were collected based on IELTS speaking prediction test results administered to 15 students. The test results were then analyzed based on

the speaking rubric to assess the factors influencing students' performance.

The participants of this study were fifth-semester students of the English Education program at Universitas Bina Bangsa Getsempena. The sample consisted of 15 students who participated in the IELTS Speaking Prediction Test. These participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on students who have been actively preparing for the IELTS speaking section as part of their academic requirements.

The research instrument used in this study an IELTS Speaking Prediction Test. This test includes several assessment criteria, such as fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation, dealing with the questions, and body language. The assessment rubric used in this study has been adapted from the Australia Awards English Language Training Assistance (ELTA) program, ensuring that it adheres to established standards for evaluating speaking proficiency.

Similar assessment criteria have been utilized in recent studies, emphasizing the effectiveness of comprehensive evaluation in language testing. For instance, Derwing and Munro (2019) explored the role of pronunciation instruction in language learning and highlighted the significance of criteria such as pronunciation, fluency, and coherence. Their research aligns with the standards used in IELTS Speaking assessments.

Another relevant study by Qiu and Chen (2020) conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of corrective feedback on Chinese learners' pronunciation, which utilized similar criteria, including grammatical range, accuracy, and pronunciation, which are central to the IELTS Speaking Test.

Furthermore, Isaacs and Trofimovich (2021) discussed interdisciplinary perspectives on second language pronunciation assessment, incorporating assessment criteria that overlap with those used in the IELTS Speaking Test, such as lexical resources and pronunciation.

For this study, data were analyzed using basic percentage analysis, which is calculated by dividing the frequency in any given category by the total number of respondents and multiplying by 100% (Sudijono, 2009). The data were then categorized based on the criteria in the ELTA speaking assessment rubric.

FINDING & DISCUSSION

Finding

Table. 1.1 Students' Score on IELTS Speaking Prediction Test

Category	Score	F	%
Fluency & coherence	5	15	100
	4	-	
Lexical resource	5	12	80
	4	3	20
Grammatical range and accuracy	5	10	66.7
	4	5	33.3
Pronunciation	5	14	93.3
	4	1	6.7
Ability to deal with the questions	5	15	100
	4	-	
Body language	5	13	86.7
	4	2	13.3

The IELTS speaking prediction test focused on five key aspects of speaking skills: Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy, Pronunciation, Ability to Deal with Questions, and Body Language. The results indicate that most students demonstrated strong capabilities in maintaining fluency and coherence, with many achieving high scores, reflecting their ability to communicate ideas smoothly with minimal interruptions.

1. Fluency and Coherence: The majority of students scored 4 or 5 in this category, indicating that they were able to express their ideas clearly and maintain a logical flow in their speech. This suggests that students are comfortable speaking English and can effectively manage their speech pace and use of discourse markers.

2. Lexical Resource: In terms of vocabulary, while students exhibited a good range of vocabulary, there were noticeable patterns of repetitive usage. This indicates that while students have a functional vocabulary, they tend to rely on a limited set of words, which can affect the richness and diversity of their language.

3. Grammatical Range and Accuracy: Students varied in their use of grammar, with many showing proficiency in basic grammatical structures but facing challenges with more complex ones. This variability suggests a need for further practice and exposure to complex grammar to enhance their speaking skills.

4. Pronunciation: Most students displayed clear and understandable speech with varied intonation and appropriate stress patterns, earning high scores in this area. This indicates a strong grasp of pronunciation, an essential component of effective communication.

5. Ability to Deal with Questions: Students generally performed well in understanding and responding to questions, showing attentiveness and the ability to engage in interaction. High scores in this category reflect students' comprehension and responsiveness during conversations.

6. Body Language: Most students performed very well in their body language when they were given several questions on speaking either on Part 1, Part 2 or Part 3 of IELTS Speaking Prediction test. There were only a few of them who did not perform well on body language during the speaking test.

Discussion

The findings highlight several strengths in the students' speaking abilities, particularly in basic fluency, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation. Many students demonstrated a solid foundation in these areas, which is crucial for effective communication. The findings confirm those in the study by Dashti and Razmjoo (2020) that fluency and coherence was the best indicator of success in IELTS Speaking, followed by grammar range and accuracy as well as lexical resource. The use of paraphrasing and synonyms by some students is particularly noteworthy, as it shows their ability to maintain communication even when specific vocabulary is not available.

These findings also corroborate those in the studies by Fitria (2024) that students often struggled with lexical variety and grammatical consistency, which affected their overall performance, and Sultana (2021) that pronunciation and vocabulary, particularly, dealing with word choice, word collocation, and word use have also been prominent challenges in speaking tests.

However, there are also areas for improvement. The repetitive use of limited vocabulary suggests that

students need to expand their lexical resources to enhance the richness of their speech. Additionally, the inconsistency in tense usage points to a need for greater attention to grammatical accuracy, especially in more complex structures.

Success in the IELTS Speaking test requires a multifaceted approach. Effective test preparation involves careful scheduling, prioritizing physical and mental well-being, and ensuring adequate sleep. In addition, consistent and thorough practice in English speaking and communication is essential to enhance fluency, accuracy, and overall performance. Finally, it is important to arrive at the exam well-rested and avoid excessive fatigue to ensure optimal performance (Fitria, 2024).

Conclusion

The analysis of the students' speaking skills based on IELTS prediction test reveals matter and promising foundation in several key areas. Their fluency, the ability to speak smoothly and effortlessly, is commendable. Additionally, their grasp of basic grammar rules allows them to construct grammatically correct sentences. Their engagement with the topic and their willingness to participate in discussions further demonstrate their potential.

However, to achieve higher levels of language proficiency, there is room for improvement in two specific areas. Firstly, expanding vocabulary diversity is crucial. A wider range of vocabulary enables students to express themselves more precisely and creatively. Secondly, maintaining grammatical consistency throughout their speech is essential. By paying attention to details such as subject-verb agreement and tense usage, students can enhance the overall quality of their communication. To address these areas, incorporating innovative teaching strategies such as communicative language teaching, peer feedback, and self-regulated learning can be highly effective.

The limitation of this study is that there was only one of the English skills observed and analyzed with a small number of participants involved. It is recommended that the future study, researchers may conduct on a wider range of areas and participants with other relevant and varied assessment criteria.

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