

The Teaching Challenges of IELTS Test Preparation; Speaking Section: An Exploratory Research

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ABSTRACT: *The primary focus of this study is to explore some of the teaching challenges of Pakistani IELTS instructors in teaching students specifically for the speaking section of the International English Language Testing System. This study employs a qualitative approach with face-to-face semi-structured interviews of 10 participants who are IELTS teachers. The instructors involved in this study have belonged to different IELTS preparation institutes of Lahore, Pakistan. Several types of research have been done on the difficulties faced by IELTS preparers but seldom have been conducted on the challenges experienced by IELTS teachers (Soatova, 2021). The focus of this study is to extract the major obstacles during teaching IELTS speaking and look for possible solutions to cope with those difficulties. The major findings of this study are some of the challenges of the instructors in getting students prepared for the IELTS speaking section. 1) Lack of intrinsic efforts from the learners. (Roza, 2019). 2. IELTS teachers' teaching experiences. Moreover, teachers have also devised some strategies to motivate them and overcoming the difficulties in teaching IELTS. 1) Engaging and interesting communicative tasks, encouraging them by sharing the opportunities of passing IELTS.*

KEYWORDS: IELTS Teaching, Strategies, IELTS Speaking

INTRODUCTION

IELTS (International English Language Testing System) examines non-native English speakers' skills and abilities. This test is a prerequisite for applying for immigration and studying in European nations such as New Zealand, Canada, and Australia, among others. Since English is the only language spoken in the lesson and the IELTS is a requirement at several universities. Not only is IELTS a criterion for university admission and scholarship, but it is also seen as a factor of international recognition rather than a test of communication competence (Khan, 2009). Non-native English speakers always find it challenging to understand the IELTS conversation and written content. The duration of the test is two hours 45 minutes. It is worth noting that effective test preparation is essential to help learners improve their English language communication and performance in tests (Ward, 1998). Furthermore, failing to prepare for English language competency tests wastes time and money (Al-Rawashdeh, 2010; Khodadadi and Yazdanmehr, 2009; Suryaningsih, 2014). As a result, in order to increase their test scores, English students need commit time to studying for exams. It's worth noting that IELTS teachers who work with a diverse group of students confront some challenges. They encounter challenges when it comes to teaching students of varied backgrounds, ages, tastes, and demands. Challenges in teaching, according to Ball and Forzani (2009), can be attributed to a lack of experience in teaching and an inability to adjust to pupils

and the context in which they operate. Teachers, according to Saif (2006), must comprehend the test development process due to their responsibilities during the teaching process. IELTS is widely thought to be a difficult test for students, requiring teachers to engage in enjoyable and creative learning. To enliven the classroom, teachers must use improvisation and a variety of other creative tactics. The problem with having a large number of students, according to Herreid (2006), is that the number of students is too large to handle and to be taught. Attendance, discipline, learning, and alienation of certain pupils are among the issues raised by having a large number of students in the classroom, according to Herreid (2006). In summary, a huge number of pupils may lead teachers to lose motivation in their classrooms, and the same thing may impair teachers' motivation in teaching exam preparation.

Research Questions

The goals of the study are to investigate concerns connected to teachers in teaching this high-stakes English proficiency test preparation due to the problems listed above. Considering the above mentioned goals of the study, following research questions arise are devised.

- What are the difficulties that teachers confront when it comes to teaching International English Language Testing System; listening preparation specifically?
- How do teachers inspire students in the teaching and learning process when it comes to preparing for the English proficiency test?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Several researches have been undertaken on the problems of IELTS. Many of them concentrate on students' perspectives on taking tests or participating in IELTS preparation programmes. Rehman (2021) investigated the difficulties that students have during the IELTS listening test. According to the author, Pakistani students lack some rudimentary ability in English language hearing, as well as minimal motivation and a lack of desire, all of which contribute to a low IELTS Listening exam band. At the same time, these students' difficulties are eventually linked to the teachers' IELTS teaching experience. Reading is obviously vital in the TOEFL test, especially abilities on genre-based texts (Mahfud, 2011). It is mandatory to build the competence of IELTS teachers, and mastering the text is required before beginning to teach the pupils.

According to Takanashi (2004), despite the fact that Japanese students are very eager to learn English, they face significant challenges in practising communicative English and obtaining employment. In light of this, the current study is significant because it illuminates the true challenges that IELTS instructors face. At this point, the current study acknowledges that IELTS is more commonly used in the context of English language acquisition and hence deserves more attention.

The Objectives of the Research

The study's goals are to uncover the difficulties that IELTS instructors have when teaching the speaking component of the exam. In addition, to look for ways that could assist IELTS teachers in dealing with certain situations.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Approach

This study used a qualitative form of research to address the research questions. Bryman (2016) defines qualitative research as data gathering and analysis that focuses on words rather than numbers. Qualitative research aids in the discovery of the truth or perspectives of academic staff, leaders, and external clients as a representation of the processes in a scenario. They can participate as individuals to give their personal experiences and perspectives based on their unique life circumstances (Flick, 2014). According to Bernard (2017), in qualitative research, the responder can be chosen accurately, allowing the researcher to collect data depending on the questions they need to answer. The data was collected and transcribed using an audio recorder in this study because it was the easiest approach to gather the results.

Participants' Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is a method of selecting a sample based on knowledge of a population, its components, and the study's aims (Babbie, 2013). The IELTS teachers who work at private IELTS preparatory institutes that specialises in and IELTS preparation courses are the participants for the research study. The profiles of the suggested participants whose names were pseudonymized are listed in the table below. However, caution should be exercised because the pseudonymized names may represent the participants' qualities (Given, 2008).

In this study, 10 instructors were recruited, and the method for obtaining a consent form from the institution's teachers was to contact the director and request permission to perform the study. Obtaining permission to conduct the research from the institution's teachers was accomplished by first contacting the director and requesting permission to do the research there, followed by contacting the teachers and requesting their permission to be interviewed. The professors' names were changed to pseudonyms and the institutions and the teachers' personal information was encrypted and password protected. The individuals' real names were substituted with pseudonyms. A pseudonym is a made-up name used to conceal the identities of persons, places, or organisations, and researchers frequently employ pseudonyms while discussing sensitive subjects (Given, 2008). Furthermore, participants had the option to quit from the study at any moment for any reason or no reason at all.

SERIAL NO	PSEUDONYMIZED NAMES	YEARLY TEACHING EXPERIENCE
1	Jack	7
2	Tom	6
3	Saumel	5
4	Mira	8
5	Alice	4
6	Susan	4
7	Blight	10
8	Mipah	7
9	Lorial	9
10	Cruise Van	5

Data Analysis

NVivo software was used to evaluate the data. Any type of qualitative data, including transcripts, images, videos, and audio files, can be imported into NVivo and then converted to plain text (Lewins & Silver, 2007). Manual analysis, on the other hand, was time-consuming and still regarded slow (Basit, 2003).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All participants who were involved in the study have shared their perceptions, points of view, opinions, and experiences about teaching IELTS during the interview, which is in line with Bernard's (2017) statement that the goal of a qualitative study is to concentrate on the instructors' perspectives through their experience in order to gain a deeper understanding of their opinions with respect to social situations. Though there were some discrepancies of opinion but they were minor because the participants all worked in the same field and provided similar information.

Teachers' challenges in teaching IELTS speaking

Unrealistic student expectations

It is worth noting that practically every Pakistani speaks Urdu as their first language, which is why the majority of pupils converse or communicate in Urdu as their first language. According to the information provided by the participants, one of the biggest obstacles they had during their teaching experience was the students' high expectations. Furthermore, teachers got stressed as a result of the students' expectations being met by a lack of comprehension of the English language. When studying English proficiency test preparation, Al-Rawashdesh (2009) believes that having a good command of the English language and a large vocabulary will be beneficial. It indicates that pupils must possess some rudimentary knowledge of English language skills before beginning to learn for the test. When asked how she perceived about instructing the class, one teacher expressed her dissatisfaction with the situation.

"The challenges are the students' expectations when they have a lower ability but want to improve their grades." It's somewhat more challenging for an instructor to assist them in meeting their goals. It will take a long time..."

During the interviews, the other teachers echoed same sentiment. The majority of them thought that the greatest issue was meeting the pupils' expectations.

"The issue, um... the pupils' expectations," Susan remarked. They anticipate earning a good score in a short amount of time, despite the fact that they don't have enough time to prepare."

The researcher of the current study has recorded their interviews and will later conduct a descriptive analysis of those recordings. The instructors discussed the students' worried feelings while dealing with them, according to the findings. They claimed that excessive anxieties and exam pressure are one of the aggravating factors that can obstruct their success. The BETS instructor went on to say that most Pakistani students have unrealistic expectations of what they may gain from such a course. When discussing the elements that influence IELTS

students' competency, he believes that the main difficulty is in Pakistan's educational system, which is built on rote learning in some form or another.

Insufficient interest among students

Furthermore, he highlighted that all problems with English speaking and listening proficiency are not simply caused by a lack of English input, but are also hereditary. The teachers and the people around them teach the students incorrect English. When the respondents were required to converse in English with the IELTS teacher or with other respondents in English, they first thought in Urdu before speaking in English in the IELTS speaking portion.

"The difficulty with most students in Pakistan is that they don't have time to develop their English language proficiency, so the only option they have is rote learning, which they have done since they were in elementary school."

Students' misunderstandings about the IELTS exam

According to one IELTS instructor, Pakistani students have a common misconception regarding IELTS speaking. Mr Tim Blight, the second IELTS instructor at BETS, said that all of his Pakistani students waste a lot of time thinking about how to respond to the question being given. When asked about the problems Pakistani students face in becoming proficient English speakers and listeners, he stated that Pakistani students like to do things the hard way and that when it comes to English language speaking part they are just interested in knowing what the correct response is. They don't seem to realise that speaking and language fluency are two very distinct things. He gave an example by saying that when he asked a Pakistani kid, "Do you play sports?" he received a positive response. Yes, he simply replied. Then he inquired as to what sports you participate in. Cricket, the student stated flatly.

"The students appear to be expecting some kind of formula for answering the question, but they actually need to speak from the heart, and another important thing is that there would be a real emphasis that they are listening to respond rather than to understand, and I believe that this hinders people. Because when I asked one of them, "Where are you from?" I got a blank stare. I want to go to Australia, he said. As a result, they are more concerned with getting a response than with understanding."

IELTS' impact on their teaching and classroom behaviour

According to one teacher, IELTS has created a situation in which students want to find covert and quick ways to gain high results rather than learning pure English, and we must provide them with IELTS exam tips and tricks. The teachers said that they re-plan or continue to plan focussing on the students' requirements in order to achieve the needed band. Furthermore, it is worth noting that exam-oriented planning is said to be based on the students' test results and performance (Masoomah Estaji & Farhad Ghiasvand, 2021).

Jack commented,

"My teaching philosophy has shifted from knowledge to technique, and I now need to develop materials for pupils that are fully exam-oriented, according to Jack. For a teacher who teaches IELTS, this is a huge challenge"

Students from various backgrounds are present.

When teaching IELTS, the teacher must devise an approach that is understandable by all students. A varying level of language competency among pupils, on the other hand, can be a significant challenge for the teacher in the classroom. It is fair to assume that IELTS instructors must be aware of how to deal with pupils who exhibit a discrepancy, i.e. high achievers and troublesome students. According to one of the lecturers,

“The difficulties arise as a result of a mixed level of English competence. Teaching mixed-level classes is difficult because you must concentrate on specific topics in a limited length of time, such as one and a half hours”.

Another teacher remarked,

"Can you image teaching pupils who are largely at different levels...! Some students don't even know what IELTS is. It's really difficult to keep track of them”.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the face-to-face interviews, it can be determined that the teachers faced a number of difficulties when teaching the high-stakes English proficiency exam preparation. In summary, the challenges that teachers faced stemmed from the students' attitudes, the class situation, and the teachers' anxiety. Most teachers believed, however, that the students' aspirations to achieve their target scores were the greatest problem of all, as this was the students' primary goal in studying for the test. It was also encountered that there were few strategies instructors should use to ascend the motivation of the students specifically preparing for the IELTS test. They suggested students about the opportunities they could have if they achieved their target scores. They engaged the learners in games with the students to break up the monotony in the classroom; they also told success stories about people who had achieved their target scores and what they had done and experienced since then; they told stories about successful and famous people who had prepared for IELTS exam; and they kept reminding the students of why they had joined for the IELTS preparatory class and the energy, time and, money they had invested in it.

The participants of the current study shared their thoughts and perspectives on the obstacles regarding IELTS test preparation challenges. Following their comments, it became clear that novel phenomena had occurred in the study's area, and many elements needed to be examined further. Overall, the data indicate that teacher problems and techniques are certainly significant concerns in the educational sector. Teachers' frustrations may be influenced by challenges they face, even if they have a great desire to educate.

Teachers should encourage students to participate in teaching and learning activities. Mipah advised playing games after the pupils had completed their test preparation as another way to push them to study. He stated that he needed to make the process of teaching and learning more engaging. It was also discovered that teachers employed some strategies to increase students' motivation to study for the upcoming test. The participants in this study shared their thoughts and insights on the topics surrounding test preparation challenges and challenges. Following their comments, it became clear that novel phenomena had occurred in the study's area, and

many elements needed to be examined further. Overall, the data indicate that teacher problems and techniques are certainly significant concerns in the educational sector. Teachers may face a variety of difficulties.

Subdividing your class into proficient pairs or trios and less proficient pairs or trios is another way to deal with the issues that teachers face. Pairing students together is the most acceptable strategy to cope with level inequality. Students are sometimes more open to a classmate explaining something when they are not understanding what the teacher is saying, so this method would be beneficial. During this exercise, the teacher will observe the children while encouraging them to collaborate with one another in order to foster friendship.

Furthermore, speaking ability is a significant barrier for students to overcome, and it is a significant task for teachers to develop proper procedures to assist IELTS candidates in mastering the language. Brown and Yule (2000) define spoken language production as "learning to talk in a foreign language in order for the teacher to assist the students."

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