



IELTS Speaking Training for High School Teachers in Yogyakarta

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Abstrak. Kegiatan PkM bertujuan untuk memfasilitasi guru-guru SMP/SMA Tumbuh Yogyakarta untuk belajar IELTS speaking. Metode kegiatan PkM ini adalah pelatihan tatap muka yang terdiri dari sepuluh pertemuan, diawali pre-test dan diakhiri penyampaian laporan hasil post-test. Tujuh guru berpartisipasi dalam pelatihan pengembangan guru yang kami (penulis) fasilitasi ini. Kesepuluh pertemuan itu terdiri dari satu sesi pre-test, enam sesi pelatihan tatap muka, satu sesi post-test, satu sesi diskusi antara fasilitator dan peserta terkait perkembangan belajar mereka, dan satu sesi diskusi antara fasilitator dengan koordinator kurikulum untuk mendiskusikan perkembangan belajar peserta. Selama enam sesi tatap muka, para peserta difasilitasi untuk lebih mengenal ketiga bagian dari IELTS Speaking di mana mereka harus mampu berbicara tentang topik familiar pada bagian pertama, mampu merespon pertanyaan tentang isu sosial yang ada pada kartu pada bagian kedua, dan mampu merespon pertanyaan lanjutan dari penguji pada bagian ketiga. Skor para peserta pada post-test mengalami kenaikan jika dibandingkan dengan skor pre-test mereka, mengindikasikan pelatihan ini cukup berhasil.

Abstract. This community service activity aimed to facilitate teachers at Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta to learn to speak using the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) standard. The method used in this community service was a ten-meeting face-to-face training programme starting with a pre-test session and ending with report on the participants' progress seen from the post-test results. Seven teachers participated in this teacher development training we (the authors) facilitated. The ten meetings consisted of a pre-test, six face-to-face training sessions, a post-test, a facilitator-participant discussion, and a discussion session between the facilitators and the school's curriculum coordinator regarding the participants' progress. During the six face-to-face training sessions, the participants familiarised themselves with three parts of IELTS Speaking test in which they had to talk about familiar topics, to respond to questions on social issues written in cards, and to respond to the examiner's follow-up questions, in Part I, Part II, and Part III, respectively. There was an increase of scores of the post-test compared to the pre-test, suggesting the training was quite a success.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the important role of teachers in education, teachers are always encouraged to continuously develop their professional skills. The necessity for teachers to continually upgrade themselves may also be influenced by the culture and demand of the schools they work at (Hasanah, 2012) and Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta can be an example of schools that continuously support the professional development of their teachers.

Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta is one of the schools under Sekolah Tumbuh, a private education institution running several schools ranging from pre-school level to Senior High School level (Sekolah Tumbuh, 2019). All schools under Sekolah Tumbuh are inclusive schools, implementing education for all policy, and they nurture respect towards diversities in religions, races, cultures, and learner's individual differences (Sekolah Tumbuh, 2019). Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta is no exception.

This school runs two types of programme, the national programme and the international one. In the national programme, instruction is conveyed in the Indonesian language, whilst in the international programme, which uses the *International Middle Year Curriculum (IMYC)* covering Science, Mathematics, History, Geography, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), instruction is conveyed in English (Sekolah Tumbuh, 2019).

To facilitate the needs of teachers of the international programme to conduct instruction in English, the management of Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta has been continuously supporting its teachers to have language enrichment programmes every semester since 2017. In the second semester of the 2018/2019 academic year, for example, there was a training of English for classroom use and we were invited to be the facilitators (see Subekti & Susyetina, 2019) as a part of the partnership between Sekolah Tumbuh and the English Language Education Department (ELED) of Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana (UKDW).

Realising the importance of teachers' competence and its influence on the quality of instruction in general (Hasanah, 2012), the ELED of UKDW and Sekolah Tumbuh once again conducted a professional development programme in the first semester of the 2019/2020 academic year in the form of

language training for teachers at all schools owned by Sekolah Tumbuh, including Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta, under community service programme as the implementation of one of the Three Pillars of Higher Education Institutions known as *Tridharma*, consisting of education, research, and community service (see Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2012). It was also the manifestation of UKDW's core values, which are *Obedience to God, Walking in Integrity, Striving for Excellence, and Service to the World* (Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, 2017), especially the fourth one – *Service to the World* (Subekti & Wati, 2019).

The training conducted focused on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Speaking test. IELTS Speaking test was chosen as the topic of the training because of the need for teachers to familiarise themselves with an international standardised test and to improve their speaking ability based on that standard that would hopefully affect the quality of instruction in their respective classes in a positive way. Besides, with more than 2.7 million IELTS test takers passing the test each year, IELTS is at present the most popular English language test in the world (Sim & Pop, 2016) and it would be better if teachers of Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta, a prominent private school providing international programme, were familiar with the test as well.

METHOD

Before the training was conducted, needs analysis was conducted to see the teacher participants' needs (Nation & Macalister, 2010; Richards & Renandya, 2002) and Sekolah Tumbuh's plan for its teachers regarding the language training. This needs analysis was conducted through a meeting between one of us and the curriculum coordinator of Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta. It was found that teachers wished to know more about international standardised tests such as IELTS.

It was agreed in the meeting that, in total, there would be ten meetings during the semester. The meetings would be conducted every week on Fridays at 1.30 – 3.00 pm after intra-curricular activities had finished. Furthermore, to optimise the exposure of the teacher participants to IELTS, among the four skills tested in IELTS, listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Issitt, 2008), speaking was chosen as the only skill that would be

practised throughout the 10-meeting programme. There were seven teacher participants of this training and they were selected by the school per their English proficiency level in which those who joined this training were those who had lower-intermediate level of English at the very least.

These ten meetings consisted of one pre-test session, six face-to-face training sessions, one post-test session, one facilitator-participant discussion on their learning progress, and one session in which the facilitators discussed the participants' progress with the curriculum coordinator as the representative of the school. We, the authors of this paper, were the facilitators of the training in which we took a turn in facilitating the training in the face-to-face sessions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first meeting on 6 September 2019 was scheduled for the pre-test. There were seven participants who took the pre-test. With the maximum score obtained in IELTS at 9.0, it was found that the minimum score of participants was 2.0/9.0 and the maximum score was 6.0/9.0, with several other participants at the 3.0/9.00-5.0/9.0 levels. These results indicated variations in the English proficiency of the participants involved in this training. Even, it could be seen that the gap between the lowest and highest score was quite big. This difference could be attributed to several factors. First, it may be caused by some teachers' lack of knowledge of IELTS before the pre-test was conducted and thus experienced test anxiety which could affect their performance negatively (Subekti, 2018b). Unfamiliarity with the topic covered in IELTS could also instil anxious feelings affecting their self-confidence in speaking (Subekti, 2018a, 2020). Seeing the results of pre-test and informed by several previous relevant studies on IELTS training about the importance of speaking strategies and building pup confidence (e.g.: Ameri-Golestan, 2016; Issitt, 2008), the training focused on familiarising the teacher participants with parts of IELTS Speaking test, discussing strategies needed in each part of IELTS Speaking test, and improving their confidence in speaking in general.

Specific about the six face-to-face training sessions, meetings two until meeting seven, the objectives of those sessions were arranged following three parts of the IELTS speaking test.

IELTS speaking test in total normally takes eleven until fourteen minutes (Issitt, 2008). In the first part, lasting four to six minutes, test takers are required to talk about themselves as well as their interest and to respond to questions on familiar topics (Issitt, 2008). One session was allocated for this part of the test (meeting two). The second part of the test, lasting three to four minutes, requires test takers to talk about a topic on a card they randomly choose. They are to speak without interruption responding to questions written in the cards (Issitt, 2008). Meetings three and four of the training were allocated to discuss this part. Finally, the third part of the test, lasting about four to five minutes, is where test takers discuss issues of a more abstract nature with the examiner (Issitt, 2008). The issues are linked to part two. For example, if in part two a test taker is asked to tell about his/her favourite teacher, in part three the discussion will more likely be on issues related to education. Meetings five and six were for discussing this third part. The last face-to-face training was intended for reviewing all of the three parts and doing further practice as necessary.

The second meeting, the first face-to-face training session, on 13 September 2019 discussed "IELTS Speaking Part 1- Talking about familiar topics". After the participants obtained the explanation of IELTS Speaking through PowerPoint presentation, they did online quizzes on IELTS in general. This activity aimed to measure to what extent the participants knew the IELTS test. It was found that some participants already knew IELTS as a standardised English proficiency test but did not know the contents and the components in detail. There was one participant who had taken the IELTS test more than once to fulfil the requirements for studying abroad. He was also the one scoring the highest in the pre-test, indicating that familiarity with the test could be important to score high in a standardised test. The activity then continued with watching sample videos of the IELTS test and the participants were asked to identify the good practices of the participants in the video as a reference, for example on the importance of speaking clearly, confidently (Issitt, 2008), and making eye contact with the examiner (Namdar & Bagheri, 2012). The use of instructional video in this activity was based on the realisation that videos helped learners see visual examples of things good to do or not good to do during the

IELTS speaking test. Then, the participants had speaking exercises by following the provisions of IELTS Speaking part 1 which focused on the topic of daily activities. Here, the participants took turns becoming the examiners and test-takers.

The third meeting on 20 September 2019 discussed "IELTS Speaking part 2 – Giving a two-minute talk based on questions in cards" (Issitt, 2008). The meeting began with a brief review of the IELTS Speaking part I materials at the previous meeting. The facilitator then began a discussion to facilitate the participants to understand the instruction on the IELTS cards as the participants analysed the sample video and discussed the technical implementation of IELTS Speaking part 2, for example: how long it took to talk and to take notes, for example through making a mind map, and how participants knew when to stop talking. The participants also obtained an explanation of the four questions on each card and how important it was to answer each question. After that, the participants learned some tips on how to take effective notes quickly as an aid in outlining responses to questions on the card because planning what to say could help improve speaking confidence (Subekti, 2019). The training was ended with participants doing recorded simulation. The activity in which the participants recorded their speech and listened to it after was found to be effective to facilitate them to realise their mistakes and weaknesses in speaking they did not realise before (see Aoki, 2014). The training situation of the third meeting can be observed in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Creating mind map before giving a 2-minute talk for IELTS Speaking Part 2

Next, the fourth meeting on 4 October 2019 started with a review of theories about IELTS

Speaking part II followed with an explanation of tips in answering questions on the card, for example, the participants should answer in an elaborative and detailed manner, the participants may not repeat questions but should paraphrase, and the participants may not skip any of the questions (Brown, 2006). In the second half of the session, the participants had speaking practice and recorded simulation. Each participant took one card, spoke for two minutes whilst recording it. After that, they listened to the recording with the other participants and conducted an assessment and reflection on their performance. The participants then gave each other ratings and suggestions for improvement. Several participants found this seemingly simple activity enlightening because they could identify their shortcomings they did not really notice before (see Yanju, Mei, & Mohamed, 2017). This activity also nurtured collaboration in learning in which all participants exchanged constructive feedback (Aoki, 2014; Jacobs & Hall, 2002).

The fifth meeting discussing "IELTS Speaking part 3 – Talking about abstract topics (responding to questions related to social issues)" was held on 11 October 2019. At the beginning of the session, the participants were facilitated to become familiar with the types of examiner questions in IELTS Speaking part III through the fill-in-the-blanks activity by watching the IELTS test video. After the participants were familiar with the types of questions asked by examiners, it was hoped that they would be able to respond to questions completely and correctly. After that, the participants learned several techniques for developing answers, for example: explaining opinions, providing relevant examples, and suggesting solutions. The facilitator also emphasised the importance of being able to convey ideas supported by strong data or arguments. The participants worked in pairs taking the role of an examiner and an IELTS test takers in IELTS Speaking part 3. They recorded their performance and the participant taking the role of an examiner give his/her partner peer feedback on to what extent their responses to questions were satisfactory. The training situation of the fifth meeting can be observed in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Providing peer feedback after listening to the recording for IELTS Speaking Part 3

The sixth meeting on 18 October 2019 continued the discussion on IELTS Speaking part 3 and focused on training the participants to express their agreement and disagreement concerning social issues. Through card games, participants expressed their agreement or disagreement of the topic on the card and they should supplement their standpoint with strong supports. In the process, participants were facilitated to be able to talk longer and more comprehensively. The participants also learned popular idioms and vocabulary that were rarely used by working on a worksheet. After that, the participants practiced using the idioms and vocabularies that had been learned in expressing agreement or disagreement.

The seventh meeting with the agenda of checking, correcting, and assessing was held on 25 October 2019. This session focussed on discussing what had been learned and what had become challenges for the participants during the training. At this point, the participants seemed to have understood the whole mapping of IELTS Speaking test components and what they needed to do as well as what they should not do in each part. One participant scoring the lowest in the pre-test, for example, realised that her pre-test score was so low because she did not elaborate her answers and just respond to the examiner's questions with "Yes" or "No" or very simple, unelaborated answers. She then realised she should never do that in the IELTS test. The last thirty minutes of the session was dedicated for IELTS Speaking parts II and III recorded simulation in which the participants worked in pair and took a turn to be the examiner and test taker.

The post-test was conducted on 8 November 2019. Six participants took the post-test whilst

one participant was absent. The results of the pre-test conducted on 6th September 2019 and those of post-test could be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. The Results of Pre- and Post-Tests

| Participants | Pre-test | Post-test |
|---------------|----------|-----------|
| Participant 1 | 2.5 | 3 |
| Participant 2 | 3.5 | 4 |
| Participant 3 | 6 | 6.5 |
| Participant 4 | 3.5 | 4.5 |
| Participant 5 | 5 | [absent] |
| Participant 6 | 5 | 6 |
| Participant 7 | 5 | 5.5 |

As seen in Table 1, the participants' grades in general, there was an increase in the average IELTS score of the participants (between 0.5 - 1.00). The minimum score achieved was 3.0/9.0 while the maximum score was 6.5/9.0. Though the increase in scores could not be said to be high, it could be said that such an increase after only 6-face-to-face sessions conducted once a week was quite a success moreover considering that most of the participants did not even have any idea about the procedures of IELTS test before the training.

The meeting held on 29 November 2019 had the agenda of conveying the participants' progress report and gathering information as well as insight from the participants' learning experience to enrich future English training programmes. From this meeting, we obtained several notable findings. Some participants confirmed that they had never encountered IELTS before the training and this training gave them a brand new knowledge. Some participants also stated that they enjoyed the English speaking activities during the training as they had the chance to practice and improve their speaking skills through the tasks given. It was realized that IELTS may not be relevant with their immediate need but the speaking practice was urgently needed as even though their school is labelled as an international school, the use of English as the language of communication was, in practice, still very limited and confined to classroom uses. Furthermore, some participants claimed that this training helped them to identify their weakness in doing the IELTS Speaking test, for example when they misunderstood the question in the card (IELTS Speaking test Part II), especially when they were asked about unfamiliar topics. Lastly, some participants emphasised that the method to record the

simulation was very effective. They could learn how to identify their weaknesses and note the mistakes they made, for example, when they mispronounced words, missed the plural markers, and made other grammatical mistakes.

After the discussion session with the participants, the facilitators reported the participants' study progress in general to the curriculum coordinator on the same day. The session was concluded with the program review and exploration of possible opportunities for future partnership.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Some important points could be stated regarding this community service programme. First, the IELTS training could be considered a success, seen from the improvement of the teacher participants' IELTS score, albeit very small. Second, the teacher participants' language skills still needed continuous improvement. As such, continual language training programmes should be maintained. They also needed to create an environment conducive for English language practice, for example, being confident in speaking in English outside classrooms such as when having informal discussions with other teachers or during meetings.

There are several possibilities for future language training programmes. Seen that many of the students of Tumbuh High School Yogyakarta have expatriate parents only speaking English, training for teachers in communicating effectively with students' parents could also be strategic. Additionally, based on discussions with teachers, it was found that the school has a student-led conference as a regular academic activity. Hence, conducting training on public speaking for these students could also be worthwhile.

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