

AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE IELTS SPEAKING SKILLS IN INDONESIA: UNTAPPED STRATEGIES TO SOLVE IELTS SPEAKING ISSUES TO GENDER, AGE, AND SOCIAL STATUS

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Abstract: Communicating effectively in English is a critical skill for many Indonesians, especially those seeking to further their academic or professional pursuits. The International English Language Testing System has become a widely recognized assessment of English proficiency, with the speaking component being a particular challenge for many Indonesian learners. This research aims to discover untapped strategies to solve IELTS speaking issues about gender, age, and social status. The increasing importance of English as a global communication tool has led to a surge in demand for IELTS courses in Indonesia. Despite various preparation strategies, many Indonesian IELTS test takers need help with speaking, particularly in the speaking component. This study explores the effectiveness of affective and social strategies in overcoming these challenges, focusing on the impact of gender, age, and social status. Drawing on a combination of literature review and empirical evidence, the study highlights the role of anxiety management, positive self-encouragement, and cultural understanding in enhancing speaking performance. This study employs a literature review to analyze effective strategies for improving IELTS speaking skills in Indonesia, focusing on how these strategies vary across gender, age, and social status. The findings suggest that integrating these strategies into IELTS preparation can improve test takers' outcomes, offering practical recommendations for both learners and educators. The implications of this research could be to inform the development of more tailored IELTS preparation programs that cater to the diverse needs of Indonesian test takers. By understanding the impact of factors such as gender, age, and social status on IELTS speaking performance, educators can design more effective and personalized learning experiences. This could involve incorporating gender-specific approaches, age-appropriate strategies, and culturally relevant content to address the unique challenges faced by different groups of Indonesian IELTS learners.

Keywords: *learning strategies, speaking, IELTS, Gender, social status*

INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language in Indonesia plays an essential role as a communication tool in the global era and as a gate to embrace an abundance of opportunities. It causes many institutions to provide various English courses generally and specifically for the International Language Testing System (IELTS), jointly regulated by The University of Cambridge Local Examinations (UCLES), the British Council, and IDP Education Australia Limited. There is no passing or failing determination in IELTS as this test is provided to measure test takers' skills related to the demands of study and job requirements (Shumin, 2002).

The IELTS courses provided by some English institutions in Indonesia are divided by the time-allocated demands, skill demands, and types of IELTS test (academic or general) demands. Some people want to learn IELTS in the evening as they are workers who must work in a day hours. Still, they try to improve their careers, others want to know the general type of IELTS to learn deeply about writing a business letter. The others are interested in learning specific skills that are considerably difficult. These demands are caused by the reasons to pursue higher education (Affandi et al., 2023) or find a proper job. Hence, many prospective students enroll in IELTS courses to take an IELTS test every year.

Specifically, the test takers often find several obstacles in the speaking IELTS. As seen by a writer through teaching experiences, the problem frequently found by test takers is the high level of anxiety that can be a burden so that they are stammering, even tongue-tied. This statement, supported by Shumin

(2002), claims that adult tends to be more focused on how to be measured; for that reason, their level of anxiety dramatically increases, especially when they are faced with a native speaker. It is known that test takers who are speaking IELTS must be confronted by honest conversations that are more humanistic and usually involve a native examiner. If test takers cannot control their emotions, further implications, such as difficulties in idea development and grammar control, can appear while testing, and it will negatively impact the test result. Moreover, gender, age, and social status aspects have to be considered because those factors can affect speaking IELTS speaking performance. All these issues will be elaborated on in the literature review and discussion section.

Based on the illustrations above, the writer is interested in finding out the significance of social and affective strategies to enhance speaking skills for Indonesian test takers. This will begin by briefly describing the problem in speaking generally and specifically for the IELTS context in Indonesia. Next, the effect of age and sociocultural will be reviewed, explaining indirect strategies and its benefits for test takers. In the discussion part, there will be an elaboration of how to use affective and social strategies to overcome the speaking issues in the Indonesian context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking is a pivotal skill that is necessary to be mastered as it is primarily a tool to help people build successful communication. By using speaking, people can transfer information and share ideas. As English functions as a lingua franca, Boonkit

(2010) claims that speaking is essential for the effectiveness of communication in the global era. However, Shumin (2002) argues that speaking English is difficult for foreign learners of the complex interaction forms in which they will not only be encountered by appropriated verbal communication but also paralinguistic elements comprised of pitch stress and intonation. In particular, based on my teaching experiences, EFL learners often stammer when speaking English.

Regarding the aforementioned statement, the teachers of English must have an onerous responsibility as they are demanded to have teaching techniques to solve the problems faced by the students in learning English. The teachers must be able to arrange their assignments efficiently, accompanied by learning strategies. They are also required to motivate the students to learn English well. The students are expected to be competent English users when communicating with others. For example, in teaching speaking, they are expected to be able to do and realize the speech, such as opening, defending, closing the conversation, and asking for help which is realized in the form of language rules and vocabulary.

International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is one of the International tests in Indonesia to analyze language skills to be formally used as a requirement to find a good job or enroll in higher education. Four language skills will be measured providently, in which productive skills (speaking and writing) will be used. The test takers are faced and assessed by an examiner throughout the actual conversation.

Speaking IELTS is a form of an interview between the test takers and an examiner. This process takes 11 to 14 minutes for three parts of the test. The test has three parts, and each part fulfils a particular function regarding interaction pattern, task input and test takers' output.

There are some reasons why the writer focuses on three genders, age, and social status factors. First, gender bias in language assessment frequently happens, and it also happens in IELTS speaking, related to topics. Second, age is one factor that will determine how much effort and mental readiness have to be prepared for face-to-face speaking sessions. Third, IELTS test takers from Indonesia come from multicultural societies where hierarchical issues appear, and it is also closely related to the IELTS speaking performance.

The study conducted by Sunderland's (cited in Lumley, 2005) claims that three factors could impact on exam/test concerning male or female test takers such as topic, task, and tester but it needs to be specifically investigated. During the interview session, the gender of both tests is taken, and the interviewer could consider variation in speaking discourse (Young and Milanovic, 1992). However, a study conducted by O'Loughlin (2002) found that gender has no impact on male and female candidates, which involved eight males and eight females, who were each interviewed twofold, first by a man and second by a woman. This research's limitation is focused on the tester/interviewer, with no further analysis for topic and task form factors. Thus, associated with the speaking IELTS test in Indonesia, where the test takers come from a society

with high hierarchal values, it would possibly impact their performance differently between women and men.

Hakuta et al. (2003) conducted a study regarding the relationship between age and L2, which revealed a strong association between them, the increase of age results proficiency level of people will decrease gradually. It is supported by Romero (2006), who states that children will find it easy to process complex information compared to aging people. Shumin (2002) also concludes that age is a common factor influencing whether learners will be successful or not. About anxiety, Gaibani (2016) has conducted research to examine the influence of age in speaking anxiety among English Language Learners at Omar Al-Mukhtar University. The result of this study shows that Lower ages tended to be associated with higher anxiety in speaking as compared to the higher age. Those, as mentioned earlier are, implied that age plays a significant role in speaking abilities. When it reflects IELTS test takers in Indonesia, the gap in learner's age will range from 16 and over. This range of age could give different results in achieving a good score for Indonesian test takers.

It cannot be denied that social status can literally influence communication. Beger et al. (1980) claim that hierarchical connections between humans will happen in all situations in which some people have the power to control or influence others. Moreover, Foulsham (2010) conducted an empirical study to analyze students' performances in a group discussion, which reveals that the student's hierarchy status will gain much more attention compared to the low-status student. Related to the Speaking IELTS test,

it can be said that the level status of the interviewer will create a sense of intimidation in the process of the interview. This condition can be a trigger to more anxiety and loss of emotional control.

O'Malley & Chamot (1990) have already revealed that the Tri-partite typology consists of Metacognitive strategies. Furthermore, the more complex concept of strategies promoted by Oxford in the same year (1990:15) is divided into two branches: direct and indirect. Indirect strategies comprised of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies which Metacognitive is a concept of strategies that give learners opportunities to regulate their cognition; affective strategies aim to control attitudes, emotions, and motivations; and social strategies help learners through human interaction (Ibid:135). Affective and social strategies that test taker can utilise to be successful in facing IELTS test will be elaborated more in this following.

Affective strategies refer to emotions, attitudes, values, and motivations (Oxford, 1990). Self-esteem is also one of the main affective elements that have an influence on keeping the learner's motivation (ibid:141). All of these aspects will guide learners to manage their way of learning, such as feelings, rewards, deep breathing, and positive self-encourage (Yunus, 2014).

Oxford (1990:143) reveals that affective strategies are practically divided into three branches such as lowering your anxiety, encouraging yourself, and taking your emotional temperature.

The social strategies relate to how to help learners in utilising several actions in communication (Yunus, 2014). Furthermore, Oxford (1990) claims that

social strategies are essential parts of communication as language cannot be used regardless of its speakers. These strategies are also divided into three practical samples as follows:

Overall, the effect of social and affective strategies to improve IELTS speaking in Indonesian context has not been investigated. It can be said that applying affective and social strategies are untapped strategies that need an empirical research in the future. Moreover, the factors of gender, age and social status are interesting as considering the multicultural backgrounds of IELTS test takers in Indonesia. Therefore, as mentioned above, there will be three factors that will be discussed comprehensively related to the benefits of socio-affective strategies. Practical implementation and feasible suggestion will also be provided to help learners and teachers.

METHOD

This study employs a literature review to analyse affective strategies for improving IELTS speaking skills in Indonesia, focusing on how these strategies vary across gender, age, and social status. By systematically searching and synthesizing relevant studies from academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, ERIC, and Academic Search Complete, the research aims to identify effective yet untapped strategies. Key themes extracted include general affective strategies for language learning, and specific insights into how gender, age, and social status impact the effectiveness of these strategies. This comprehensive approach ensures a robust foundation for proposing targeted interventions for IELTS candidates in Indonesia.

The analysis involves critically evaluating the quality and relevance of selected studies, grouping findings into thematic categories, and comparing different studies to draw well-rounded conclusions. The findings aim to highlight both consensus and discrepancies in existing research, providing a nuanced understanding of the affective factors influencing IELTS speaking performance. Ethical considerations include proper attribution of sources to maintain academic integrity. The study's primary limitation is its reliance on existing literature, which may not fully capture all aspects of the Indonesian context. Nonetheless, the systematic approach offers valuable insights for educators and learners seeking to improve IELTS speaking outcomes through tailored affective strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dealing with speaking assessment in the IELTS test often faces many difficulties. This includes cognitive and mental problem. Based on my personal learning and teaching experiences, many teachers and prospective IELTS test takers focus on material preparation and practising excessively regardless of mental preparation, specifically on tackling their anxieties, confidences, and pessimism. It cannot be denied that these issues are closely related to the test takers' age, gender, and social status, and the majority of these issues would happen to the first-taken IELTS test. Hence, this will discuss using affective and social strategies to overcome the problems mentioned above.

The Effect of Affective and Social Strategy on Gender.

The influence of gender in Speaking IELTS can be categorized as a biased assessment relating to gender. The majority of the cases in Indonesia are topic bias. Based on my student's testimony, she said answering a question about extreme sports in part 2, speaking IELTS was difficult. Compared to males, they would be easy, although they have no experience in this sport. These issues can be solved by utilizing effective strategies. If test takers have no idea about the topic in the middle of the test, they have to "take a risk wisely" to figure out the topics. It means that they have to control their feelings to answer whether they attempt to make up a story related to an unfamiliar topic or be honest, to tell the truth that she has no idea. Besides, before the test appointment, female or male test takers must practice three practical branches of affective strategies to support their language ability. It can be said to be a preparation where the positive statement will be helpful. This statement is supported by Dörnyei (2001), who claims that maintaining a positive image may create better results for learners.

The Effect of Affective and Social Strategy on Age

Age factor becomes an issue for some Indonesian test takers about their level of anxiety. As mentioned before, based on the research, young learners tend to be more vulnerable to anxiety, and it happens in a majority of test takers in Indonesia. Young learners could face a high level of anxiety, especially those who want to experience the IELTS Speaking test for the first time. Some will ask, "What is

the background of the examiner?" "is it British, American, or Australian?" and others will ask, "Is the examiner's voice clear enough or understandable?". All of these atmospheres indicate that they are not capable enough to minimize their level of anxiety. Unfortunately, this condition can often negatively impact their speaking ability. Probably, their pure ability to speak "without high anxiety", could get a high band score. Those issues, as mentioned earlier, therefore, could be solved by effective strategies using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, and meditation. These strategies can be applied during preparation or throughout the test. Social strategy can also be utilized by learners in which they should adjust to the new people and environment by cooperating with others and increasing their level of empathy.

The Effect of Affective Strategy on Social Status

The social status factor sometimes appears for some test takers to be a burden. It could happen that their hierarchical values are rooted in a custom for Indonesian societies. This value spreads among substantial aspects such as vernaculars and social interaction. The Javanese language, noted as the most vernacular speakers in Indonesia, has been known as a hierarchical language. Wajdi et al. (2013) claim that there are two speech levels: ngoko 'low' and krama 'high', which creates intimacy, deference, and hierarchy among its speakers. This issue, consequently, becomes a reason why the Javanese language could not be chosen as National Language. Regarding social interactions, it can be observed through these roles; young people are too

respectful to older people, employees show too much appreciation to the employer, even students give high respect to much to their lecturers. Therefore, test takers who cannot release from mentioned values will be easily affected by intimidating feelings, and it will obviously decrease their speaking performance.

The sense of inferior in front of examiners can be solved by using affective and social strategies. In affective strategies, learners can practice to encourage and motivate their self by saying positive statement. They can stick a positive statement in their mind like “an examiner is my friend, and I don’t need to be afraid”. Furthermore, social strategies would be helpful as attempting to develop cultural understanding. They have to know that in speaking IELTS, we don’t need to feel as facing a lecture in the class. Cultural understanding will help test takers to analyse their value needed to be eradicated in front of IELTS examiner.

Why affective and Social strategies can be useful to improve Speaking IELTS

There are some reasons why affective and social strategies are useful to improve speaking IELTS. Initially, these strategies are possibly used in four skills (Oxford, 1990). It means that these strategies are flexible to be implemented in speaking including Speaking in IELTS. Secondly, it is commonly known that anxiety is the greatest obstacle in speaking that can influence test takers performances to get high band score in IELTS. Test takers in Indonesia often experience this condition where they feel underperformance due to under pressure atmosphere. This can be handled by the test takers with the implementation three branches

that have been mentioned before, especially for the points 2.2.1.1 above regarding lowering your anxiety by using music, relaxation, and laughing. Finally, as speaking IELTS designed with involving human as an assessor, it would be necessary to apply social strategies. For example, the use of asking for clarification and verification if the questions are not understandable or vague, and the use of cultural understanding knowledge to follow the way native speakers thought.

Practical Implementation of Affective and Social strategies

In this following part, there is a form of the lesson plan (Appendix.2) that can be implemented to exemplify the use of social and affective strategies in encountering IELTS speaking. The form of lesson plan will absorb five stages (raising awareness, explicit instruction, practice, implicit instruction, and evaluation) promoted by Griffiths (2015), to implement social and affective strategies. Raising awareness is an essential part as if learners recognise what choices are existing; they will easily to set position in order to choose what the most effective strategies that can be implemented to help them achieving target language (Oxford, 1990). Regarding explicit and implicit, Cohen (2014) claims that strategies should be explicitly delivered and embedded in a learning process. In order to be automation in strategies application, the learner should apply in practice session (Oxford, 1990). It is commonly known that without sufficient practice, it cannot attain the maximum result. Moreover, to measure the significance and drawback of learning

strategies implementation, the evaluation process is included.

Feasible Suggestion for IELTS TEST Takers and Teacher.

Based on what has been discussed, it can be proposed several suggestions that can be considered by teacher and test taker if they are preparing for speaking in IELTS test.

Teacher

- a. They should pay attention more to indirect strategies as the most process of IELTS training in Indonesia is barely designed by practice session about skill regardless mental preparation and specific motivational activities.
- b. The teacher should take into consideration regarding the effect of gender, age, and social status of their learners. These can be used as a pilot study to design syllabus based on learners' weaknesses.
- c. It would be better if the teacher provides real speaking atmosphere regarding three forms of IELTS speaking question rather than forces them to practice a lot without real communication goal.

Learners

- a. Besides practising excessively, Learners should pay attention to their mental readiness to encounter interviewers.

- b. Learners should try to implement affective and social strategies either as preparation or along the IELTS speaking test.
- c. Learners should try to adjust their self into the test atmosphere so that they can learn how to cope their anxiety and tension along the test.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it is obvious that test takers in Indonesia often perceive intimidating atmosphere along the IELTS speaking session. This correlates with several factors which can affect speaking performance such as gender, age and social status. Gender associates with the bias topic for women and men test takers, age associates with difference anxiety level and social status connects hierarchal value which makes sense of intimidation. All of these cases could be resolved by implementing social and affective strategies such as the practical implementation of 'take a risk wisely', lowering anxiety by using music, relaxation, or laughing and building positive statement and cultural understanding. It can be said that test takers will be more careful in anticipating their weaknesses which can be happened along the speaking session if they have already perceived an effective mental and social control.

Based on what had been discussed above, it could be said that the significance of social and affective strategies to improve the performance of IELTS speaking skill for Indonesian test takers is justifiable. What relates to gender, age, and social status issues which become speaking obstacles could also be solved by implementing these strategies.

SUGGESTION

On the other hand, it is important to remember that all learning strategies are connected and supported each other to maximize learner potential in order to achieve their goals (Oxford, 1990). Social and affective strategies cannot influence learner without the significance of direct strategies such as memory, cognitive and compensation strategies.

However, further empirical research is needed to investigate this issues. Furthermore, it is a pivotal step to consider other individual differences as it is known that suitability of language strategies cannot be generalised by having the perception that this will be matched for all learners (Griffiths, 2015). Hence, it is suggested that the association of individual differences factors is investigated in future studies, especially in IELTS teaching context. In addition, for IELTS teachers and learners, they have to realise that affective and social strategies are necessary strategies that can fortify willingness and self-awareness.

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