

Online IELTS (International English Language Testing System) Training for High School Teachers as Preparation for Applying for Foreign Scholarships

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Abstract: IELTS is a mandatory requirement in applying for overseas master's degree scholarships. However, many people, including senior and vocational high school teachers in Selong City, East Lombok, face difficulty answering IELTS questions. Other than having no educational background in the English Language, they also have no time to take IELTS courses because of their heavy workload. Therefore, this community service activity aims to provide IELTS training to high school teachers in Selong City, East Lombok. This IELTS training is expected to help them meet the IELTS score when applying for overseas scholarships. Twenty teachers participated in this IELTS training, which was held in August 2023. Data from the pre-test and post-test revealed that the participants showed increased IELTS scores, although insignificant. Besides, data obtained from the online questionnaire and interview session showed that the participants positively responded to this IELTS training.

Keywords: IELTS training; overseas scholarships; school teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar of a nation's progress. Without education, society will certainly lag behind in the global competitive world. Many factors certainly cause the decline of education. In Indonesia, many dropouts end up unemployed. One of Indonesia's most influential factors in education is the cost factor (Hasibuan et al., 2021; Sofya et al., 2018).

The economic situation of the Indonesian people, most of whom are below the poverty line, as mentioned by Mujiati et al., (2018), is one of the

reasons they cannot afford school fees and eventually fail to continue to higher levels. However, there are many ways to ensure that someone can still receive an education. One way is through scholarship programs (Aliyyah et al., 2020). There are quite a few scholarship programs, both from the government and from private parties, that offer financial assistance for education every year. These scholarship programs vary, ranging from non-degree scholarships (short courses, research, internships) to degree scholarships (Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D.) offered by domestic

and foreign governments. These scholarship programs can be easily obtained as long as the applicants meet the criteria or requirements listed. One of the scholarships that is a dream for students who have graduated from Bachelor's programs is the foreign Master's degree scholarship.

Many foreign Master's degree scholarship programs open registration every year, and successful applicants will have the opportunity to attend master's level lectures in certain countries. The target of these Master's degree scholarship programs is usually bachelor's graduates who already have work experience and meet the English language proficiency test scores. Besides TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), the English language proficiency test that is often a requirement for applying for foreign Master's degree scholarships is IELTS (International English Language Testing System). For example, the Chevening scholarship opens registration every year for Indonesian citizens to continue their master's studies at prestigious universities in England. This scholarship requires applicants to have a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 to proceed to the next selection stage. Meanwhile, the LPDP (Education Fund Management Institute) scholarship opens registration every year with various types of scholarships. For those who want to apply for regular foreign Master's degree scholarships, applicants must have a minimum IELTS score of 6.5. Of course, there are still many other types of Master's degree scholarships that can be applied for by anyone interested.

Quite a few high school teachers in Selong (East Lombok-NTB) are interested in trying to apply for these Master's degree scholarships. However, one of the registration requirements that they find difficult to fulfill is the IELTS score. Besides the cost of the IELTS test, many of them admit that they do

not have experience in studying IELTS or taking the IELTS test. They feel more familiar with the TOEFL test. Rooted from this problem, this Community Service activity aims to provide an opportunity for high school teachers in Selong who are interested in attending free online IELTS training via the Zoom application. This is done online because of the participants' location differences, making scheduling difficult. So, it was agreed that the training would be conducted online using the Zoom application. This kind of PkM activity has also been carried out by several people in Indonesia (Daud et al., 2022; Mahmud, 2022; Nurchaerani & Nursyamsi, 2021; Onny & Renreng, 2020; Susanti et al., 2022; Widiyanto et al., 2021).

The understanding gained from this IELTS training is expected to help them understand the IELTS test more deeply and become a capital for them to achieve the certain IELTS score required by their dream Master's scholarships. Specifically, the type of IELTS in this training is academic IELTS. As we know, there are two types of IELTS: general IELTS (for work or residency purposes) and academic IELTS (for educational purposes). Because scholarships are closely related to education programs and are used as registration requirements for foreign Master's degree scholarships, this academic IELTS type is used as the training in this Community Service activity.

METHOD

The method used in implementing this community service activity is by applying the Service-Learning (SL) method, where the community servers provide IELTS learning services to high school teachers in Selong, East Lombok. It should be noted that this IELTS training was held four times a week on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and

Thursday for approximately one month, namely in August 2023.

As mentioned earlier, this IELTS training was conducted online through the Zoom application. The participants in this IELTS training were 20 high school teachers in Selong with different educational backgrounds (Computer Engineering, Biology Education, Mathematics Education, Informatics Engineering, Physics Education, and Biology Education). They are interested in applying for foreign Master's scholarships but still have a limited understanding of IELTS. Therefore, they felt the need to attend IELTS training early to prepare for applying for Master's scholarships in the future.

Regarding the teaching materials, the book used in this IELTS training was the book "IELTS Strategies and Tips" by Dr. Lin Lougheed, 2nd edition published in 2013. Participants were provided with

this IELTS book in PDF format, which they could print themselves. For your information, this book contains strategies and tips for quickly answering the four components of the IELTS test (listening, reading, writing, speaking). These strategies and tips were taught to the participants and served as the approach in this IELTS training.

A pre-test was given before the training began to determine the IELTS scores of the participants. After the training ended, participants took a post-test to determine their changes in IELTS scores. Additionally, participants were asked to answer some questions in a questionnaire provided online through Google Forms. This questionnaire contained several questions about the participants' perceptions of the IELTS training they had attended and any suggestions they could give, as seen in Figure 1.

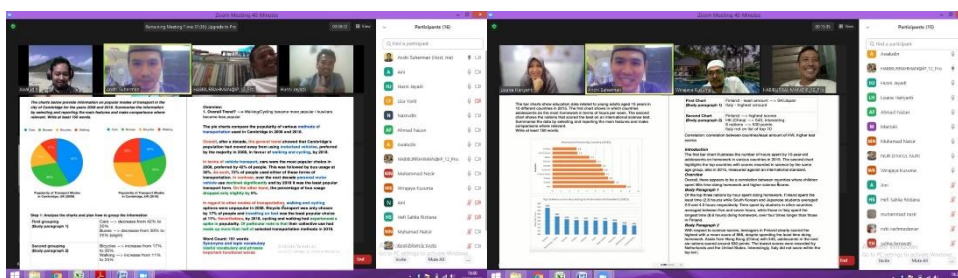


Figure 1 Atmosphere during the online IELTS 2023 training

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained in the pre-test and post-test showed a change in each participant's IELTS scores, which can be seen in the Table 2. For the sake of personal data, the participants' real names are listed in initials only.

Table 2 Results of the pre-test and post-test of the IELTS 2023 training participants

No	Name	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1	WD	4	4.5
2	TSK	4.5	5
3	MS	5	5.5
4	AA	4	5
5	KF	4	5
6	IM	3.5	4

No	Name	Pre-Test	Post-Test
7	MA	4	4.5
8	AF	5	5.5
9	YDF	3	3.5
10	RT	4.5	5
11	ES	4	4.5
12	TRW	5	5.5
13	RE	3	3.5
14	MA	4.5	5
15	YF	4	4.5
16	BS	4	5
17	AAS	5	5.5
18	LS	4.5	5
19	AY	4	4.5
20	FPT	5	5.5

Table 2 shows that the participants showed an increase in IELTS scores in

the post-test results. This finding is in line with the community service activities conducted by Juliarta, (2022). IELTS training held for nursing students in Bali showed that participants achieved an increase in IELTS scores after training. However, this training was only conducted to provide participants with an understanding of IELTS without knowing the targets or goals of the participants, as done in this community service activity. Additionally, in person, IELTS training by Hartono dan Prima (2022) was provided to the general public. Unlike this PkM activity, they provided IELTS training only for the writing component and was not specifically aimed at a particular group. Slightly different, the IELTS training by Fitriana et al., (2017) was given to students and lecturers from the English Language study program in Kalimantan. From the results of this training, it was obtained that the participants showed a fairly good increase in IELTS scores. However, the participants in the IELTS training they conducted came from the English Language study program, so they certainly have basic English language skills. Meanwhile, the participants in the IELTS training in this community service activity come from various study programs, so it can be concluded that they do not have a strong foundation in English and academic IELTS.

Additionally, from the online questionnaire, the participants' perceptions of this IELTS training can be seen as shown in the graph below. The component that received the most positive responses was the writing comprehension training (90%), followed by speaking comprehension (86%). After that, 82% of participants gave positive feedback on the listening comprehension training, and only 77% felt the benefit of the reading comprehension training. Participants'

perceptions of the 4 IELTS components are listed in Figure 2.

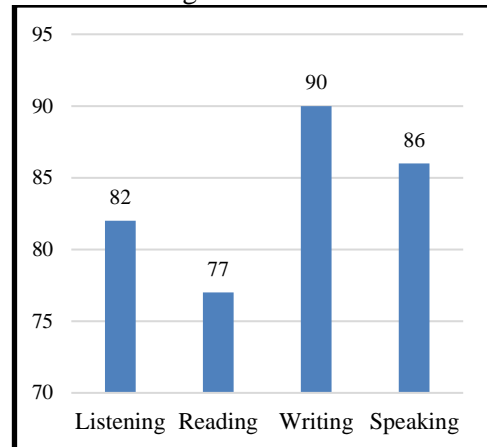


Figure 2 Participants' perceptions of the 4 IELTS components

Direct statements during the interview process support the assessment by participants in the above graph. Regarding the writing comprehension section, WD and TSK stated:

"To be honest, I am least confident in my writing ability. Let alone writing academically, even in general writing, I often run out of ideas. However, this IELTS training has been able to help me improve my writing skills, especially academic writing, as in the official IELTS test. Considering its many benefits, I hope IELTS training like this will continue to be held."

"Writing is indeed the most challenging component for me, especially in the first writing part where we have to understand tables or graphs and convey them in writing. Fortunately, many effective techniques in answering the first part of the IELTS are taught in this training. Hopefully, training like this will continue to be scheduled."

Regarding the speaking comprehension section, AA and MA gave their opinions and hopes during the interview:

"At first, I thought that speaking was the easiest part of IELTS because we only express opinions without having to

use formal sentence structures. But it turns out I learned many things from this IELTS training to get a high speaking score, especially about vocabulary that is rarely used, which can improve the speaking score. My hope is that there will be IELTS training like this next year that those in need can attend."

"I really enjoyed learning the speaking part in this IELTS training because of its relaxed yet focused learning method. Many tips were given, especially in the monologue part, where participants had to speak for 2 minutes. I was very helped by this IELTS training. It's very beneficial."

For the listening comprehension section, LS and AY expressed their opinions during the interview:

"Let alone the listening IELTS, even for general listening, it is still difficult for me. It takes a long time to get used to hearing the differences in English accents. But in this IELTS training, I learned quite a few strategies to answer the listening IELTS quickly and accurately. Hopefully, this IELTS training will continue because it is very beneficial."

"In my opinion, listening is the determining factor when taking the IELTS test because it is in the first part of the 4 IELTS components. If I feel bad when answering the listening session, I will be uneasy in the other sessions, affecting my answers. However, in this IELTS training, participants are also taught how to remain calm when facing the listening session, and they are also given tips and strategies to answer quickly. It is very beneficial."

For the component with the lowest positive response, reading comprehension, AAS gave his opinion and suggestions during the interview:

"This IELTS training has indeed been quite beneficial for me personally."

However, I feel that I have not been very helpful in answering the reading session that contains very long texts. Perhaps future IELTS training could focus on quickly finding answers in long texts. But overall, this IELTS training is very beneficial for me personally."

YDF expressed a similar opinion. He gave his opinion and suggestions regarding reading comprehension in this IELTS training.

"Reading is indeed challenging, but very tiring because there are too many texts to be understood in a short time. My suggestion is that future IELTS training could allocate more time for reading comprehension considering that many question types in each text need to be answered."

This finding is in line with several IELTS training activities in previous community service activities. For example, Wardana et al., (2020) provided IELTS speaking training to Chinese Literature students in Sumatra. Although the participants responded positively to this IELTS training, their opinions were not further explored through interviews, as in the IELTS training in this community service activity. The same thing happened in the IELTS training by Azhari et al. (2022), who provided IELTS training to high school English teachers in Aceh. From the data obtained, the participants were found to benefit from the IELTS training provided, but their perceptions were not directly conveyed through interviews as done in this community service activity.

CONCLUSION

This community service activity specifically provides academic IELTS training assistance to alumni of Hamzanwadi University. The target participants of this community service activity are alumni who have a strong interest in applying for foreign Master's scholarships but do not have good

IELTS skills yet. The data obtained in the pre-test and post-test shows that the participants showed an increase in IELTS scores, although not too significant. Additionally, during the interview process, many participants gave positive responses to this IELTS training because they felt the benefits of helping them work on the academic test type of IELTS.

The implications that can be obtained from the implementation of this community service activity are that IELTS training can be concluded to be very helpful for alumni to improve their knowledge and skills in IELTS. Furthermore, this community service activity provides information for us to know the perceptions of alumni about this IELTS training and the suggestions they can give for the success of future IELTS training.

Although the implementation of this community service activity was quite beneficial, there are still some shortcomings. Besides the number of alumni participating in this IELTS training not being too many, the training time was also not long enough. The implementation of IELTS training in the future may be able to involve more participants and allocate a longer training time.

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