

Empowering Islamic Boarding School Students with an Introductory IELTS Program

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ABSTRACT

Through a community service program, this study aims to introduce Islamic Boarding School students to IELTS. The training program, a collaboration between the State Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe and Integrated Dayah Al-Muslimun (one of the top-tier Islamic Boarding Schools in North Aceh), aimed to improve the English language skills of community service participants. The training program was enthusiastically attended by community service participants (students), demonstrating their desire to improve their language skills and prepare for future academic endeavors. With IELTS certificates required for new student admissions at international universities, this collaborative training initiative is critical for empowering Islamic Boarding School students to successfully pursue educational opportunities abroad. This program aims to promote participants' academic and professional development on a global scale by providing them with the necessary language skills.

INTRODUCTION

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a globally recognized language proficiency test that serves as a gateway to higher education opportunities abroad for students (Read, 2022). The IELTS test evaluates candidates' English language skills and provides a standardized measure of their ability to communicate effectively in an academic setting. It is divided into four sections: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. A high IELTS score is now required for admission to international universities, making it an important stepping stone for students wishing to pursue international education (Pearson, 2019). Mastering the English language, particularly in the context of IELTS, is critical for students planning to study abroad. As universities around the world embrace multicultural environments, a strong command of English is becoming increasingly important for successful academic integration and social interaction. The IELTS test evaluates language abilities in a variety of areas, ensuring that students are well-prepared for the academic rigors and language demands that they will face in a foreign educational setting. A good IELTS score not only demonstrates language proficiency, but it also demonstrates a student's adaptability and willingness to participate in cross-cultural learning experiences (Yuzar et al., 2022).

The four sections of the IELTS test, listening, reading, writing, and speaking, challenge candidates to demonstrate their language skills in a variety of contexts. The listening section assesses the ability to understand spoken language, which is necessary for understanding lectures, class discussions, and social interactions in an academic setting. The reading section assesses students' ability to interpret and analyze academic texts, which is necessary for conducting research, participating in class debates, and comprehending complex concepts. The writing section evaluates candidates' ability to articulate their thoughts and ideas coherently in written form, which is necessary for writing academic essays and research papers. Finally, the speaking section assesses the fluency and accuracy of spoken English, which is necessary for effective classroom participation and the development of interpersonal relationships.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

The collaboration between the State Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe and Dayah Al-Muslimun, a renowned Islamic Boarding School in North Aceh, was formed with the overarching goal of improving students/participants' English language proficiency. Recognizing the importance of English as a global language (Rahman & Saputra, 2021), and its growing importance in academic and professional settings, both institutions collaborated to offer a comprehensive and immersive training program. The partnership aimed to create a dynamic and effective learning environment for students by combining the academic expertise of the State Islamic Institute with the well-established educational practices of Integrated Dayah Al-Muslimun. The enthusiastic response from the community service participants, primarily, students eager to develop their language skills and broaden their horizons, demonstrated the training program's success. These participants recognized the significance of mastering English as a prerequisite for academic success, having a strong desire to pursue higher education

opportunities both locally and internationally. The comprehensive curriculum of the program, which addressed the four key language components of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, catered to the students' diverse needs, ensuring a well-rounded development of their English language abilities.

The collaborative training initiative was a transformative experience for community service participants, creating an environment of interactive and engaging language learning. The program provided students with practical opportunities to apply their newly acquired language skills through a combination of interactive workshops, language immersion activities, and real-life simulations. Furthermore, the collaboration between the State Islamic Institute and Dayah Al-Muslimun allowed for a unique blend of traditional Islamic teachings and modern educational practices in the language learning process, emphasizing values such as empathy, respect, and cross-cultural understanding. The engaging language-learning program will be carried out over the course of a period of four months (February 6th - June 3rd 2023), which will be subdivided into a total of sixteen different sessions. This well-structured timeline allows for a systematic approach to language learning, which ensures that each component of the IELTS examination is thoroughly covered and practiced. The length of the program gives participants plenty of time to absorb the information and practices that are being taught to them in a step-by-step fashion by the instructors. The tutors are able to implement a comprehensive learning strategy, which includes periodic evaluations and feedback sessions, because the meetings are spread out over a period of four months. This allows the tutors to effectively monitor the participants' progress.

The instructors of this training program have a wealth of experience leading other training sessions that are comparable to this one, and they have also taken the IELTS exam more than once. Their firsthand experience as test takers enables them to empathize with the challenges faced by the participants in the community service, and as a result, they are able to provide individualized guidance and support throughout the entirety of the training journey. The purpose of the tutoring sessions is to improve the participants' language abilities and test-taking strategies by utilizing effective teaching methodologies, interactive exercises, and practical tips. The tutors will draw on their expertise in this area. This individualized approach guarantees that every participant will receive individualized instruction that is tailored to address their particular linguistic requirements. The training program is guaranteed to be both thorough and all-encompassing. This strategy not only improves the continuity of the training, but it also gives the participants the opportunity to develop learning experiences with the instructors over the course of the four-month period. The learning process is streamlined as a result of the absence of external speakers, which enables a focused and coherent training experience that is aligned with the participants' particular goals and objectives related to their community service.

The comprehensive materials that are going to be provided by the tutors are going to cover a variety of different kinds of tests, and they are going to offer detailed explanations and practical examples to help the participants improve their language skills as well as their ability to take tests. The program has a structured timeline that ensures a methodical and comprehensive approach to language learning (Damanik, 2022). Participants can anticipate receiving individualized direction and assistance throughout the duration of the training journey from tutors who have previous experience in taking the IELTS test themselves. The decision to not invite external speakers will further enhance the training's continuity and effectiveness by capitalizing on the expertise of the tutors. This will foster a learning environment that is cohesive and engaging by capitalizing on the expertise of the tutors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants in this community service program expect to significantly enhance their language competence as a consequence of their participation in the complete English language training program, which will also prepare them for the IELTS exam. The guidance and expertise provided by the experienced tutors, who have already taken the IELTS test multiple times, will prove to be of great value in assisting the participants in developing effective test-taking strategies and understanding the assessment criteria (Estaji & Banitalebi, 2022). The participants will be equipped with the confidence necessary to confidently tackle the challenges that are presented in the IELTS examination by utilizing the carefully designed materials, which cover various types of assessments and include explanations and examples.

Table 1. The IELTS introductory Training Program in Dayah Al-Muslimun

Aspect	Details
Activity Facilitators	3 Experienced Tutors (have participated in similar trainings and taken the IELTS test more than once)
Material Provided	Various types of assessment materials, including explanations and examples of questions from 4 different skills
Duration	16 meetings conducted over 4 months

The participants will go through a gradual and organized learning process as a result of the fact that the training program is spread out over the course of four months and consists of 16 meetings. Because of this extended timeline, the participants will have plenty of time to practice and internalize the language skills that will be taught to them by the tutors. The participants will be able to assess their level of progress and pinpoint the aspects of their performance that need additional work through the use of periodic evaluations and feedback sessions (Tieu & Baker, 2023). It is reasonable to anticipate that by the time the participants reach the conclusion of the program, they will have experienced a discernible improvement in their capacities for listening to, speaking, reading, and writing, which will position them favourably for the achievement of higher IELTS scores (Stigger, 2019).

Table 2. The outlining a 16-meeting activities

Meeting	Aims and Objectives	Topic
1	Understand the IELTS exam structure and its different sections and familiarize with the scoring system and band descriptors	Introduction to IELTS and Test Format
2	Introduce strategies for effective note-taking and practice with sample Part 1 listening tasks	Listening Part 1: Overview and Note-taking
3	Learn how to fill in forms while listening and practice with sample Part 2 listening tasks	Listening Part 2: Form Completion
4	Develop techniques for tackling true/false/not given questions and practice with sample Part 1 reading tasks	Reading Part 1: True/False/Not Given
5	Learn to locate specific information in a passage and practice with sample Part 2 reading tasks	Reading Part 2: Identifying Information
6	Understand the requirements for Task 1 and analyse sample Task 1 responses	Writing Task 1: Introduction and Overview
7	Practice describing visual data accurately and receive feedback on Task 1 writing	Writing Task 1: Describing Graphs and Charts
8	Learn the structure of an IELTS essay and practice planning for Task 2 essays	Writing Task 2: Essay Structure and Planning
9	Become familiar with Part 1 speaking questions and practice responding to general questions	Speaking Part 1: Introduction and Interview
10	Learn how to structure and deliver a Part 2 speech and practice with sample Part 2 speaking topics	Speaking Part 2: Cue Card Presentation
11	Understand the question types in Part 3 and practice engaging in extended discussions	Speaking Part 3: Follow-up Discussion
12	Expand academic vocabulary and use collocations and practice using new words in context	Vocabulary Building and Collocations
	Revise essential English grammar concepts and practice creating complex sentences	Grammar Review and Complex Sentence Structure

13	Simulate a full IELTS test under timed conditions and discuss test-taking tips and strategies	Mock Test 1 and Test-Taking Strategies
14	Provide personalized feedback on strengths and weaknesses and offer suggestions for improvement	Mock Test 1 Review and Individual Feedback
15	Recap key concepts and strategies learned and discuss further resources and self-study plans	Final Review and Next Steps

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In addition, the tutors will use a personalized approach (Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 20011), which is based on their first-hand experience as test-takers and their comprehension of the participants' linguistic requirements. This will ensure that each individual will receive individualized guidance and support that is tailored to their specific needs. Because of this individualized attention, the participants will not only improve their language skills, but they will also boost their confidence in their ability to use English in a variety of academic and professional settings. As a consequence of this, the people who participate in community service will be extremely well-prepared to pursue higher education opportunities both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, they will be equipped with the necessary language skills to excel in the academic fields that they choose. If the training program is successful, the participants will undoubtedly gain the confidence to take advantage of a wide variety of educational opportunities and make a positive contribution to both their communities and the world at large.

The participants in the community service program can anticipate achieving significant improvements in their language proficiency as a result of their participation in the comprehensive English language training program, which will also prepare them for the IELTS exam. The guidance and expertise provided by the experienced tutors, who have already taken the IELTS test multiple times, will prove to be of great value in assisting the participants in developing effective test-taking strategies and understanding the assessment criteria (Rimma et al., 2017). The participants will be equipped with the confidence necessary to confidently tackle the challenges that are presented in the IELTS examination by utilizing the carefully designed materials, which cover various types of assessments and include explanations and examples.

The participants will go through a gradual and organized learning process as a result of the fact that the training program is spread out over the course of four months and consists of 16 meetings. Because of this extended timeline, the participants will have plenty of time to practice and internalize the language skills that will be taught to them by the tutors. The participants will be able to assess their level of progress and pinpoint the aspects of their performance that need additional work through the use of periodic evaluations and feedback sessions. It is reasonable to anticipate that by the time the participants reach the conclusion of the program, they will have experienced a discernible improvement in their capacities for listening to, speaking, reading, and writing, which will position them favourably for the achievement of higher IELTS scores (Hu & Trenkic, 2021).

In addition, the tutors will use a personalized approach, which is based on their first-hand experience as test-takers and their comprehension of the participants' linguistic requirements. This will ensure that each individual will receive individualized guidance and support that is tailored to their specific needs. Because of this individualized attention, the participants will not only improve their language skills, but they will also boost their confidence in their ability to use English in a variety of academic and professional settings. It is hope that the students who participate in community service will be extremely well-prepared to pursue higher education opportunities both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, they will be equipped with the necessary language skills to excel in the academic fields that they choose. If the training program is successful, the participants will undoubtedly gain the confidence to take advantage of a wide variety of educational opportunities and make a positive contribution to both their communities and the world at large.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude, mastering the English language through the IELTS test is essential for students wishing to pursue higher education in another country. The comprehensive assessment of listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills provided by the test ensures that students are prepared to thrive in an international academic setting. A high IELTS score not only opens doors to prestigious universities, but it also boosts students' academic and professional prospects in an increasingly interconnected world. Students can confidently embark on their educational journeys abroad and contribute to a diverse and enriching global learning community by investing in IELTS English training and preparation.

The collaboration between the State Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe and Dayah Al-Muslimun was a success in terms of improving community service participants' English language skills. The eagerness of the participants to participate in the training program reflected their commitment to personal growth and academic advancement. Both institutions' collaborative efforts resulted in a well-rounded and transformative language learning experience, empowering students to confidently pursue future academic endeavors and positively contribute to their communities and the larger global context.

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