# Behind a spoken discourse: Idiomatic expressions in IELTS speaking test

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| | The performance of a wider range of vocabulary mastery in IELTS speaking test is imperative to escalate the band score achievement. The present study sought to investigate the teaching of idioms in an IELTS preparation program with regards to the kinds of idioms taught in the class, how the students used them during the mock post test, and whether the use of idioms interfere with the grammatical accuracy. The study was in urgency to be conducted with regards to the absence of the teaching of idioms for IELTS at least in the past five years. The data were collected from the recorded speaking performance of five students at intermediate level of English, in both mock pretest and post test to see if there were some alterations in the predicted test score and a deep interview with one candidate to have strengthen the arguments. The results showed significant differences in the students' performance of speaking in pretest and after they were taught idioms despite some less accurate grammar in the sentence productions. The findings of the study can have potential pedagogical implications for teachers of IELTS preparation classes to incorporate the teaching of idioms in either speaking or vocabulary lessons. |

**INTRODUCTION**

Idiomatic expressions constitute a salient feature in elevating the overall IELTS speaking score. Idioms, which belong to the lexical sophistication dimension, are one of the scoring criteria a test candidate has to comply with to meet the standard of band 7 and above (British Council, 2014). Along with the other lexical resources namely paraphrases, style and collocations, the use of idioms in performing IELTS speaking test is imperative as it is the most noticeable expression the test examiners will orient to and reward with a high mark, even if the expressions are not delivered quite perfectly (Seedhouse & Satar, 2021).

The vocabulary sophistication, including idiomatic vocabulary, has a strong connection with a test candidate's communicative competence which refers to the knowledge of how to interact successfully with an interlocutor in a communicative exchange in an L2 (Iwashita & Vasquez, 2019). What is meant by interact successfully is that a test candidate should be able to use the knowledge of the language he or she has mastered and to adjust to the context of speaking. Presenting in IELTS speaking test is not only a matter of producing utterances fluently, but also with regards to the area of sociolinguistics which enables language users to create or comprehend language suitable to a specific context (Abdulrahman & Abu-Ayyash, 2019). There are many topics in IELTS test which are relevant to the daily communication and more serious topics, such as on politics, economy, education policy, and so forth that each test candidate should be able to make a pertinent response to.

IELTS speaking test entails a face to face interview between the candidate and an IELTS trained examiner (Ghaemi, 2022). The assessment of the test will be based on the four following criteria: fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation (IDP IELTS Indonesia, n.d.). This present paper only investigated the area of lexical resource in the speaking assessment of IELTS since the teaching of it was usually done as an integrated part with the other skill lesson in some IELTS preparation programs. In addition to how the candidate should present in the test, there is also a kind of technical requirement in giving a clear presentation of the talk since it will be recorded for administrative and evaluation purposes. The candidate should be able to produce a clear pronunciation too since the test evaluation may have a double-rating system to establish the intra-rater reliability of live and audio-taped interviews (Nakatsuhara et al., 2020). For speaking, the examiners rate candidates' lexical resource on the range of vocabulary used and the precision with which meanings and attitudes can be expressed (Smith, 2019).

IELTS speaking test, as a matter of fact, requires much of presenting immediate response to examiner's questions with regards to stating relevant supporting answers in terms of examples and arguments to sustain the communicative exchange. In addition, there is a higher demand rather than just performing the fluency in responding to questions in the test that is the ability to speak with wider and advanced range of vocabulary skillfully. In doing so, the targeted high score of IELTS speaking will not be out of reach. There have been some studies probing the vocabulary size including the lexical sophistication in making great accomplishment of second language acquisition and speaking intelligence (Appel et al., 2019; Kaneko, 2020; Kim et al., 2018) to give emphasis on how the involvement of sophisticated words, such as idioms, will generate greater effect in excelling the speaking skill.

The importance of learning idioms for classroom practices has been studied by Qureshi et al. (2018) and the study revealed the EFL idioms presented with etymological background make a lasting impact on the overall comprehension of language. Orfan (2020) highlighted a better understanding of idioms is a requirement for English proficiency and accuracy despite some challenges in learning idioms in classroom context. In addition, the prominence of idioms comprehension for non-native speakers will lead to achieve more effective communication and higher proficiency level (Vo & Nguyen, 2020). Ahmadi & Zarei (2020) also investigated the effects of three verbal mnemonic tools (grouping, stories, and conceptual metaphor) on EFL learners' recognition and recall of English idioms. Those studies aforementioned are to verify the urgency of learning idiomatic expressions to uphold the higher level of speaking competence achievement. They seem to emphasize the close connection between the use of idioms and the successful speaking, while the absence of the urgency of including idioms in the test preparation program is still apparent.

In addition, in the past five years the term augmented reality in helping students understand idioms have gain better popularity. The augmented reality, mostly shortened by AR, has to deal

much with technology-based learning activities and gamifications. There have been some previous analyses on the inclusion of AR in learning idioms and how the participants or learners might have more enjoyment in acquiring the new vocabulary item from their devices (Wu et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2018; Chew et al., 2018; Edyanto et al., 2021).

One of the foremost investigations on this area of lexical sophistication of Indonesian learners was carried out by Failasofah (2018) in which she explored the learners' word production by utilizing computational data. The result of the study unveiled an outstanding notion on how the low-level English participants could produce more lexically rich texts compared to higher level participants. The software used in the study was used to determine the vocabulary mastery students needed to function properly in foreign language. However, the study did not elaborate the specific test on idioms in isolation and did not have anything to do with IELTS speaking test. It would have been great if there were some studies conducted using the same software to measure the lexical diversity of the Indonesian candidates of IELTS.

Many English schools providing the service of IELTS programs design the lessons based on the available resources of textbooks and a collection of past test questions. The textbooks covering the speaking lessons give information on the strategies to best perform in the test and highlight some dos and don'ts during the official test. The assessment rubric is clearly shown to the participant, as a part of the syllabus design, but each item in the lexical resource element has never been studied separately for the sake of comprehensive mastery and practices. The teaching of idioms was mostly inserted in vocabulary section along with the other features of formulaic language, such as paraphrases, collocations, and style. Thus, the learners may only have to recognize the idioms on the surface and not to comprehend them deeply and not to have the chance to elaborate the use of many useful idioms for the test.

Compared to the bulk of research on how salient the knowledge of idioms is in speaking skill and on the absence of the teaching of idioms as a separate lesson in the classroom, the present study proposes a novel inquiry to address the issues on uplifting lexical items of the Indonesian candidates by using one type of formulaic language, that is idioms for IELTS speaking test. There has been almost zero attempt in the last five years to investigate how the approach of teaching idioms can help the IELTS speaking-test candidates to better equip themselves with proficient vocabulary mastery. Now how would the IELTS preparation program be successful in giving a robust assistance to score high in the test when the teaching of one crucial item of lexis, that is idioms, is not paid much attention of.

Shedding some light on the significance of idiomatic expressions for IELTS speaking test, this current study aims to fill the void of addressing the detailed lexis assessment in IELTS speaking test by further examining the candidates' savvy of English idioms. Thus, the research questions of the present study are formulated as follows:
1. How is the nature of the candidates' speaking performance in IELTS mock speaking test?
2. How does the learning of idioms during the course program upsurge the candidates' oral fluency in performing the speaking post test?
3. To what extent does the utilization of idioms in speaking interfere with grammatical accuracy?

**METHODS**
The present study uses qualitative method to describe the problems faced by the Indonesian candidates of IELTS speaking test in presenting a large scale of lexical resources, more specifically the use of idioms. The theory of lexical sophistication by John Read and Paul Nation (2002) which highlighted the point that the lexical superiority of the IELTS candidates was shown not only by their use of individual words but also their mastery of colloquial or idiomatic expressions which were often composed of relatively high-frequency words was used as the outmost theory referred to in the whole discussion. The qualitative method was used in the study since it best describes detailed and complete understanding of an issue (Creswell, 2014), not to mention the natural use of idioms when giving response to queries during the IELTS test. This strength of qualitative method is used to improve the understanding of the kind of problems faced by the Indonesian test-takers in using idioms, along with the alternative solution of the learning of idioms, in performing the speaking test. In order to investigate the first research question, the researcher conducted a closed observation on the mock pre-test of IELTS speaking taking place in the first day of the candidates' joining the course. The researcher took notes on important features of the candidates' nature of presenting the talk on the test based on their individual prior knowledge and skill of English speaking. The notes

were then used as a reference to compare the candidates' speaking fluency before and after joining the course. The researcher then collected 5 students' recorded speaking performance in IELTS simulated pre-test conducted in one of the most well-known English courses in Malang in 2022. The reason behind the option of this informal school is because it has frequent entries of IELTS classes and it offers quite a range of English competence levels, namely IELTS for Pre-intermediate students, IELTS for Intermediate students, and IELTS for Upper Intermediate students. The data from the pre-intermediate students' speaking mock pre-test were the major data used in the study on the basis of assumption that they do not possess ample mastery of using wide range of vocabulary to talk on varieties of topic and of using formulaic phrases in prior communication. Additionally, to give deeper understanding about the issue, an interview with one of the candidates was also carried out to see from the student's perspectives if the use of idioms could actually help him perform more confidently in the speaking mock test. These stages were performed to address the second research question.

In addition to collecting the information for the second research question, the next type of data were the simulated post-tests of IELTS speaking at the end of the preparation program to give some comparative information between the performance before they got the treatment of learning idioms and after they got the materials on idioms to see if they would ultimately make some progress in speaking skill or gain higher score.

The data were then analyzed in terms of lexical resources in accordance with the components of idiomatic expressions. The data were analyzed following the model of interactive data analysis consisting of data reduction, display, and verification (Miles & Huberman, 2014). In data reduction stage, the recordings were selected based on the performance of the medium-level users of English, or at the CEFR pre-intermediate level, presenting a full part of the speaking mock test (Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3). The same idioms performed by different candidates were not selected to avoid some repetition.

The next stage, the data were displayed to be elaborated further in the discussion section. The pre-selected audio recordings were carefully observed based on the nature of the lexical resources they produce during the speaking test, whether they were able to use any idiomatic expressions. In addition, the display of the use of idioms during the post test was also elaborated to see if there was some interference with the grammatical accuracy from the sentences the candidates produced using idioms. The displayed data were then verified to withdraw a conclusion by checking the final score the students got from the IELTS mock post test taken place at the very end of the course program. The score on the lexical resources given by the examiner, or the class teacher, was used as a reference to verify if the students have made clear attempts of using the idioms skillfully so as to gain higher score compared to the one they had in the pretest.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
### The nature of the candidates' speaking performance in IELTS mock speaking test
*The absence of idioms in pretest*

The first research question is intended to describe the nature of the candidates' speaking performance before joining the program and the answer for the question was the absence of idioms during the test. Only one out of five candidates used idioms in the simulated speaking pre test while the other candidates used none of any idioms. The response the candidates performed during the pretest was mostly general with regards to the the use of daily words and expressions without any attempt of using any word complexity.

Table 1. Idioms used in IELTS Speaking Pretest

| Candidate No | Idoms | Meaning |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | None | - |
| 2 | None | - |
| 3 | Rain cats and dogs | Rain heavily |
| 4 | None | - |
| 5 | None | - |

In the speaking pretest, the candidates were given a chance to fully perform their English mastery in answering many questions on a wide variety of topic, including the topic of 'weather' in speaking part one. The above data is the information of whether the candidates were familiar with

the use of idioms about weather. The question of the test was 'How is the weather in your country recently?' and most of the candidates seemed to not have any idea of considering the use of idioms about weather at all, and went on with giving some general response by saying more or less 'it's raining a lot for some days' to suit with the empirical situation taking place at the moment of speaking. Only one candidate was able to show his ability to use idiom appropriately by saying 'it's raining cats and dogs sometimes' along with his natural expressions when saying this so the utterances he produced sounded native-speaker alike.

The response consisting idiom of weather by Candidate 3 is actually a good sign of vocabulary richness or sophistication a test taker could initially present. The expression 'rain cats and dogs' is quite commonly used to describe the heavy rain taking place closely around us, and Candidate 3 might have said it often in his daily communication. It seems to be the most frequently used idiom when referring to the rainy season. Candidate 3 had the ability to use the idiom naturally and fluently into the utterances because he might have heard the expression much and then had some chances to use it in many appropriate situations before, so when asked about weather in his speaking pretest, he did not hesitate to express it as his response to the question. This indicates that the exposure to idioms on daily communication is meaningful for the IELTS test candidates to upsurge their vocabulary mastery and to score higher especially in the assessment of lexical resources of the test.

In accordance with the assessment of lexical resources of IELTS speaking test, the examiners of IELTS tend to notice idioms and reward their use with a high mark even when they are not used accurately in context (Seedhouse & Satar, 2021). The examiners will easily capture the expressions as to distinguish the level of the candidates' vocabulary mastery and they can refer to the specific band score, that is at least 7, which states where the feature of the idiomatic expression begins to be noticed. As a consequence, Candidate 3 was at least within the range of band 7 in speaking due to his ability in generating an idiom and as his speaking performance went along, the examiner of the mock test could start to adjust whether the score would continue to rise or dip.

Compared to what happened to Candidate 3 of the test, as the result indicated about the nature of the candidates' speaking performance during the simulated IELTS speaking pre-test, there was the absence of idioms as a part of lexical sophistication required in aiming for a higher range of score in IELTS for the other four candidates. The four candidates were mostly unfamiliar with the use of less frequent expressions which can help them uplift the score of the speaking test in terms of vocabulary assessment. Most of the candidates' responses relied much on daily words to answer a wide range of topics in the test and this indeed avoided them to score high for their first test of speaking in IELTS preparation course. When asked about weather, none of the four candidates used idioms in their response since they might not have had a lot of exposures to the use of idioms in their daily practices. It is quite likely that they once heard the idiom of *raining cats and dogs*, or maybe *under the weather*, but because they did not have many opportunities to practice saying them when the context was appropriate, then the expressions did not come easily from them during the pretest.

To give more comprehensive and satisfying elaboration on the nature of the speaking before the candidates joined some lessons on idioms, one candidate was interviewed. Candidate 2 was given a series of questions on how he did the speaking pre-test and his overall response was that he did not have any idea that sophisticated words would play important role in achieving high score in IELTS speaking test. The only thing he knew was that he should be able to keep talking and present a lot of ideas into his talk without any hesitation. The knowledge of the importance of less frequently used expressions was out of his consideration at all.

In addition to Candidate 2's prior knowledge on the use of idioms, he mentioned that he was once exposed to the use of idioms, such as *it's a piece of cake, break a leg, no pain no gain*, etc, including the one about weather *raining cats and dogs*. However, he had never used the idioms much in his daily conversations, except *break a leg* since he used it quite often to transfer a positive outlook to motivate his classmates for the test or even himself whenever he bumped into some difficulties during college projects. During the pretest when asked about weather, the candidate did not have a single shot on any idioms to be presented. He further described that he had a mixed feelings during the pretest which were excited, nervous, and confused at the same time, and the feelings affected his initial performance in the test a lot. He could not think clearly of what he said and whether what he said was all relevant to the questions and he indeed had no idea if he could remember any idioms he could show off to the examiner during the test. Another fact was revealed here, that the exposures of

the idioms in everyday communication is a crucial factor determining the ability of an IELTS test taker to use the idiomatic expressions fluently and naturally as expected from band 7 and higher.

The response by Candidate 2 about the absence of the knowledge of using idioms strengthens the urgency of the teaching of idioms in a separate lesson in the classroom. As stated by one of the IELTS teachers of the school, Ms. Octa, many schools were not able to provide the teaching of idioms in isolation because the school academic administrators believed that the lexical resources element in speaking has already covered all the candidate's needs of scoring high in IELTS test, while in the real classroom practice, idioms were never mentioned of.

**An upsurge in the candidates' use of idioms**

The IELTS preparation program lasted for about three months making some attempts to assist the IELTS test candidates to grasp all important strategies to master for the sake of gaining the targeted score they had had in mind even before joining the class. The program covered all skills required for the test and the syllabus design was fixed by the academic coordinator to suit the course time allotment and skills coverage. However, there had not been any lessons on idioms taught separately for many years until some class instructors saw there was the urgency of teaching idioms to the students in the class to help them score high in vocabulary assessment. The lessons of idioms were then carried out separately from any other vocabulary focus and were included in the speaking practice dedicated to use idioms to give a talk on some relevant topics.

The lessons on idioms were conducted three times in the preparation class where the students were given a list of useful idioms for IELTS speaking test under some topics. The students were then asked to categorize them into different big themes, such as weather, feelings, life lesson, etc., and then the class had to agree on which topics to be discussed in the first, second, and third meeting on the specific timetable of the course. The students had the exposures to some choices of idioms they could use during the speaking test, so they could initially familiarize themselves to the type, the meaning, and the suitable contexts of the idioms they had at hand. Each meeting of idioms lesson gave the participants a huge opportunity to practice using the idioms they have learned into a variety of classroom activities, such as in a role play, a speech, and a simulated interview of IELTS. The purpose of having a variety of activities on idioms was to give the participants much exposure on how the idioms sound and finally they would be able to use them in the appropriate context or situation. The class instructor supervised the speaking practices in the classroom quite closely when the students were engaged in a pairwork to see if they were able to use the idioms naturally and whether the idioms fitted into the context. At every end of the lesson, the teacher would give the feedback focusing on the accuracy and appropriacy of using idioms during the practice, and in the following meeting they were asked to complete some mini quiz to check their better understanding of idioms.

To add to the results of the second research question, the following table shows the kinds of idioms the candidates used mostly in post test after the lesson on idioms was delivered in the classroom based on the topics of questions asked by the examiner.

Table 2. Idioms used in IELTS Speaking Post Test

| Topic | Idoms | Meaning |
|---|---|---|
| Feelings | Over the moon | Extremely happy |
| | To be on cloud nine | Very happy or joyful |
| | Get on my nerves | (someone/something) makes you annoyed |
| Weather | Rain cats and dogs | Rain hard/heavily |
| | Under the weather | Feeling unwell |
| Others | Every cloud has a silver lining | Believing that every bad situation eventually leads to something good |
| | Better late than never | It is better to do something late than not to try it at all |
| | Keep an eye | Watch carefully |
| | Once in a blue moon | Happening very rarely |

The information in Table 2 presents how the candidates' idioms were used in the appropriate context in relevance to the questions asked by the examiner during the test. The meaning of the idioms was given to check if the candidates' idioms were in line with their overall response in

sentence production. Most of the idioms stated by the candidates were on how to express their feelings, especially happiness about certain experiences they had in the past. Additionally, there were two idioms about weather and more idioms on different context which cannot be categorized into a specific topic.

The idioms displayed in Table 2 were mostly used by the candidates during their speaking post test as a result of them joining the lessons of idioms which were delivered three times out of the whole meetings in the course. The candidates were given a list of idioms for them to use at any appropriate context in IELTS speaking during the classroom practices and they were encouraged by the class tutors to use the idioms whenever there was a right timing. Since the candidates had been familiar with many idioms presented in the classrooom, they were finally able to use them in the simulated post test successfully with regards to the relevance to the topic and questions raised by the examiner of the test.

In terms of the type of idioms used by the candidates during the simulated speaking post test, the expressions to describe feelings were the most popular among the other idioms. The data presented the expressions of happiness such as to be on cloud nine and over the moon were in the replacement of the word 'very happy'. Some candidates used these idioms to describe their feelings on the questions about their past experiences on going abroad for the first time. The idioms were relevant in use because most people may share the same feelings of joy when they had the chance to visit another country. The candidates used the idioms to state that they were more than happy to see a foreign country and to stay there for a while for some purposes. The followings are the transcriptions of some examples of the expressions mentioned by the candidates:

*Candidate 1: That was my first time going abroad so I was over the moon when I felt a different vibe from my country.*

The idiom I was over the moon above was to answer the question of the candidate's first experience of going abroad in IELTS speaking part 1. The response was relevant in terms of meaning and it was also supported with a clear reason of why the candidate was more than joyful to have such experience in another country. The candidate went on with giving more details on the statement of why he was happy by saying that the atmosphere he had abroad was different from the one he had in his original country, especially about the cleanliness of the surrounding and the less polluted air. This idiom was on point with regards to the accurate meaning and form at the same time. Another example of the idiom used to express happiness was stated by Candidate 4:

*I went to visit Singapore the first time when I was in third … er … or maybe fourth semester. I was on cloud nine, for sure, because … um … I travelled far from Malang and it is out of country. I see many beautiful places and there are also a chance for me to speak English with people there. It was exciting.*

The candidate used another idiom to show his feeling of joy *I was on cloud nine* when describing his first experience of going to another country in the past. He used the idiom accurately in a way that he used the expression in appropriate context and also in accurate grammatical structure. The idiom was also supported by reasons or examples behind his joy accordingly. Instead of saying that he was basically happy with the experience, the candidate showed his knowledge of one idiom to share the same meaning as *happy* to make attempt for gaining higher score of vocabulary mastery.

Having known that some candidates used the idioms to describe feelings, especially happiness, there was actually an interference of the first lesson on idioms taught in the classroom. The students were given a list of the most common idioms to express feelings on a wide variety of topics they might encounter in IELTS speaking test. This first lesson introduced the students to useful idioms to replace the word happy, interesting, exciting, and some other similar words and to the importance of idioms to score higher in the test. Since these idioms were deemed flexible and ready to use to give response to many topics requiring the overall impression of any experiences, the students easily stored them in mind and finally picked them up during the test.

To give a close look at how well the candidate performed the idiomatic expressions during the post test, Candidate 2 shared his thoughts about this. His first impression towards his ability to use some idioms about weather and feelings was amazing. He was a bit surprised at first that he could remember to use appropriate idiomatic expressions when answering questions about the weather

and his past experience of first going abroad. He could use the idioms about feelings easily because he had expressed them during the classroom practices and he added more self-practice at home to make sure that he could express them naturally. He also shared the feedback given by his instructor upon the completion of the course that he developed his vocabulary mastery significantly and his predicted speaking band score levelled up. He felt that the teaching of idioms gave him more confidence to use some 'cool' vocabulary to sound a little like a native speaker of English.

In accordance to what Candidate 2 had shared about his speaking experience in post test using some idiomatic expressions, it is clear to see that the teaching of idioms separately from the other language focus in an IELTS preparation class was way more than just important. By having much exposure on useful idioms for some topics discussed in IELTS test, the candidates could gain their fluency of producing more sophisticated words into their talk. With more fluency of idioms which are relevant to the topic of discussion in IELTS test, the candidates were also helped to gain the confidence in speaking because they have been able to widen their vocabulary range to attempt a higher score in the test. Even though using idioms is not the only way to help students upsurge their confidence in performing their speaking skill in the test, since there are more items of evaluation to address, the element of idiomatic vocabulary is clearly stated in the area of lexical resources in the speaking rubric which the candidates could easily access from many sources. Band score 7 and above requires the candidates to be able to use the idiomatic vocabulary skillfully, so the idea of teaching idioms in the IELTS preparation class is urgent.

**The use of idioms in speaking interfering with grammatical accuracy**
While the candidates were able to use the idioms in their post test after joining some lessons and self practices, the use of idioms in their complete response was not always error-free. There were some inaccuracies in the candidates' sentences even though, in terms of fluency, the content of idioms was already in coherent with the questions raised in the text.
Despite the fluency of using idioms in the speaking test, the candidates' attempts to use them along with the other words in the responses were not always error-free. In other words, the fluency of using idioms was not hand in hand with the grammatical accuracy. Since the candidates paid much attention to score high in terms of lexical resources, the accuracy was somehow neglected, as shown from one the candidates' statement as follows:

> *Almost every house has a car and they drive wherever they like so it cause a traffic, very terrible, and it really disturbs me, like … it's get my nerves, like that.*

In terms of sentence accuracy, the statement above consists of some errors that I scrutinized as follows:

> *Almost every house has a car and they drive wherever they like ….*

The sentence violated the pronoun reference where the subject 'they' in *they drive* did not refer to the correct subject, that is 'house' written in singular noun thing. Also, the verb 'drive' attached to pronoun 'they' also did not support the accuracy of the statement since it was meaningless that the 'house' could drive. The clause should have been written more appropriately by *Almost every house has a car and its owner drives wherever he likes …* . Other errors detected in the response above were:

> *… so it cause a traffic* which should be replaced by *so it causes a terrible traffic*
> *… it's get my nerves* which should be replaced by *it gets on my nerves*

The samples above strengthened the argument that it was pretty challenging for the candidates to balance between the fluency of using idioms and the accuracy of the sentences. There should be more efforts committed by the candidates to perform well in both sections of lexical sophistication and grammatical awareness since they are all assessed carefully in the official IELTS test.

In giving response to whether the use of idioms could particularly interfere with grammatical accuracy, Candidate 2 made a strong impression. He described his struggle with managing both fluency and accuracy in speaking skill even before he was introduced to idioms. He added that the suggested ideas of using idioms into his speaking performance in IELTS test added up more loads

on his shoulders in a way that he might have surrendered his grammar awareness and would pay more attention to the use of sophisticated vocabulary. One clear example is taken from the above grammatical mistakes in saying *gets on my nerves* by one of the candidates. There was a tendency for the candidates to memorize the main root word, such as *get my nerves* or *get nerves*, while the accuracy of the subject-verb agreement of the sentence was carelessly neglected. They wanted to show off their new skill of using the idioms into practice so they somehow memorized the expressions, but unfortunately they ignored the grammatical awareness. They did not adjust the idioms consisting verbs, for instance, because they thought they have produced the new sophisticated words. The candidates preparing for the IELTS test might find the idiom lesson a new experience or it sounds intelligent when they are able to generate many of the idioms during the speaking test, so they will be very likely to feel overwhelmed in using them without a careful control of the sentence pattern.

The example was quite an interesting response from the candidate as a matter of fact, since the candidates of IELTS test should ideally have more or less equal English competence in both the fluency and the accuracy of the utterances they produce. However, it turned out to be not an easy task for each IELTS test taker had to deal with in a preparation course for scoring high in both mastery, but still it is quite likely that by having more practices on the use of sophisticated words in speaking but with a strong supervision on grammatical accuracy. So, at the and the candidates preparing for the test would be equipped with a satisfying skill in performing both fluency and accuracy at the same time in the official IELTS test

## CONCLUSION

Idiomatic expressions were deemed novel by some students preparing for an IELTS test. The nature of their speaking skill during the IELTS mock pretest was more on the fluency of the talk without significant hesitation with less knowledge on the importance of using idioms. The maneuver of idioms by the candidates in IELTS speaking test was two folds. As an attempt to perform a wider range of lexical sophistication required in attaining higher score, there was a strong drive from the candidates to master some expressions they learned earlier in the preparation program to put into practice in the test. The idioms they learned during the meeting in the class could help them perform better fluency and higher score in terms of lexical resource element of evaluation, as adjusted to the avaialbale scoring rubric. On the flip side, the use of idioms was not always in alignment with the accuracy of sentence production which could interfere with the evaluation of grammatical awareness. The candidates' issue of not being able to modify the idiomatic expressions to suit the correct subject-verb agreement in the sentences were always present. In short, to score perfectly in IELTS test, the candidates are highly expected to perform both language fluency and accuracy equally well.

The present study was conducted with the scope limitation of an IELTS preparation program for students of pre-intermediate level of English. Should there be other researchers interested in developing the discussion of this subject matter, the analysis on a wider scope of students' English competence is deemed necessary. Observing the IELTS preparation class with lower English competence, such as the elementary level, should bring meaningful contribution to the learning output of delivering the lesson of idioms in the classroom. In addition, the further study can also compare the learning output of idioms for all levels of English users preparing for IELTS speaking test.

## FUNDING STATEMENT

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