

Integrating Formulaic Sequences into Explicit Instruction for IELTS Speaking Performance

Zwesty Aridasarie^{1*}, Sahiruddin², Hamamah³

¹The Department of Language and Literature, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia: zwesty.zee@student.ub.ac.id

²The Department of Language and Literature, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia: shrdn@ub.ac.id

³The Department of Language and Literature, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia: hamamah@ub.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The mastery of Formulaic Sequences (FS) for IELTS speaking test is one prominent aspect of achieving a high band score. The overtly published scoring rubric of IELTS speaking test, including the one in printed course books or available online, highlights that band 7.0 requires the wide range of style and collocation in practice. However, the teaching of FS has not yet been done explicitly in many classroom practices to meet the level in fluency and automaticity. Explicit instructions were evident to be effective for learners to gain knowledge and vocabulary bank that later contribute to better speaking competence. The present study investigates how the FS is acquired by employing explicit instructions in an IELTS speaking preparation class and to eventually ensure if the FS can promote fluency and automaticity. The classroom action research was conducted with observation and focus group discussion. Two cycles were implemented to ensure the acquisition of FS was done effectively and to encourage students to produce the FS more naturally at the end of every mock test in the class. The findings unveiled positive results towards the introduction of FS in both cycles and the FS was successfully acquired as evident from the test conducted at every cycle of the interventions. The explicit instructions represented in every intervention headed towards the more use of FS the students could present in their talk for IELTS speaking Part 2.

KEYWORDS

Explicit instructions; formulaic sequences; IELTS speaking part 2; IELTS vocabulary

ABSTRAK

Keahlian dalam menggunakan gabungan beberapa kata yang sering dipakai bersama-sama (Formulaic Sequences/FS) dalam konteks tes IELTS merupakan satu aspek penting dalam memperoleh hasil tes yang tinggi. Rubrik penilaian yang telah tersebar untuk umum, baik dalam bentuk cetak di beberapa buku teks maupun yang tersedia secara online, merumuskan penggunaan gaya bahasa yang luas untuk mencapai skor 7.0. Meski demikian, pengajaran gabungan kata-kata tersebut tidak banyak diterapkan secara eksplisit di dalam kelas-kelas persiapan belajar IELTS untuk meningkatkan kecakapan dan otomatisitas berbicara. Pengajaran eksplisit terbukti mampu menunjang pengetahuan dan keragaman kosakata siswa secara efektif dalam peningkatan kemampuan berbicara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi cara FS diserap di dalam kelas melalui pengajaran secara eksplisit dan memastikan apakah FS berhasil membantu meningkatkan

KATA KUNCI

Pengajaran eksplisit; gabungan kata yang dipakai bersama; tes berbicara IELTS part 2; kosakata dalam tes berbicara IELTS

kecakapan berbicara siswa. Penelitian Tindakan Kelas merupakan metode penelitian ini dengan mengikutsertakan observasi dan kelompok diskusi. Dua siklus diterapkan untuk memastikan bahwa FS telah mampu diserap oleh siswa dan untuk memberi motivasi pada siswa dalam penggunaan FS yang lebih natural pada setiap simulasi tes di dalam kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan keberhasilan siswa dalam menyerap kosakata baru di kedua siklus tindakan dan menggunakan kosakata tersebut dalam ujian akhir untuk kemampuan berbicara di dalam kelas. Pengajaran eksplisit tentang materi FS mendorong siswa untuk lebih sering memproduksi gabungan kata-kata tersebut saat melakukan tes berbicara bagian 2 dari keseluruhan tes IELTS.

***Corresponding Author :**

Zwesty Aridasarie

The Department of Language and Literature, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang,
Indonesia

zwesty.zee@student.ub.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Formulaic Sequences (FS) which are defined as typical recurring word combinations have been argued to reflect indispensable part of native speakers' language (Carrol & Conklin, 2020; Yu, 2022; Flinn, 2023). Because these prefabricated chunks reinforce natural speech, mastering them become imperative for second and foreign language learners. As learners incorporate a greater frequency of FS into their utterances, their speaking proficiency shifts closer to native-like fluency.

Wood (2009) claimed that FS could make essential contribution to language learners' speech fluency. Some other previous scholars have also revealed the conjunction between FS and speaking fluency gain (Liang, 2017; François & Albakry, 2021; Vu & Peters, 2022). The FS acquired by the language learners from bountiful exposures may enable them to store, retrieve and use the particular expressions in speaking practices. Vilkaitė and Schmitt (2019) even emphasized that FS are processed faster and/or more accurately than novel phrases both in receptive use and productive. The regular exposures of FS may enable language learners to endorse speaking fluency and automaticity.

Shedding light on fostering the speaking fluency and automaticity, language learners might tend to use the FS which they heard and used more frequently than the new ones which could be more laborious to be memorized (Khodadady & Shamsaee, 2012). However, the delivery of FS in Indonesian academic contexts to date has been absent from the teaching speaking in many ESL or EFL classrooms. Ideally, there should be explicit and rigorous classroom activities involving FS if they are to become a useful part of the language repertoire of learners (Wood, 2009).

To narrow down the context of learning classrooms in Indonesia, the present study aimed attention at the IELTS speaking preparation class. The IELTS class was selected for twofold. First, in Indonesia, the proficiency of IELTS speaking skill is one of the key success to pursue

higher degree overseas since it is accepted by more than 10,000 global institutions and universities (British Council, 2020). Along with the increasing number of learners aiming for higher education abroad recently, IELTS has become one popular English proficiency tests taken by study-abroad aspirants (Kurniawan & Ghazali, 2023). IELTS preparation programs are ubiquitous in a large number of universities, informal language schools, including online courses that offer some learning flexibility in terms of time and space.

The second reason was because FS is required to perform a higher band score of IELTS speaking test as suggested by the speaking Band Descriptors (IELTS, 2021). Language learners intending to achieve band 7 or higher in the speaking test should be able to perform idiomatic items that are a part of FS. The requirement is clearly presented in the assessment of lexical resource element in which the test takers' wide mastery of advanced vocabulary is tested. Regarding the nature of IELTS test that is a high-stakes exam, Indonesian test takers are in favour of attempting efforts to attain their target score by joining IELTS preparation programs in many institutions (Roza, 2019; Damanik, 2022).

The IELTS speaking preparation programs are mostly designed to assist the language learners to meet their target score. Learners are compelled to address the four components of assessment, namely fluency and coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation (IELTS, 2021). FS is incorporated into the component of lexical resource assessment. However, many IELTS speaking preparation programs put much weight only on fluency, or maybe a little chunk on accuracy, meanwhile the lexical lesson is taken aside from the speaking class and is instead normally delivered in IELTS reading classes (Guntur & Rahimi, 2019; Munawarah et al., 2020; Hartono & Prima, 2021).

The issue on the absence of FS in IELTS speaking class also existed in the school where this present study was taken place at. The glossary on relevant vocabulary items is provided in the course book when dealing with the reading passages to help with comprehension. On the contrary, the speaking lesson was mostly directed to maintain the fluency of ideas, sustain the responses in the allotted time, and pay close attention to speech accuracy. FS was not explicitly taught in the speaking class and it resulted on the learners' unfamiliarity with the lexical items to gain at least band 7 in the test.

Referring to Wood (2009) about the need of enacting explicit instructions of FS in the classroom, the use of explicit instructions in classroom practices facilitates learners with clear stages or process in the beginning and helps them achieve the target task. Explicit instructions are characterized by a set of scaffolding where students are led through the learning process by affirming clear goals and rationale of learning the new ideas, showing intelligible demonstrations of instructional targets, and providing practices with feedback to achieve independent mastery (Khair et.al, 2022). Thus, the present study aimed at addressing the ways FS were acquired in an intensive program of IELTS speaking class and how the explicit instruction of FS enhances the frequency of FS use in an IELTS speaking mock test.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Formulaic Sequences

One of the key insights into spoken language is that language is formulaic in nature. There are multiple versions of spoken expressions each individual can hold and perform depending on

a variety of contexts, mood, to whom they are talking, and degree of politeness. The more common a speech act or language function is in the real world (e.g. apologizing, requesting, and offering sympathy), the more likely there are conventionalized phrases available to handle that situation (Adolphs et.al, 2020).

One prominent concept of FS is revealed by Read (2000) by highlighting a number of different forms of FS performed by the examinee in the IELTS speaking test as presented below.

1. The candidates with high-proficiency level of English fluency could be determined from their use of a vast range of idiomatic expressions, i.e., fixed word sequence or combination conveying a meaning as a whole rather than of its individual words. The presence of idiomatic expressions would make the speech appear to be more native-like.

2. Lower proficiency candidates may also show evidence of using (or maybe overusing) the FS that they had memorized earlier to aim at improving their performance in the test. Many IELTS preparation courses may encourage this tendency of memorization of such expressions.

Elucidating the last point aforementioned, formulaic sequence is indeed an item of lexical resources that can be learned and trained in the classroom, rather than something innate, especially for individuals with low level of English proficiency. This present research has taken a broad view of FS in conjunction with the theory by Vilkaite (2016) as illustrated by the following figure:

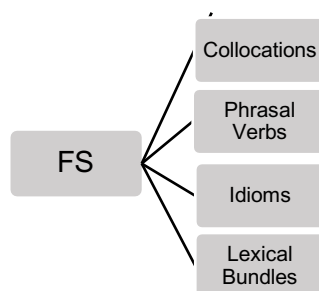


Figure 1. Vilkaite's theory on FS

FS in IELTS Speaking Test

Some studies regarding the use of FS have been conducted, and probably the foremost investigation inspiring this present study is the one carried out by Goncharov (2019). The result of the study illustrated the evidence that FS contributes to second language fluency, thus it was deemed urgent to help language learners to acquire the language through more developed pedagogical approaches. However, the study did not reveal how the applications of the targeted FS in the class was delivered throughout the interventions. The information on what type of instructions carried out was not present to monitor if the improvement of the FS use was actual. Meanwhile, the present study compared two cycles of prefabricated lesson plans carefully designed to endorse FS use in IELTS speaking Part 2.

Iwashita and Vasquez (2019) and Seedhouse (2019) also explored the features of discourse competence observed in IELTS speaking Part 2 performance. Their reports highlighted how different features correlate to the IELTS speaking band descriptors. The

results of the study showed that the test takers with higher English proficiency used a variety of cohesive devices more frequently and their referential expression was more accurate than the test takers with lower level of English proficiency. The findings also mentioned the pedagogical implications on the task-based strategies to widen the FS use. However, there was no further elaboration on which strategies were employed and how the strategies were implemented in a real context.

Explicit Instructions

Explicit instructions refer to a conscious and intentional process of learning (Ellis, 2009). The use of explicit instructions in classroom practices facilitates learners with clear stages or process in beginning and succeeding the target task. Explicit instructions are characterized by a set of scaffolding where students are led through the learning process by affirming clear goals and rationale of learning the new ideas, showing intelligible demonstrations of instructional targets, and providing practices with feedback to achieve independent mastery (Khair et.al, 2022).

In many speaking and vocabulary lessons, explicit instructions have been more preferable than the implicit instructions because the explicit one can generate considerable gain in acquisition of the target lexical items and the effect appears to sustain over time (Norris & Ortega, 2000). When learners are exposed to many FS types for their talk, they will raise more awareness in generating FS in any speaking chances they have in and outside school environment. Since the exposures are taught directly in the class over some period of time with much repetition, learners will be able to sustain the knowledge and spontaneously produce the FS in their utterances. Wood (2009) also conducted the same explicit instructions of FS whose results showed that oral production of the involved participants was much faster in pace on post-test as compared to the oral production performed on pre-test. The participants even uttered the same FS repeatedly or multiple FS to extend a talk.

METHOD

Research design

The present study adopted the design of Classroom Action Research (CAR) to yield the explicit instructions of FS in order to enhance the speaking performance of IELTS test takers. CAR was selected to seek what worked best to deliver FS in the speaking class and to contribute to practical significance in terms of teaching speaking (Kemmis et.al, 2014). The design established a strong connection between the diagnosed issue of lacking FS in IELTS speaking and the interventions to acquire FS. The design allows the researcher to organize a systematic refinement in teaching strategies of FS based on the cyclic procedures, and possible adjustments after the each intervention could be made accordingly to achieve the learning objectives.

The planning phase was carried out by selecting a worksheet containing 10 common idioms of “feelings” (such as “over the moon”, “butterfly in my stomach”, “it blew me away”) and lexical bundles (“I’d like to talk about”, “in addition”, “all in all”) that should apply easily to a variety of topics in Speaking Part 2 of IELTS test. Idioms were selected to meet band 7 requirement “uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary” (IELTS, 2021), otherwise the speaking performance might be capped at Band 6 for the scoring of lexical resources in the rubric. To achieve higher score in this particular area, the students should be able to use

idiomatic expressions skilfully, naturally, and accurately. Meanwhile, lexical bundles could help students reduce cognitive load and improve coherence. Lexical bundles are treated as a single unit that enables students to not think word-by-word and are used mostly as discourse organizers, helping transition between ideas smoothly.

During Part 2, a test taker should maintain a long talk for two minutes, and here FS may act as a natural language bridge to structure ideas and avoid silence or long pauses. The selection of idioms and lexical bundles ensured that the B1 students could acquire the FS easily and practice using them naturally without being overwhelmed. The intervention was implemented over eight-week period, thirty minutes at the end of every speaking lesson with the same procedure: first, the researcher introduced five common idioms or lexical bundles, then the students involved in controlled practices (worksheets, cue cards, and drills), and finally the students practiced using the learned lexical resources through IELTS Part 2 simulation.

Parallel to the action phase, the observation encompassed three fold measures: a tally sheet to count the frequency of FS use, Speaking Band Descriptors to evaluate if the idioms and lexical bundles were produced naturally and appropriately, recorded speaking responses to ensure reliability. Upon the completion of this phase, the researcher analysed the data from the three measures to track the students' progress and performed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the students of the class. The FGD helped the researcher to evaluate the strategies and practices that worked best for the students in using FS in IELTS speaking Part 2. Since the qualitative analysis from the recorded speaking tasks in Cycle 1 revealed a critical problem of fluency, the study advanced to Cycle 2 focusing on using idiomatic expressions more naturally and flexibly through take-home glossary and sample video of IELTS speaking Part 2 mock test.

The following table summarized both cycle procedures:

Table 1. CAR cycles

Phase	Cycle 1 Activities	Cycle 2 Activities
Planning	• Selecting common idioms and lexical bundles for IELTS speaking Part 2 • Creating explicit instructions of FS focusing on meaning and possible practices for Part 2: long talk • Designing a checklist for classroom observations	• Refining the explicit instructions with more emphasis on communicative tasks • Producing take-home glossary and lexical bundles for more exposures of target language in and outside classroom • Providing reliable sample videos on how to use the target language more naturally to talk on a diverse range of IELTS topics
Action	• Presenting FS and eliciting meaning from students • Implementing explicit instructions: worksheets, audio-visual materials, role-plays, and mock test	• Playing videos containing FS use in practice and asking students to do some analysis on accuracy and appropriateness • Performing role-plays in pairs and providing more cue cards to drill the FS use and sharpen the natural delivery • Distributing glossary of FS as take-home practice and asking students to use the

		target language in the glossary to be used later in the following class speaking tasks
Observation	• Moving around classroom during the speaking practices and completing the tally sheet of FS production and field notes • Collecting immediate FS use in speaking during the written tasks and choral drills	• Sitting in on pair role-plays to assess the variety of FS use, the FS accuracy, and naturalness of delivery • Filling out an updated rubric of FS variations, flexibility and naturalness
Reflection	• Analyzing the results of classroom practices: acquisition of FS in written exercises revealed a positive sign towards accuracy and appropriateness, but the oral production of FS was still somewhat robotic • FGD unveiled the strong impression from students: they found FS boost their confidence level in speaking, FS helped reduce the long pause or silence between ideas, idioms were still too challenging to use. The students also suggested more video resources as self-study to have more exposures in how to use FS more naturally • Transitioning to Cycle 2 with adapted design	• Comparing outcomes from both cycles: glossary and intensive role-plays improve the frequency of FS use and the quality of the long talk of IELTS Part 2 • Concluding that take-home glossary was evident to encourage FS use and natural delivery

Research site and participants

The research was conducted at one language course in Malang which offered IELTS preparation program for more than seven years. The school accepted many intakes for IELTS program every month and across different levels of English proficiency which enabled the researcher to select the relevant group of students to suit the research aims. The school also used a range of Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Practice Tests to assess the students' learning progress. Cambridge English Assessment Tests are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which allows international benchmarking of the learning outputs.

The participants of the study were 5 students joining an IELTS preparation program in the school who were at the pre-intermediate level of English proficiency (CEFR: B1 level). The class had a variety of gender, age range, and educational background who might differ in learning achievement. All of them joining the program to aim at pursuing a higher degree of education abroad. These B1-level students were the representation of what so-called "intermediate plateau" because they possessed sufficient vocabulary to talk about familiar topics on daily basis, but their grammatical knowledge stops being effective for spoken fluency (Richards, 2008) and this ensured that the introduction of FS was vital. Teaching FS to these students gave them an accessible shortcut to achieve complex lexical demands of IELTS test.

Data collection

To guarantee a comprehensive evaluation of the students' FS development, four distinct instruments attained data triangulation: a tally sheet for the FS frequency, Speaking Band Descriptors, audio recordings, and FGD.

FS Tally Sheet was used to track the different idioms and lexical bundles the students could produce in their talk and to monitor the impact of the interventions to the students' lexical choices. The researcher completed the sheet during real-time observation in the classroom and double checked it after listening carefully to the audio recordings. The sheet recorded the number of target FS attempted by the students and which expressions were successfully incorporated into their talk.

Speaking Band Descriptors of IELTS were used a guideline to determine the flexibility of students' idiomatic expressions and lexical bundles in their speech. There was adjustment deliberately made from the original descriptors covering four criteria of scoring into one specific aspect (Lexical Resources) Band 6-8. The band scale was selected to give clear illustration for the students about the requirement of using FS with natural expressions and flexibility.

Audio recordings stored every student's response to IELTS Part 2 questions in a variety of topics taken from official Cambridge books. At every end of the cycle, in Week 4 and Week 8, the students completed a mock test individually with the researcher in the classroom. To establish reliability, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to carefully check the exact FS used by the students.

FGD played an essential part to gauge students' perceptions and feelings towards the new lexical items and the new strategy of integrating FS into their speaking performance for IELTS. Through FGD at the end of every cycle, the students shared which FS was relatively easy to remember and put into practice and which of them remained challenging for them. They were also actively involved in suggesting teaching-learning strategies to help them use FS more frequently and naturally in addressing the questions of IELTS Part 2. The information from FGD was documented as a substantial element in deciding the following paths of Cycle 2.

Data analysis

The transcribed speaking performance of each test candidate during IELTS mock test was analysed on the basis of the expressions of FS. The selected recorded data were listened thoroughly to highlight the use of FS throughout the test. Next, the data was then categorized into idioms and lexical bundles by writing some codes to easily organize and categorize the occurrence of FS.

The following step was to display data by organizing the data of the use of idioms and lexical bundles into narrative explanation. The researchers classified the data into specific group categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The researcher described how the elements of FS were obtained from having some classroom practices in the course program and saw if the candidates were all well equipped with the strategies of performing the expressions appropriately to elevate their speaking score. Then, once the data was elaborated to address all research questions, the conclusion was drawn in relevance to the findings and discussion.

The result of the interview with the class participants was analysed to ensure if the use of FS was internalized and to figure out the participants' impression towards FS to help them improve their speaking performance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The FS was acquired through the 8-week interventions covering two FS types, namely idioms (ID) and lexical bundles (LB). The interventions were divided into two cycles in which the learning materials and strategies to introduce FS differed. Cycle 1 followed the stages illustrated in the diagram below.

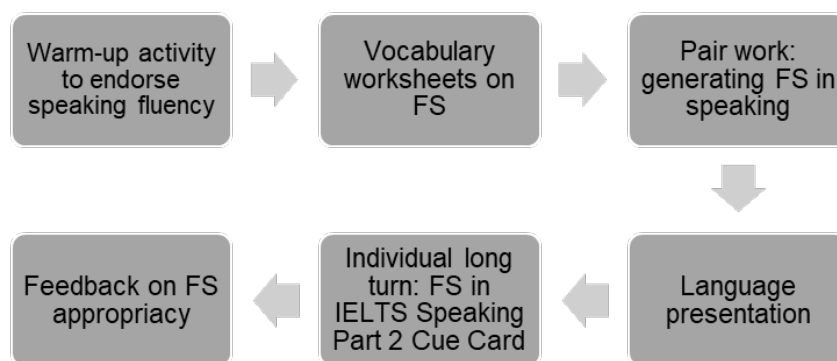


Figure 2. The scheme of Cycle 1 of the study

The vocabulary worksheets, power point presentations, and cue cards were provided in Cycle 1, from Meeting 1 to Meeting 4, to promote FS acquisition about *holiday experience*. This topic was selected as the most frequently asked questions in the real IELTS test and allowed the students to use the target FS.

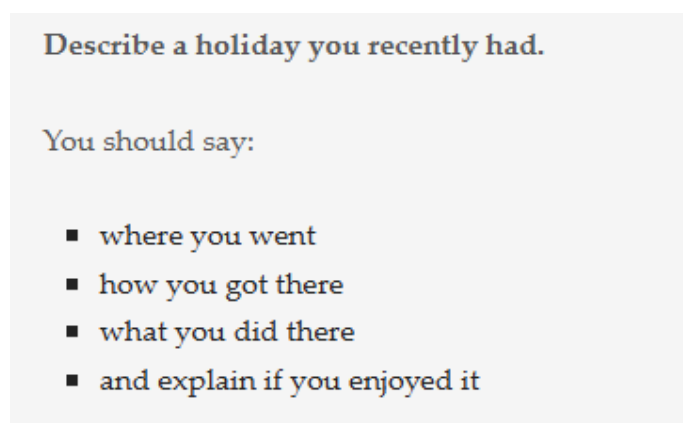


Figure 3. The cue card of individual Speaking Part 2 in Cycle 1

The mock test in this cycle was flexible in allowing more than 1 minute for the students to prepare the notes for the talk, so all them would have sufficient time to include as many FS they wished to use in the talk. This reason was also based on the fact that was the first time the students were engaged with the explicit instructions of FS. The results of FS production performed by the students is presented as follows:

Table 2. FS production and its frequency of use

Name	LB	Total	ID	Total
AP	I'd like to describe, but what I know is, next is, all in all	4	Over the moon	1
AS	what I want to tell you about is, that's all	2	Butterfly in my stomach, over the moon	2
NR	I'd like to tell you about, the thing I like about, how do I say it, to conclude	4	On cloud nine, over the moon	2
DF	I'll describe, the next point is, all in all	3	It blew me away, out of this world, my cup of tea	3

Cycle 2 was performed with better planning and implementation as also suggested by the students during the feedback session in Cycle 1. The comments and suggestions from the students during the Focus Group Discussion at the end of Cycle 1 were taken into account to develop better lesson plans for the next cycle. Two students expressed their first experience in using FS in IELTS speaking Part 2:

Personally I like learning idioms, because it's, uh, like, like fun for me. I can speak cool, more cool like a native. That's of course make me confident in speaking English. But Miss, uh, the time is like, uh, short, right? Like, many idioms but the time is very short. In short time I have to use idiom? Yeah, that's like very difficult (AS).

I guess I want to one something. About the idiom thing (giggles), I guess there are too many to remember. That's, um, because yeah, uh, we are still quite new about this. It's not that, the materials are too much to handle but I think we need more time. To remember, to write, to use and, yeah practice in the class. And yeah I agree, the preparation time is indeed short. So that it adds the challenge (NR).

The students agreed that the use of FS boosted their confidence in speaking and they found it cool to speak with idioms. However, they also expressed their struggles in using the idioms into their talk more naturally. An issue of preparation time also occurred as a part of the challenge in integrating FS into their speech. In addition, the following suggestions from FGD also contributed positively towards the refinement of Cycle 2 planning:

When you show us videos, uh, I think it's great. We can read easily from the videos and some definitions in the script, uh, subtitle, I mean. When we only have worksheets, it feels like, um well um I, I'm not saying the worksheet is bad, but uh, you know, it's more helpful with the videos. (DF).

Thus, the following figure summarizes the stages involved in Cycle 2.

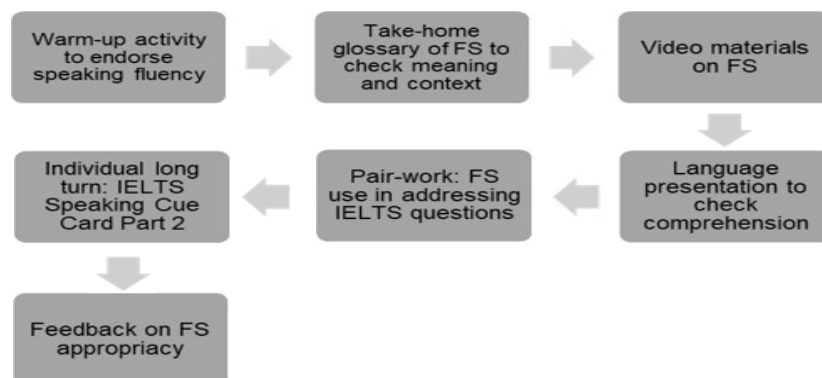


Figure 4. The scheme of Cycle 2

The learning materials were provided in the forms of take-home glossary and relevant IELTS videos in replacement to the power point presentations and vocabulary worksheets in the previous cycle. The students were able to use the FS to talk on another topic, that was *past experience*, and to manage time in preparing the notes for the daily practices (Meeting 5-8) because they had been given the relevant glossary to be selected and studied beforehand at home.

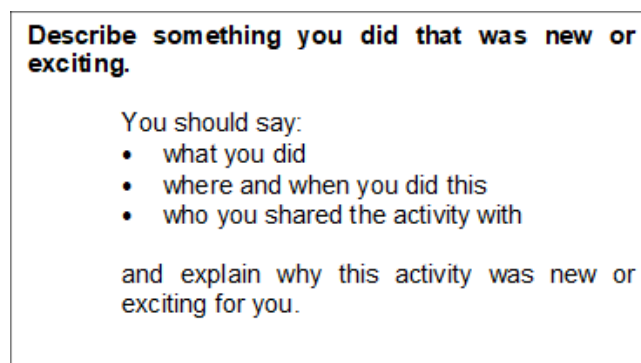


Figure 5. The cue card of Speaking Part 2 in Cycle 2

Table 3. The occurrence of FS in Cycle 2

Name	LB	Total	ID	Total
AP	I'd like to talk about, in addition to what I like about the club, next thing is about, all in all	4	It blew me away, fed up	2
AS	Let me describe, about who I share this Korean language with, in conclusion	3	Over the moon, felt blue, my life was like a rollercoaster	3
NR	let me tell you about, for instance, all in all	3	Butterfly in my stomach, cry over spilt milk	2
DF	I'd like to share with you, talking about the resources, looking back on it now, to sum up	4	I couldn't wait to see, over the moon, my first rodeo, butterfly in my stomach	4

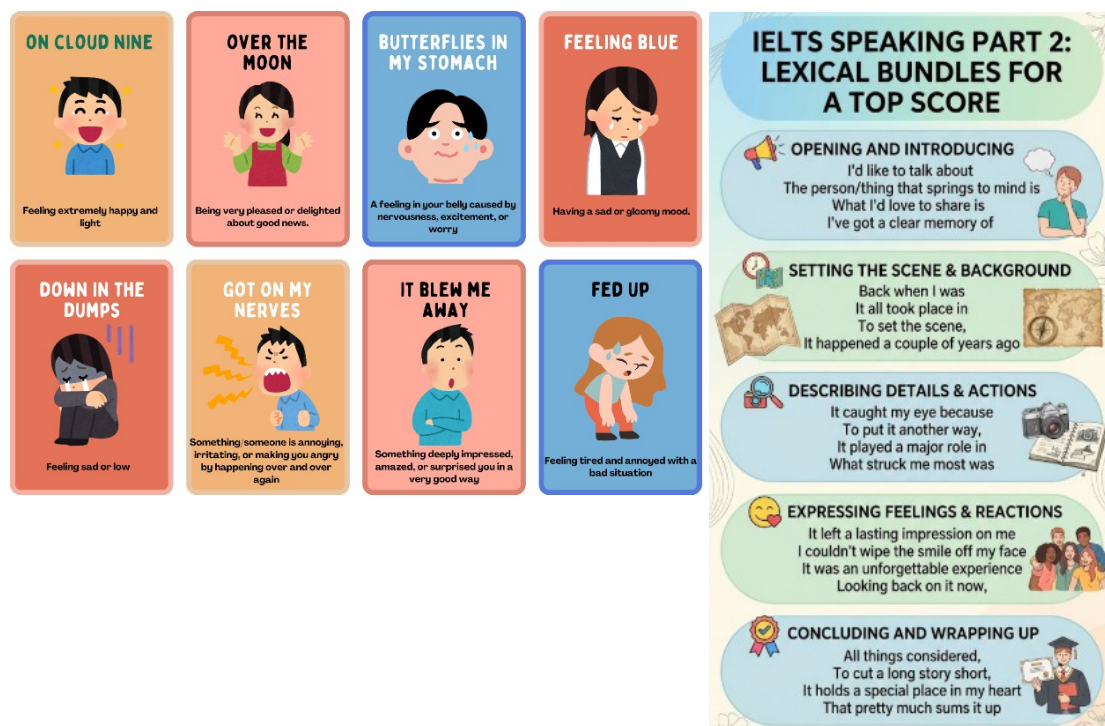


Figure 6. Samples of take-home glossary on idioms and lexical bundles

DISCUSSION

FS Acquisition through Explicit Instructions

The first finding of the preliminary stage of Cycle 1 concerns the issue of lacking explicit instructions in delivering the vocabulary lesson of FS for IELTS Speaking Part 2. Both the students and the regular IELTS teacher in the school were aware of using wider variety of lexical resources to score high in the test, but they had no idea if the FS could be taught along with the lesson on speaking skill whenever it was scheduled. By having the explicit instructions of FS in the IELTS preparation class, the students gained knowledge and enriched their vocabulary bank, and at the end of the class, they could perform better speaking competence (Dokchandra, 2019; Adolphs et al., 2020; Carrol et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020).

Shedding the light on how explicit instructions could help students to internalize the vocabulary more easily, Ellis (2009) ensured that there is some evidence to suggest that explicit learning is more effective with some linguistic features than others are. Since FS employs many linguistic features, then it is suitable to perform the explicit instructions of FS in an IELTS preparation class. The findings in the class also support the term 'effective' in a way that the students could obtain clear examples of FS needed in delivering a talk in Speaking Part 2. This acquisition of FS was then practiced among the classmates or peers, so they could listen to each other and provide feedback before the class teacher interviewed them. This role-play sustained throughout the interventions to help students gain their confidence and reduce anxiety (Lisa et al., 2025).

The FS taught by the means of explicit instructions in the classroom was graded from the easiest to the most challenging one. The lesson plans conducted in both cycles of the study were to address the earlier issue on using FS in a more conversational mode than for the real IELTS test. There had been some kind of modifications in terms of instructions and speaking activities in the first lesson of FS that were not present in the second cycle. To be more specific, the teaching of FS in Cycle 1 was concentrated on having the exposures of new target language the students could use in speaking skill, not necessarily for the real IELTS test yet. The students were exposed to the list of relevant idioms and lexical bundles to talk about the most familiar topics of IELTS speaking Part 2 in describing past events. Having much exposure to learn new language item was also foregrounded in Dickinson et al. (2019) that the students' breadth and depth of vocabulary could be obtained from having ample supplies of exposure through intentional instructions.

In comparison with the revised version in the acquisition of FS in the second cycle, the students were given a sample answer from the video of IELTS speaking test. The topics were about describing past experience and some videos showed the transcripts to better equip the students with full comprehension and to avoid impeding meaning from the forms. The students could read and match the FS they learned from the video with the glossary they had been provided, and then picked up some words from the video for their talk. The video-learning materials were deemed more of assistance for the internalization of FS since the students could directly relate the FS into the context of speaking.

In the light of using audio-visual learning media, four out of five students participating in the group discussion after the final post-test (Cycle 2) showed their positive outlook on the use of videos to support their FS comprehension. They agreed that they could get more vivid

ideas of how the real test looks like and it was easier for them to master the new language items. One student even emphasized the importance of the video to give her a real atmosphere of the test. Knowing the real atmosphere of the test for the students turned out to be crucial for them. Not only did the students enjoy a more audio-visual mode of learning, but the impression of being involved in the real time situation could also promote their vocabulary mastery. The feedback from the students was consistent with the previous research showing that captioned video can provide an effective support for instructed vocabulary learning (Suárez & Gesa, 2019).

Idiomatic expressions that are mostly used naturally by the native speakers of English may not be a lesson that is easy to deal with in Indonesian context or perhaps in some Asian countries as well. Orfan (2020), for instance, conducted a study with many students majoring in English language and literature and revealed that they had a strong positive attitude towards learning idiom and at the same time were aware of the difficulties in learning it. Similarly, another report on the difficulty of learning idioms also unveiled the factors behind the problem. It can be owing to lacking foreign cultural background, presenting idioms in a manner that mirrors real-life language use, understanding English figurative expressions, using idioms in oral communication, and practicing idioms in different communicative contexts (Ta'amneh, 2021).

Another outstanding argument to support the previous studies on the reasons affecting the students' difficulty in learning idioms, which is called "linguistic component shortages" (Cahaya & Farida, 2025), is that there have not been sufficient resources provided by school for the students to learn the language item. In many schools, including the present research site, the teaching of vocabulary lesson aims at addressing the problem reading comprehension. The exercises on matching words and definitions, for example, are set to answer some comprehensive questions that usually follow at the end of the passage to check understanding that is passive in nature compared to using the target words in speaking skill. The target idioms will be stored, retrieved and generated more meaningfully by the productive skill, such as speaking, than the receptive one, as in reading. That is one strong reason to instil the exposure of English idioms into more speaking lesson, not only for the sake of succeeding the IELTS test but also for all English learning classes.

CONCLUSION

The explicit instructions are one shape of breakthroughs the IELTS teacher or instructor can exhibit to help students master the lexical items which are required to achieve Band 7 and above in IELTS speaking test. These explicit instructions are deemed more meaningful in equipping the students with wider mastery of vocabulary for IELTS speaking test compared to the regular teaching of common vocabulary to address the questions of the test. The explicit instructions in this study were evident enhancing the students' knowledge and use of FS in delivering a talk in IELTS Speaking Part 2.

The results of the study revealed that FS could be acquired by having a variety of interventions in the shape of explicit instructions of target language. However, the acquisition of idioms for the talk in IELTS Speaking Part 2 was still lower than expected. The students still struggle much with using idioms into their talk which is majorly caused by their unfamiliarity of the meanings and appropriate contexts.

There are inevitably limitations of this study. The first limitation of the study refers to the small number of involving participants (n=5) that were grouped together in one class sharing the same level of English proficiency. Another limitation is in terms of time period allowed for the researcher to conduct the study at the research site. The researcher was only given eight weeks to perform the interventions in the classroom by making modifications in the course outline that is completely different from the regular one at the school.

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