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Identification of the Problems faced by learners during preparation of IELTS Speaking Test

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges encountered by International English Language Testing System (IELTS) candidates in achieving oral proficiency and presents a specially designed "Preparation Practice Plan" to address these difficulties. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews, this research identifies key obstacles, including fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy test anxiety and time management. A comprehensive analysis reveals the impact of these challenges on candidates' performance and overall test anxiety. The research design employed in this study was descriptive in nature, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods utilizing snowball technique to ensure more accurate and reliable data collection. The sample size is 120 participants, consisting of 100 students and 20 instructors. The "Preparation Practice Plan" developed from this research provides a structured framework for improving oral skills, incorporating effective strategies, techniques, and resources. The study's findings offer valuable insights for IELTS candidates, instructors, and language educators, highlighting the importance of targeted preparation and practice in overcoming oral proficiency barriers.

Keywords IELTS, Oral Proficiency, Language Testing, English Language Instruction, Language Learning Strategies, Test Preparation. Practice Plan.

1 Introduction

"The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has been a vital gateway for millions of candidates worldwide, seeking to access education, employment, and immigration opportunities. IELTS has been a widely recognized assessment of English language proficiency, administered jointly by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge Assessment English. Since its inception, the test has consistently evaluated the listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills of test-takers, with total test duration of approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes. The test has comprised four sections: listening (40 questions, 60 minutes), reading (30 questions, 60 minutes), writing (two tasks, 60 minutes), and speaking (face-to-face interview, 11-14 minutes). Scores have been calculated on a nine-band scale, ranging from 1 (non-user) to 9 (expert user), with a minimum score of 6.0 required for most academic and professional purposes. Test fees have varied by location, ranging from \$215 to \$245. The IELTS test comes in two basic categories the first one is IELTS Academic for those aiming to study at higher education institutions where English is the medium of instruction. It evaluates whether a candidate is prepared to start studying or training in an English-speaking environment. IELTS General is designed for individuals planning to undertake non-academic training, gain work experience, or immigrate to an English-speaking country. It focuses on essential survival skills in social and workplace contexts. The IELTS test consists of four sections: **Listening:** This section includes four recorded monologues and conversations. Test-takers are assessed on their ability to understand main ideas, specific information, and the opinions and attitudes of speakers, among other listening skills. **Reading:** Comprising three reading passages with a variety of question types, this section assesses skills such as reading for gist, main ideas, detail, understanding inferences, and recognizing writers' opinions, attitudes, and purposes. **Writing:** In the Academic version, test-takers must describe visual information (e.g., graphs, charts) and write an essay. In the General Training version, tasks include writing a letter and an essay on a given topic. **Speaking** a face-to-face interview with a certified examiner involves three parts: an introduction and interview, a long turn where the candidate speaks on a given topic, and a two-way discussion. Despite its widespread acceptance, IELTS has faced criticisms and challenges regarding its validity, reliability, and cultural bias. This study has investigated the speaking component of IELTS, exploring the challenges faced by test-takers and the design of speaking practice plans to enhance their oral proficiency. Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Listening are the four components of the IELTS exam, which evaluates important facets of English language competency. Candidates must respond to 40 questions in 30 minutes after listening to four recorded monologues and conversations in the Listening module (British Council, n.d.). With 40 questions to respond to in 60 minutes, the reading module tests abilities such as reading for the main concept and details through three passages with different question styles (British Council, n.d.). Candidates must finish two tasks in the Writing module: assignment 1 is to write 150

words in response to a visual cue, and Task 2 is to write a 250-word essay. Each assignment takes 60 minutes (British Council, n.d.). The Speaking module comprises a three-part, in-person interview that lasts 11 to 14 minutes, evaluating fluency and coherence (British Council, n.d.). There are several reasons to take the IELTS exam, including education, employment, and immigration. IELTS scores are required for admission to many English-speaking institutions and colleges in order to verify students' language competency (British Council, n.d.). While immigration authorities in the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand utilize scores to measure applicants' capacity to integrate into society, employers use IELTS results to evaluate communication abilities in a formal setting (British Council, n.d.). IELTS results are also used by professional organizations for licensure and certification (British Council, n.d.).

Table 1 Components of the IELTS Examination

Component	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking
Number of Sections	4	3	2	3
Number of Questions	40	40	2 tasks	3 parts
Time	30 minutes	60 minutes	60 minutes	11-14 minutes (Face-to-face interview)
Tasks/Parts	-	-	Task 1: 150 words, Task 2: 250 words	Introduction and Interview, Long Turn
Format	-	-	-	Face-to-face interview with an examiner

The purpose of the IELTS Speaking Module is to evaluate the test-taker's ability to communicate effectively in English through a face-to-face encounter with an examiner. Three sections make up the module, and each one assesses a distinct facet of speaking abilities (IELTS, 2022). The examiner can evaluate the test-taker's vocabulary and fluency in Part 1, which lasts four to five minutes and includes introduction questions and common topics (Cullen, 2016). Part 2, sometimes referred to as the "long turn," assesses the test-takers capacity for coherent concept organization and opinion expression by having them talk for one to two minutes about a particular subject (Hawkey, 2006). Part 3 concludes with a conversation between the examiner

and the test-taker, examining abstract concepts and problems associated with the subject matter covered in Part 2 and evaluating the test-takers capacity for sophisticated discourse (IELTS, 2022). Four criteria are used to evaluate the speaking module: pronunciation, grammatical range and accuracy, lexical resource, and fluency and coherence (IELTS, 2022). By bridging the theoretical and practical gaps, this groundbreaking work addressed the urgent need for effective IELTS oral preparation. Its importance went beyond its academic value since it clarified frequently overlooked subjects by examining the spoken **challenges** experienced by IELTS applicants. In order to help applicants improve their confidence, accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, exam anxiety management, and time management abilities, the study created a methodical practice plan. Teachers were given helpful advice on how to enhance speaking skills through informed instructional design, which improved exam scores. These enhancements increased success rates and increased candidates' competitiveness in the international education and employment markets. The study placed a strong emphasis on inclusive support, catering to a variety of learning requirements and encouraging targeted help for IELTS candidates. The introduction of personalized practice strategies provided particular techniques for responding to different kinds of questions and managing varied speaking assignments. In order to improve speaking fluency and responsiveness under time constraints, time management techniques were emphasized. Pronunciation and fluency advice also sought to enhance general communication skills, such as voice clarity and intonation. The study's findings were helpful to IELTS instructors, test administrators, and legislators since they offered a methodical framework for creating and executing efficient study plans and resources. The study also emphasized how crucial an eight-week, well-organized preparation program is for increasing IELTS candidates' speaking abilities and test scores. Ultimately, mastering critical sub skills like vocabulary, grammar, fluency, intonation, confidence, pronunciation, and listening comprehension was necessary to communicate successfully in the past tense and in a variety of speaking contexts on the IELTS exam.

1.2. Background of the study

The history of the IELTS test is marked by its evolution and development to meet the increasing demand for a standardized English language proficiency assessment for non-native speakers. The test originated in the 1980s and was officially introduced in 1989, replacing the earlier English Language Testing Service (IELTS) established in the early 1980s. It was developed by Cambridge Assessment English, the British Council, and IDP: IELTS Australia to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of language skills, incorporating listening, reading, writing, and speaking components. Throughout the 1990s, the test underwent revisions aimed at enhancing its reliability and validity, reflecting the practical language skills needed in academic, professional, and social contexts. In the 2000s, the computer-delivered version of IELTS was introduced to

adapt to technological advancements and the growing number of test-takers, offering greater flexibility in test scheduling and result processing. By the 2010s, IELTS had gained global recognition, with over 10,000 organizations accepting its scores worldwide. IELTS is the world's most renowned English language test, widely recognized for assessing the language skills of individuals aiming to study, work, or migrate to English-speaking countries. IELTS has evaluated listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. It offers two main types of tests: IELTS Academic, and IELTS General Training, the latter being specific to those migrating for work or training purposes. Many students have prepared for IELTS through self-study and online resources, while others have opted for formal preparation courses. This literature analysis aimed to identify and evaluate the main challenges the students faced while preparing for the IELTS exam. Speaking competency encompassed several sub skills that facilitated effective communication. However, IELTS candidates worldwide faced challenges in developing these sub skills while preparing for the exam, including. Restricted availability of quality resources: Limited access to effective study materials, such as textbooks, practice tests, and professional guidance, hindered candidates' ability to improve their speaking skills. Socioeconomic elements also played a role, leading some candidates to rely solely on self-study methods, which may not have been as effective for everyone. Variations in English language education, differences in English language instruction and exposure to English speaking environments impacted candidates' speaking skills, with some facing disadvantages due to limited opportunities. Due to insufficient experience with the test format many candidates lacked familiarity with the IELTS exam format, particularly the speaking module, which caused anxiety and poor performance on the test day. These challenges highlighted the need for improved access to quality resources, standardized English language education, and familiarization with the IELTS exam format to support all candidates' speaking competency development and success in the exam. Time management difficulties: Effectively allocating time for each section of the exam proved challenging for many candidates, potentially impacting their scores.. Cultural and communication barriers: Candidates from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Pakistani students, encountered obstacles in the speaking and writing modules due to language and cultural differences. Understanding colloquial expressions, adapting to various accents, and formulating well-structured answers posed significant challenges.



Figure 1. Challenges Faced by IELTS Candidates

1.2.1 English Speaking Components

Speaking effectively requires a number of fundamental sub skills that combine to effectively and convincingly communicate meaning. In order for the listener to grasp the speaker's message without any confusion, **pronunciation** is crucial. It guarantees that words, sounds, and sentences are pronounced accurately. **Vocabulary** is also crucial since it allows the speaker to convey ideas, thoughts, and opinions with complexity and nuance by using a wide variety of words and phrases. By using the appropriate principles to create sentences that are ordered and cohesive and enable clear expression, **grammar** further improves communication.

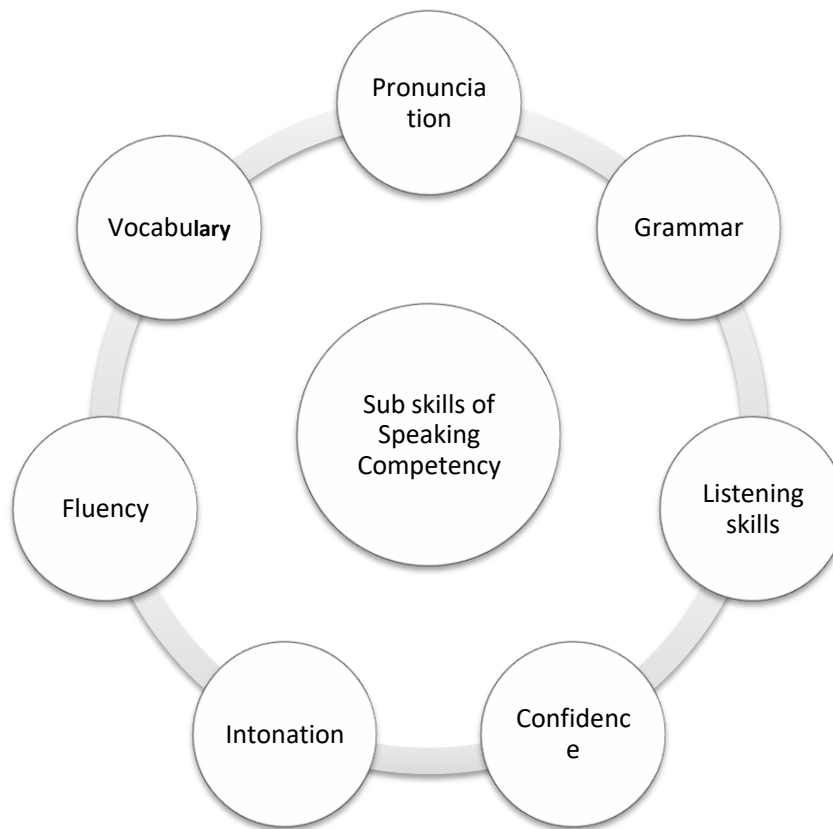


Figure 2. English speaking components

Additionally, **fluency** is essential because it allows the speaker to communicate with ease, speaking continually and fluidly without uncomfortable pauses or hesitations. Another crucial component is **intonation**, which can be used to highlight important ideas, express emotion, and provide meaning beyond what is spoken directly in words. Speech efficiency is increased by confidence, which is demonstrated not just by voice inflection but also by good body language and an upbeat attitude. Finally yet importantly, **listening abilities are essential**; it is the capacity to concentrate on people, comprehend their perspectives, and intelligently reply that turns one-way communication into a dynamic interchange of ideas. Speaking becomes more than just a means of communicating information once these sub skills are mastered and combined; it becomes an impactful and captivating act of connection. These sub skills are essential for effective communication, enabling individuals to express themselves clearly, confidently, and persuasively. Effective communication depends on a number of essential sub skills that allow people to communicate themselves convincingly, confidently, and clearly. These fundamental sub skills include using a variety of words and phrases to convey thoughts and opinions via vocabulary, applying grammatical rules to create clear and logical sentences through syntax, and correctly articulating sounds, words, and phrases through good pronunciation. Effective

communication also entails speaking fluently—that is, without hesitating or faltering—and using intonation to change pitch in order to express emotion, emphasis, and meaning. Additionally, confidence depends on expressing self-assurance through body language, voice inflection, and general attitude. The final component of good communication is active listening, which is paying attention to others, comprehending their viewpoint, and reacting accordingly.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What specific challenges do IELTS candidates encounter while preparing for the Speaking components of the IELTS test?
2. What difficulties do IELTS teachers face when teaching the Speaking skill in IELTS classrooms?
3. What is an effective preparation practice plan for IELTS candidates to attain the required speaking proficiency skills?
4. How do students perceive the effectiveness of the designed preparation practice plan in improving their speaking skills?
5. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of the designed preparation practice plan in enhancing their teaching of speaking skills in IELTS classrooms?

1.4 Significance of the study

The current study addresses the critical need for efficient IELTS oral preparation by bridging the theoretical and practical gaps. Its importance goes more: The study examines IELTS oral difficulties, bringing attention to understudied topics, creates a **systematic practice schedule** that enables applicants to improve their confidence, accuracy, and fluency vocabulary grammar test anxiety and time management. Informed instructional design offers instructors and educators practical advice for improving speaking abilities. Better test performance increases test success overall and makes applicants more competitive. The study further highlights the fluency and pronunciation tips enhance overall communication abilities, intonation, and voice clarity. The study's outcomes are useful for IELTS teachers, test administrators, and policymakers, as they provided a framework for designing and implementing effective preparation programs and materials. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the importance of a well-structured preparation practice plan in improving IELTS candidates' speaking skills and overall test performance. The ability to communicate effectively depends on acquiring essential sub skills: listening comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, intonation, confidence, and pronunciation. The outcomes highlight the value of a methodical approach to IELTS speaking practice, as it produces significant gains in test-taker confidence, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

2. Literature Review

Language proficiency testing is a widely used assessment tool designed to measure an individual's ability to communicate effectively in a target language (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). By assessing language proficiency, institutions and organizations can make informed decisions regarding admission, hiring, and placement (Kunnan, 2018). The IELTS test is a renowned language proficiency assessment that measures the language skills of non-native English speakers seeking to study, work, or reside in English-speaking countries (Davies, 2008). . The speaking component of the test evaluates the test taker's oral abilities, encompassing fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Oral proficiency is a critical aspect of language testing, as it reflects the test taker's capacity to communicate effectively in real-life situations (Brown, 1994). Despite its widespread acceptance, IELTS has faced criticisms and challenges regarding its validity, reliability, and cultural bias (Kumar, 2016). This study has investigated the speaking component of IELTS, exploring the challenges faced by test-takers and the design of speaking practice plans to enhance their oral proficiency (Munoz & Soler, 2013). Oral proficiency is a crucial aspect of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), as it evaluates a candidate's ability to communicate effectively in English (IELTS, n.d.). This skill is essential for academic success, as it enables students to participate in lectures, seminars, and group discussions (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Additionally, oral proficiency is critical for professional success, as it facilitates effective communication with colleagues, clients, and customers (Munoz & Soler, 2013). In social situations, oral proficiency enables individuals to express themselves and understand others, leading to meaningful interactions and relationships (Kumar, 2016) The IELTS speaking test assesses a candidate's oral proficiency, evaluating their ability to communicate fluently, accurately, and appropriately (IELTS, n.d.). Research has shown oral proficiency is a strong predictor of academic success; with students who demonstrate high levels of oral proficiency tend to perform better academically (Munoz & Soler, 2013). Furthermore, employers highly value oral skills, as they are essential for collaboration, problem-solving, and decision-making (Employer's Guide to IELTS, 2020).

Despite advancements in technology and test preparation resources, IELTS candidates continue to face significant challenges and barriers in achieving success (Kumar, 2016). The desire to improve one's standard of living and access better opportunities has fueled growing needs for effective test preparation and support, as passing the IELTS exam has become essential for entering top universities and countries (Munoz & Soler, 2013). Addressing the difficulties IELTS candidates face in achieving the required score has become a pressing concern, highlighting the need for innovative solutions and support systems (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Cheng and Curtis (2022) offer a thorough examination of the evaluation techniques used to gauge speaking test coherence and fluency. They highlight the importance of these two elements in

calculating the final score, examining the many standards and models used to evaluate the test takers' capacity for coherent and fluid communication. Their study underscores the relevance of fluency and coherence as fundamental aspects in the scoring system, influencing both the reliability and validity of the assessment process. Nguyen and Tran (2023), who pay close attention to the effects of Part 2's one-minute preparation period on fluency and coherence, examine the impact of task complexity on applicants' performance in the IELTS Speaking module. He and Wang (2020) look at how non-native speakers understand and react to the more difficult questions in Part 3, especially those from East Asian backgrounds. Wells and Allen (2019) offer helpful tips for getting ready for the IELTS Speaking exam, along with particular methods to boost scores in each of the three components.

According to Dyczok (2013), successful interpersonal connections, career success, and personal development are all based on effective communication. According to Morreale et al. (2017), it depends on the mastery of a number of crucial sub skills, such as accurate pronunciation, a broad vocabulary, sound grammar, fluid fluency, expressive intonation, steadfast confidence, and careful listening. The combination of these sub-skills is essential for persuasive communication, eloquent self-expression, and successful relationship-building, according a study conducted by prominent communication specialists (Beebe & Masterson, 2012). People can effectively communicate emotions, highlight important ideas, and project authority by using these fundamental abilities to combine their speech and body language (Burgoon et al., 2016). Notably, studies by the National Communication Association (NCA, 2020) and the Harvard Business Review (HBR, 2019) highlight the importance of these sub skills, indicating that their strategic application can greatly improve both professional and personal outcomes, promote collaborative environments, and promote effective communication. People can reach their full potential, effortlessly negotiate intricate social situations, and become effective communicators in both their personal and professional lives by developing these essential sub skills.

2.1. Components of Speaking

The several components that make up successful oral communication are usually referred to when examining the components of speaking. Although there are many ways to group these elements, these are some of the most important ones.

2.1.1 Pronunciation

The way we create and utter words is known as **pronunciation**, and it comprises a number of crucial components. Fundamentally, pronunciation involves the distinct sounds we produce, such as vowels and consonants. Every sound has a distinct way of being produced; some are produced

by touching the roof of the mouth with the tongue, while others are produced with the lips or teeth. Words are made up of these sounds, and how clearly we pronounce them has a big impact on how readily people understand us. **Stress and intonation** are also important aspects of pronunciation. The emphasis we provide to particular syllables or words is referred to as stress. For instance, in the word "record," the first syllable is stressed when used as a noun ("RE-cord"), but when used as a verb ("re-CORD"), the focus is on the second syllable. Conversely, intonation refers to the rise and fall of our voice during speech. A sentence's meaning can be entirely altered by intonation. For example, the final rising pitch of "You're going to the store?" indicates a question? but a statement is indicated by the final dropping pitch of "You're going to the store." **Accents** are the unique ways that people pronounce things depending on their background or the language they speak. People from different parts of the same country or from different nations can pronounce the same word differently. For instance, an American English speaker and "sh" at the beginning by a British English speaker may pronounce the word "schedule" "sk" at the beginning. Accents can reveal a speaker's social or geographic background and are frequently linked to cultural identity.

2.1.2. Fluency

The smoothness and flow of speech that make communication seem effortless and natural is known as fluency. Pace or the rate at which one speaks, is a crucial component of fluency. Speaking too slowly can break the flow of the conversation, while speaking too quickly might make it hard for others to follow. In order to facilitate easy comprehension without hurrying or dragging, the speed should ideally remain constant. The use of pauses, which are deliberate gaps in speech that aid in information processing and conversational comprehension, is another crucial component. Additionally, pauses allow the speaker to reflect or highlight key ideas. The capacity to effortlessly connect words results in connected speech, which sounds smooth rather than jagged. This entails use elisions (where sounds are deleted, like "wanna" instead of "want to") or reductions (such saying "gonna" instead of "going to") to make speech sound less robotic and more fluid. When combined, these fluency components contribute to natural, interesting, and easy-to-understand speech.

2.1.3. Vocabulary

The variety of words one knows and use when speaking is referred to as one's vocabulary. Range, or the number of words one has at their disposal and can employ successfully in many contexts, is a crucial component of vocabulary. A person's options for self-expression increase with the size of their vocabulary. Another crucial component is appropriateness, which is the capacity to select the appropriate words in light of the situation, target audience, and goal. For instance, you might use different words in a formal presentation than you would in a friendly

conversation. Last but not least, word choice involves choosing terms that are appropriate for the given circumstance in addition to being clear and succinct. You can communicate more effectively and profoundly and make sure that your message is understood by using the appropriate words. When paired with the ability to select words carefully, a large vocabulary can significantly improve communication efficacy.

2.1.4. Grammar

Grammar is the collection of rules that control the construction of sentences, encompassing elements such as word order, punctuation, verb tenses, and forms. Sentence structure, or the arrangement of words and sentences to produce a coherent meaning, is a crucial component of grammar. This entails employing conjunctions or other linking words to seamlessly connect concepts and accurately punctuate sentences. Another important aspect of grammar is verb tenses, which serve to show when an action occurs. The speaker's message will be in line with the desired time frame if they use the appropriate tense (past, present, or future) and aspect (simple, continuous, or perfect). Finally, maintaining coherence and clarity requires consistent grammar. To make speech easier for the listener to follow, it is important to maintain the same tense, sentence structure, and grammatical forms throughout. In addition to aiding in meaning transmission, proper grammar improves communication effectiveness and professionalism.

2.1.5. Comprehensibility

The ability of a speaker to communicate in a way that the listener can understand is known as comprehensibility. **Clarity**, which entails speaking simply and avoiding complicated jargon or ambiguity that could perplex the audience, is a crucial component of comprehensibility. In order to ensure that concepts are presented in a structured, coherent manner and that each point flows naturally to the next, logical arrangement is also essential. The audience could find it difficult to follow the speaker's argument or story if it is not coherently organized. Furthermore, as speakers must modify their language to fit the particular audience or circumstance, **contextual awareness** is crucial. This entails adapting examples, terminology, and tone according to the listener's experience, background, or understanding. Being aware of **nonverbal clues** is also necessary for effective communication because they have the power to either support or contradict the message. Together, these components make the message easier to understand and strengthen the bond between the speaker and the audience. The ultimate objective is to guarantee that the audience understands the intended meaning without needless effort or misunderstanding.

2.1.6. Interactional skills

Effective communication in social situations requires interactional abilities, which enable people to have discussions, share ideas, and establish relationships. Knowing when to speak and when to listen is a crucial component of **turn-taking**, which is one of the main components of interactional skills. With each member having the chance to contribute without interjecting or controlling the discourse, this balance guarantees that the dialogue proceeds smoothly. Another essential element is **listening**, which calls for active participation in order to comprehend what the other person is saying. In addition to processing information, good listeners also demonstrate empathy and respect by paying attention to both spoken and nonverbal clues. Additionally, **nonverbal clues** are also important in communicating. These include eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and body language, all of which support or elucidate the spoken word. A grin, for instance, can express warmth and friendliness, while keeping eye contact might indicate concentration. When combined, these components facilitate more efficient conversational navigation for participants, guaranteeing that messages are not only sent but also comprehended and appropriately addressed. Good interactional abilities allow people to connect, work together, and form relationships by fostering meaningful discourse.

2.1.7. Confidence

Confidence in communication refers to a speaker's comfort and assurance in expressing their ideas clearly and effectively. **Self-assurance**, or the capacity to talk without hesitancy, stuttering, or excessive self-correction, is a crucial component of confidence. A speaker who exudes confidence projects a sense of conviction in their remarks and speaks with ease. **The use of body language** is another crucial component. A person's posture, gestures, and facial expressions can all have a big impact on how others interpret their message. Confident movements can assist highlight important ideas, and open posture, for instance, can make a speaker seem more approachable and credible. Another **important factor is presence**; a speaker who exudes a pleasant energy that engages the audience compels attention. This presence is characterized by a composed, confident manner that conveys confidence in one's message rather than loudness or aggression. When taken as a whole, these components of confidence enable the speaker to engage the listener and inspire trust in addition to effectively communicating their views. When a speaker is confident, they can connect with their audience more intimately and communication becomes more natural.

2.1.8. Cultural Appropriateness

Adapting language and behavior to the listener's cultural norms and expectations is known as cultural appropriateness in communication. **Sensitivity to social context** is a crucial component, as speakers need to know when to employ formal or informal language based on the situation, such as when speaking to a close friend versus a coworker. In order to ensure that the language

chosen is respectful and attentive of the listener's cultural background and values, **cultural relevance** is equally crucial. Stronger, more courteous relationships can be fostered and misunderstandings can be prevented by being aware of the cultural meaning behind words, gestures, and even silence. Relationships are strengthened and the message is understood as intended when it is culturally suitable. In the end, it shows how the speaker may move sensitively and perceptively through a variety of social and cultural contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This study's research technique was created to give a thorough grasp of the variables affecting IELTS speaking competency and to create plans for improving test-taking success. In order to guarantee solid and trustworthy data gathering, the study used a descriptive research design that combined qualitative and quantitative techniques.

3.1 Research Design

The research design employed in this study was descriptive in nature, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods utilizing snowball technique to ensure more accurate and reliable data collection. This approach provided a cross-sectional research framework, aiming to develop strategies and resources that would effectively support students in passing the IELTS speaking exam. By utilizing this design, the researcher sought to provide actionable insights and practical tools to enhance students' performance in the IELTS speaking test.

3.2 Instrumentation

Several data gathering techniques were used in the IELTS speaking skills study in order to comprehend the difficulties students encounter as well as the tactics required for success. In order to collect thorough information on speaking proficiency and related topics, the main tools utilized in this study were questionnaires, observations, interviews, and pilot testing. These tools shed light on the challenges faced by applicants while they studied for the IELTS speaking exam as well as the efficacy of various speaking strategies.

3.2.1. Questionnaires

First, the questionnaires IELTS teachers and students were given Google Docs questionnaires as the initial step in the data collection procedure. The purpose of these questionnaires was to investigate how students perceived their speaking skills, the methods they used to prepare, and the particular difficulties they encountered during the speaking exam. Important elements of the surveys addressed subjects like: - Self-assurance in responding to different kinds of questions (e.g., Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3). Perceived challenges with coherence, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. The strategies and resources employed to get ready for the speaking exam. The

purpose of the surveys was to learn more about the teaching strategies that teachers believed worked best for enhancing speaking proficiency as well as their opinions about typical problems that students encounter when practicing speaking.

3.2 2. Observation

Apart from the surveys, observations were crucial in determining how well students spoke during actual IELTS practice sessions, which included both classroom and mock tests. The fluency and coherence of students' responses, particularly when asked to speak spontaneously, were among the many facets of speaking proficiency that these observations shed light. Researcher closely observed the way the students arranged their thoughts and kept a logical line of reasoning throughout their answers. Additionally, students' vocabulary and grammatical structures were examined in order to evaluate their language proficiency and sentence construction accuracy. The students' nonverbal communication, which includes their body language, gestures, and eye contact, was another important aspect that was noted. These elements all affected the speaker's overall impression and were taken into consideration when evaluating their speaking abilities. The researchers were able to pinpoint areas for development by observing how students approached the task, especially in handling hesitancy or anxiety during the speaking exam. Additionally, throughout these practice sessions, teachers' relationship with students was extensively observed. The objective was to evaluate how well teachers addressed the unique difficulties pupils had, especially in areas like coherence, fluency, and pronunciation, and provide constructive criticism. As a result, the researcher was better able to comprehend how teachers may help pupils improve their speaking abilities for the IELTS exam.

3.2 3. Interviews

A small sample of IELTS teachers and students were interviewed in order to learn more about the unique difficulties and approaches associated with the speaking exam. Participants were able to elaborate on topics brought up in the questionnaires during these semi-structured interviews, yielding rich qualitative data. The usefulness of typical speaking techniques including speaking aloud frequently, practicing with a partner, and recording responses for self-evaluation were among the main topics of the interviews. Teachers offered ways for fixing typical speaking flaws, such as problems with coherence, pronunciation, or overuse of specific phrases, with the participants. The impact of test anxiety was also investigated, and both students and teachers shared their perspectives on how anxiety influences performance and stress-reduction techniques such as positive self-talk, relaxation techniques, and mental practice. These interviews yielded important insights into how students might enhance their communication abilities and more effectively handle the difficulties of the IELTS speaking exam.

3.3 Framework of Analysis

The IELTS Speaking module evaluates candidates' proficiency in three main areas of English communication: lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and fluency and coherence. An opening segment, a lengthy turn (during which the candidate talks on a specific topic), and a conversation that delves into abstract themes comprise the speaking test, which consists of an in-person interview with an examiner. The main objective of the study "Challenges Faced by IELTS Candidates during Attaining Speaking Proficiency and Designing a Speaking Practice Plan" was to assess the efficacy of current preparation techniques and methodically investigate the different challenges IELTS candidates encountered when getting ready for the speaking portion. The cultural and communication obstacles that many candidates faced especially those from non-English-speaking regions were one of the major issues noted. These applicants frequently had trouble understanding colloquial terms, adjusting to various accents, and communicating interactively, which made it difficult for them to express themselves clearly throughout the speaking exam. In addition, a lot of applicants were not familiar with the precise structure and time constraints of the IELTS speaking portion. . Their performance suffered as a result of their uncertainty and poor time management brought on by this unfamiliarity. In order to overcome this obstacle, the study emphasized how important it was for candidates to get accustomed to the test format through thorough reviews and practice exams. The disparity in English language education systems between nations was another significant problem. The IELTS test demanded skill in formal, academic language, which was challenging for candidates from areas where academic English was not as valued. Due to their limited exposure to academic language, candidates found it more difficult to articulate complicated concepts or provide well-organized, cogent answers to more difficult questions. The survey also found that candidates were frequently unprepared because to a lack of access to high-quality resources like practice materials, tutoring, and immersion in English-speaking contexts. Candidates were at a serious disadvantage if they did not have regular access to real-world English communication or specialized preparation materials, especially when trying to increase their speaking fluency.

4. Data Analysis

In order to comprehend candidate difficulties and offer workable answers, the study of IELTS Speaking Proficiency issues used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative data. This method assisted in pinpointing the precise areas such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency where candidates struggled. Along with examining these difficulties, the study underlined how crucial it is for candidates to have a well-organized preparation strategy that includes focused practice and feedback in order to successfully enhance their speaking abilities. A comprehensive review of existing research on the IELTS Speaking test provided a solid foundation for understanding the typical challenges candidates faced. Previous studies highlighted key obstacles such as difficulty managing speaking time, speaking under

pressure, and limitations in vocabulary usage. These challenges were consistently identified as significant factors affecting candidate performance. In addition, surveys and candidate input contributed valuable data to the analysis. Quantitative data collected from surveys revealed widespread issues like nervousness, lack of vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties. Qualitative data, gathered through interviews or open-ended survey questions, allowed candidates to elaborate on their personal struggles, offering deeper insights into specific areas of difficulty and providing a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. With an emphasis on the crucial elements of fluency, lexical resource, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation, test data were examined to find trends in applicant performance. According to this investigation, candidates frequently had trouble with things like using a diverse vocabulary or remaining fluent under pressure. Candidates' self-reports also revealed similar issues, such as test nervousness and a lack of preparation in specific areas, including addressing abstract subjects or organizing more intricate answers. Gaps in the candidates' study habits were also identified through an assessment of their preparation methods. It was discovered that many applicants lacked experience in authentic speaking situations, which exacerbated their anxiousness and impairs their performance. In light of these results, the study suggested focused practice exercises like simulated speaking exams, peer interviews, and fluency-building exercises, to improve speaking proficiency and address the specific challenges identified in the research.

5. Justification of the Research Questions

5.1 What specific challenges do IELTS candidates encounter while preparing for the Speaking component of the IELTS test?

Obstacles IELTS Candidates Face in the Speaking Section as they get ready for the Speaking portion of the test, IELTS candidates face a number of unique obstacles. They have difficulty expressing complicated thoughts in the allocated time, which makes achieving fluency and coherence in their speech a major issue. Inadequate grammar usage and vocabulary restrictions further impede clear communication. Misunderstandings can also result from poor pronunciation, including accent and intonation problems. Moreover, candidates encounter difficulties in reacting to novel subjects, controlling their trepidation and nervousness during the interview, and preserving a steady stream of speech. Cultural and communication difficulties, a lack of exposure to a variety of dialects, and a lack of opportunity for real-world language practice exacerbate these issues. This is because applicants must be able to think critically, have spontaneous conversations, and explain complicated ideas under time constraints when taking the IELTS Speaking test. The performance of candidates can be greatly influenced by their failure to communicate clearly and concisely. Repetition, circumlocution, or the difficulty to communicate ideas clearly might result from vocabulary deficiencies. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings, and grammatical mistakes can make a sentence difficult to grasp.

Additionally, strange subjects and accents might increase nervousness, which lowers performance. The in-person nature of the test exacerbates anxiety, which makes it challenging for applicants to demonstrate their genuine language competency. The scarcity of possibilities for real-world language practice makes these difficulties even worse. Scripted answers or prepared phrases may be extensively relied upon by candidates, which may come across as artificial or dishonest. Candidates' capacity to interpret idioms, inferred meanings, and linguistic nuances may also be impacted by communication and cultural hurdles. Candidates therefore need specific techniques and practice to get past these obstacles, boost their self-esteem, and exhibit their genuine speaking ability. Candidates can demonstrate their language proficiency and pass the IELTS Speaking test by preparing and practicing well, which might lessen these difficulties.

5.2 What difficulties do IELTS teachers face when teaching the Speaking skill in IELTS classrooms?

Speaking is one of the hardest skills for IELTS teachers to teach in the classroom, which can impede efficient education and student growth. Handling different ability levels in the classroom presents a significant problem, especially in large class sizes where individual attention and feedback are limited. Customized techniques are needed. Other methodological issues include a lack of real resources to engage students, a short curriculum that does not allow for sufficient instruction on speaking abilities, and an objective approach to speaking evaluation. Teaching the Speaking skill in the classroom presents a number of challenges for IELTS teachers, which might impede efficient learning and student growth. One of the biggest challenges is managing the classroom, especially in situations when there are a lot of students and varying skill levels that call for specialized methods. Other methodological issues include a lack of authentic materials to engage students, a narrow syllabus that limits the amount of time teachers can devote to teaching speaking, and the difficulty of objectively measuring speaking. Teachers often deal with challenges relating to students, like low self-esteem and shyness, linguistic and cultural variety that calls for sensitivity, and vocabulary restrictions that make it difficult to have in-depth conversations. Another challenge is giving consistent and useful feedback, which calls on educators to strike a balance between justice and practical guidance. Moreover, teachers frequently may not have access to high-quality materials, assistance, or training. Teaching can also be hampered by technology constraints, such as incorporating digital tools into speaking exercises and having erratic internet access for online speaking practice. To overcome these obstacles, the best possible learning environment for the development of IELTS Speaking abilities must be created, together with unique teaching strategies, resources, and assistance. Through recognition and resolution of these issues, teachers can improve their methods to better prepare students for the Speaking portion of the IELTS exam.

5.3 What is an effective preparation practice plan for IELTS candidates to attain the required speaking proficiency skills?

A systematic and regular practice plan is necessary for IELTS applicants to achieve the necessary speaking proficiency skills. Building foundations should be the first step in this strategy. Vocabulary growth should be the focus of flashcards, word lists, and reading materials. Regular listening exercises utilizing podcasts, TED Talks, or audio books should also be included to help with pronunciation and intonation. During the first four weeks, candidates should record themselves speaking fluently for ten to fifteen minutes each day in order to pinpoint areas that need work. In the next four weeks, applicants should increase their speaking practice to thirty minutes a day in order to improve fluency. Self-recorded monologues on IELTS-related subjects, dialogue role-plays with a partner or tutor, conversations or debates on current affairs, and audio or video recordings of IELTS-style interviews should all be included. During the last four weeks, applicants should work on honing their skills in timed speaking exercises, precise vocabulary usage, cohesive sentence structure, and effective question handling. Using language study applications, watching English-language media, asking peers or tutors for comments, and participating in online IELTS communities or forums can all help candidates prepare even more. Maintaining consistency and making little, steady gains are essential. Candidates can improve their speaking abilities, boost their confidence, and obtain the necessary IELTS competency by regularly evaluating themselves and receiving feedback. Through adherence to this methodical plan, applicants can improve their speaking abilities in a methodical manner by working on their fluency, vocabulary, coherence, and pronunciation. This will ultimately result in higher scores on the Speaking portion of the IELTS exam.

5.4 How do students perceive the effectiveness of the designed preparation practice plan in improving their speaking skills?

The majority of students believe that the prepared preparatory practice plan is beneficial in improving their speaking abilities, noting notable improvements in vocabulary, confidence, fluency, and time management. They gain more confidence via consistent practice and helpful criticism, which makes it easier for them to speak more fluently and easily. Their fluency is further enhanced by the gradual transition from brief to extended speaking sessions, and the deliberate growth of their vocabulary gives them the ability to communicate complicated ideas more effectively. Additionally, the plan fully prepares students for the style of the IELTS Speaking test by incorporating timed speaking exercises and realistic test simulations. Customized improvement is made possible by the individualized feedback method, which is supported by peer review, tutor coaching, and self-assessment. Engaging in online discussion boards and study groups also promotes a feeling of community and offers tools and inspiration. Some students do point out that it can be difficult to sustain the plan's intensity and that solo

practice and self-recording could not have the same dynamics as actual talks. Flexibility is also required because of unique learning style preferences and technical problems with online materials. However, the combination of the planned approach, focused skill development, and support systems results in a comprehensive strategy that improves speaking abilities and prepares students for the IELTS exam. Students find the plan helpful overall, which improves their speaking ability and gives them more confidence to take the IELTS Speaking test.

5.5 How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of the designed preparation practice plan in enhancing their teaching of speaking skills in IELTS classrooms?

The preparedness practice plan has received overwhelming support from teachers as a useful tool for improving speaking instruction in IELTS classrooms. They commend the plan's methodical approach, which enables teachers to target vocabulary, coherence, fluency, and pronunciation while methodically developing students' speaking abilities. Because of the plan's adaptability, teachers can include technology, group projects, and individualized feedback to meet the demands of a variety of classroom situations. Instructors value how the plan simplifies class planning while guaranteeing thorough covering of the requirements for the IELTS speaking test. They observe notable gains in the self-assurance, fluency, and exam results of the students. The plan's focus on peer review, feedback, and self-evaluation creates a collaborative learning environment that supports student autonomy and instructor direction. Teachers also appreciate that the plan is in line with the IELTS assessment standards, which allows for focused skill development and accurate evaluation. They also praise the use of role-plays, real-world situations, and realistic materials, all of which increase student motivation and involvement. To further enhance the strategy, some educators advise adding more multimedia materials, switching up the practice exercises, and taking into account various learning preferences. The planned practice plan is widely regarded by educators as an indispensable instrument that improves student outcomes, teaching effectiveness, and the general development of IELTS speaking abilities. By using this method, teachers may help students develop critical communication skills that are necessary for real-world applications while also adequately preparing them for the IELTS Speaking exam. Teachers have responded well to the plan because of its well-organized approach, flexibility, conformity to IELTS assessment criteria, focus on feedback and self-evaluation, and use of real-world examples and authentic materials. These essential components enable teachers to provide effective education that raises student performance and confidence in their ability to speak on the IELTS. The plan's adaptability allows for a range of learning needs, while its thoroughness and organization allow educators to systematically build students' speaking talents. Adherence to the IELTS evaluation standards guarantees accurate assessment and focused skill improvement. Furthermore, a collaborative learning atmosphere is fostered by the emphasis on feedback and self-evaluation, which

encourages student autonomy and teacher guidance. Real-world scenarios and authentic resources are used to bridge the gap between classroom education and practical communication, increasing motivation and engagement. In the end, the designed practice plan provides teachers with a thorough framework to improve student outcomes, teaching efficacy, and the development of IELTS speaking skills. Using this plan, educators may help students prepare for the Speaking portion of the IELTS exam while also giving them the tools they need to succeed in both academic and professional settings.

6. Conclusions

Language and cultural barriers, anxiety, a lack of exposure to real-world communication situations, trouble learning subtle discourse and idiomatic expressions, difficulty responding spontaneously, a lack of vocabulary and grammar, difficulties with pronunciation and accent, time management, and fluency are just a few of the major challenges that IELTS candidates frequently encounter when trying to achieve oral proficiency. An organized practice schedule can be created to help overcome these obstacles by boosting competence and confidence. Oral skills can be improved with a customized practice schedule that includes fluency strategies like speaking in short bursts and using linking words. Engagement is promoted by rapport-building strategies including active listening and eye contact. Performance is maximized by time management techniques including note-taking and timed practice. Role-playing, improving pronunciation by recording and mirroring, and expanding vocabulary all mimic real-world interactions. Leveraging language learning apps and online resources further supports development. IELTS applicants can improve their oral skills, create efficient communication techniques, improve their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, become more fluent and spontaneous, and score higher on the speaking portion of the exam by following this practice plan. Frequent assessment and modification guarantee the best outcomes, enabling applicants to overcome obstacles and achieve oral proficiency. IELTS test-takers can access global academic and professional opportunities with perseverance and the appropriate strategy.

7. Suggested Practice Plan

The following is the suggested practice schedule for getting ready for the IELTS speaking component based on the feedback from teachers and students.

Week 1&2 Tasks

A well-thought-out two-week practice schedule is crucial for success on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Students are first introduced to the format, pacing, and question types of the test, which includes sections on speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Building communication foundations, improving fluency through conversations about common subjects and current affairs, and honing fundamental conversational skills like turn-taking, small talk, and introductions are the main objectives of the first week. Role-playing activities mimic speaking exams as students advance to the second week, which helps them hone their language abilities and boost their confidence. Focused practice of words and phrases relevant to a certain task leads to the expansion of one's vocabulary. While writing abilities are addressed through task-based exercises and practice essays, strategies are created to address challenging reading and listening comprehension challenges. IELTS test-takers who commit to this extensive strategy for two weeks improve their vocabulary, fluency, and communication abilities, acquire a thorough understanding of the test criteria, and create efficient test-taking techniques. In the end, this focused training enables students to attain their goal band scores, excel in their academic or professional endeavors, and open up new prospects across the globe.

Weeks 3&4 tasks

The emphasis switches to honing speaking abilities as students move on to weeks three and four, guaranteeing a flawless result on the IELTS test. Part 1: Introduction and Interview kicks off this crucial stage, when students hone their vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency while practicing answering personal questions about their interests, coursework, and jobs. Students gain the capacity to boldly and effectively express their ideas by concentrating on these core elements. After that, students are taught to mimic the interviewer's words and body language through the use of mirroring techniques, which promotes attentive listening and responsive participation. Students are able to build a relationship with the examiner through this subtle technique, resulting in a constructive and interesting exchange. Additionally, pupils gain the ability to identify and mimic colloquialisms, idioms, and discourse markers. Further enhancing their communicative competence. Additionally, time management techniques are stressed, teaching pupils how to provide succinct and understandable answers in the allocated amount of time. This ability is essential for making sure that kids may fully express their thoughts without feeling hurried or under pressure. Students improve their capacity to think quickly, communicate clearly, and confidently and accurately demonstrate their English skills by becoming proficient in these sophisticated strategies. Students can greatly raise their IELTS Speaking band scores with consistent practice and improvement, opening up new avenues for success in school and the workplace.

Week 5&6 tasks

The emphasis on learning the more difficult components of the IELTS speaking test increases as students move into weeks five and six. Students hone their coherence, syntax, and vocabulary by

practicing articulating their ideas for one to two minutes on a specific topic in Part 2: Individual Long Turn. Through this crucial activity, students can show linguistic precision, rationally arrange their thoughts, and build sustained fluency. Students participate in Role Play through discussing a Topic, practicing dynamic interactions with a partner or interviewer, to further improve their communication abilities. This activity promotes vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency while developing the capacity for organic, unplanned dialogue. Through exploring a variety of subjects and viewpoints, students hone their ability to think critically and react intelligently. Mirroring Techniques, which build on earlier methods, are still essential in weeks five and six. Students develop rapport and involvement by honing their ability to mimic their partner's words and body language. Students can connect with the examiner through this subtle yet effective technique, resulting in a constructive and open exchange of ideas. Students can greatly improve their IELTS Speaking performance with consistent practice and improvement, exhibiting:

1. Consistent fluency and coherence
2. Advanced vocabulary and grammar
3. Effective communication and interaction
4. Self-assured and clear communication

Students reach their full potential by becoming proficient in these advanced skills, which leads to higher band scores and more success in their academic and professional endeavors.

Weeks 7&8 tasks

To ensure that students perform well on the test, weeks 7-8 of the final IELTS Speaking preparation are devoted to honing advanced speaking techniques. The emphasis switches to Part 3: the Two-Way Discussion, where students have lively discussions about a range of subjects. Their capacity to listen well, answer intelligently, and utilize coherent language to keep a conversation moving forward is refined by this practice. Students that practice these abilities become more adept at having organic, impromptu discussions while using efficient listening techniques and smoothly incorporating transitional words. Additionally, time management techniques are stressed, teaching students how to manage their time effectively during class discussions and provide succinct answers while under time pressure. Students take part in Role Play: Debating a Topic to further develop their fluency and confidence. In this activity, they provide compelling arguments, rebuttals, and counterpoints. By honing their language, critical thinking, and quick response abilities, this exercise helps individuals to accurately convey complex concepts. Students acquire sophisticated linguistic skills, master intricate conversational dynamics, and exhibit remarkable fluency and coherence through consistent practice. Students are best equipped to obtain high IELTS Speaking band scores by implementing these cutting-

edge preparation strategies, which opens doors to academic and career prospects globally. Weeks 7-8 of the final preparation phase concentrate on honing advanced speaking abilities to guarantee that students perform well on the IELTS exam. Section Three: Two-way Discussions take center stage as students practice listening, reacting, and using devices cohesively while participating in lively discussions on a range of subjects.

Additionally, In order for students to properly manage their time during conversations and provide concise, clear responses when under time pressure, time management methods are essential. Students are encouraged to gain confidence and fluency by delivering strong arguments, counterarguments, and rebuttals in exercises such as Role Play: Debating a Topic. Students can use a variety of fluency-enhancing techniques to perform well on the IELTS Speaking test, including speaking in brief bursts, rephrasing, using linking words, and purposefully using fillers. Another crucial ability is developing a relationship with the interviewer, which can be accomplished by making eye contact, displaying positive body language, posing intelligent queries, and pointing out areas of agreement. Taking notes, setting a timer, practicing under pressure, concentrating on important information, and progressively increasing speaking time are some time management strategies. Students can improve these skills by recording themselves to see where they need to improve, using notes and flashcards to help them remember important terms and questions, practicing speaking for 10 to 15 minutes every day, reviewing the IELTS Speaking test structure and question types, and preparing answers to frequently asked interview questions. Students can greatly improve their fluency, confidence, and overall performance on the IELTS Speaking test by incorporating these tactics into their everyday practice. This will result in higher band scores and more prospects for both academic and professional success.

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