

## An Analysis of EFL Test Takers' Problems in IELTS Writing Task

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### Abstract

*IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is one of the English proficiency tests which consists of 4 skills that should be tested including Writing which has two types "writing task 1 and task 2. However, there are many problems that testees face in doing writing such as problem in language use, word choice, punctuation and so on that make them could not pass the test. in this case, the researcher focuses on writing task 1 to know the problems that testees faced. The present study aims at (i) finding out the problems are faced by the testees, (ii) to find out the most frequent problems; and cause of error in language use made by the participants in ELC-IDP Makassar. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, and the total number of the samples were 17. The instrument used for this study was archival documents (testees' writing). In this case the authors classify the problems of the testee's writing into four categories: problem in word choice, punctuation, spelling and language use, then language use is identified and classified into grammatical area: error of verb, noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, article, preposition, and conjunction, after that the error analyzed using procedure of error analysis. The finding indicates that: a total of whole problems are 88 numbers which made by the testees (i) the percentage of problems in word choice is 5 % (4), punctuation 10% (9), spelling 7% (6); (ii) the most frequent problem is error in language use about 78% (69) which the most frequent error is verb area (73%) 50 errors from 69 of total error and; (iii) the causes or error are interference of the learner's mother tongue, overgeneralization, and false concept hypothesis.*

**Keywords:** IELTS, EFL Test Takers, Writing Task.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, English as an international language plays an important role in human life, not only to communicate each other but also as a requirement to find a job whether in private company or civil servant or even just to visit western countries for studying. For these reasons many people take TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS test to fulfill the requirement or just to measure their ability.

There are some proficiency tests that can be taken to know the knowledge and the ability of the learners in English such as TOEFL, IELTS and so on. The IELTS test is taken by students who want to live, study or work in an English-speaking country, or especially by those who are going to follow academic courses at a university or similar institution, or more general training course. IELTS is a test which takes a part to measure the listening, reading, speaking and writing of the applicants, in contrast TOEFL tests the ability of the students in listening, structure and reading. However, in this research the writer would like to conduct research deal with IELTS especially the IELTS writing.

Writing test consists of two tasks, they are task 1 and task 2, in task 1 the students will write at least 150 words in 20 minutes about responding to a situation with a letter, e.g., asking for information, explaining, or complaining about a problem while in task 2, the students will write at least 250 words about writing a discursive (discussion) essay, or defense of an opinion, relating to a topic of general interest. Terry, M (2006) stated that the task 1 prompt is always a type of diagram. You have to write about the information shown, describing the main figures, trends or differences. You have to refer closely to the diagram and, where relevant, illustrate your main points with figures. You are not required to give any explanation for the data but have to describe only the information given in the task.

The previous research by Abe (2008) with a title “*Exploring The Role of Model Essays in the IELTS Writing Test*” investigated about the aspect of language Japanese ESL learners notice by comparing their own writing with model essays. in addition, cotton, Fiona in her research “*An Investigation of Examiner Rating of coherence and cohesion in the IELTS Academic writing task 2*” investigated whether examiners find the marking of coherence and cohesion (CC) in the IELTS academic writing task 2 more difficult than the marking criteria; what features of CC examiners are looking for marking Academic writing task . moreover, this researcher in her research investigated a range different measure related to the three analytic scoring criteria were identified.

On the other hand, the three researchers above did not investigate deeply about task 1, he has just compared between task 1 and task 2, while the second researcher identified the coherence and cohesion in writing task 2 and the last researcher investigated scoring criteria of IELTS writing. The previous researchers did not investigate the problems of writing by the applicants which faced in IELTS writing and the reasons of making problems while the fact there are so many testees did error in IELTS writing task 1. As Ahmad,J (2011) stated that the common problems of testees are error in structure such as pronoun, subject-verb agreement, part of speech, articles, countable and uncountable noun, active voice and passive voice.

Based on the statements above, this study aims to find out the problems are faced by the testees in writing IELTS task, to find out the most frequent problems faced by the IELTS testees in ELC-IDP Makassar, and to find out the causes of errors in language use by the testees in writing IELTS task.

**METHOD**

This study applied a descriptive research by using archival documents from the test takers as the source of data. The researcher used this design to collect the participants data to be identified to know the problems made. Creswell (1994) stated that the descriptive method of research is to gather information about the present existing condition. The emphasis was on describing rather than on judging or interpreting. Gay(2006:159) stated that descriptive determines and describes the way things are. The participants of this research were the IELTS’ participants of ELC\_IDP Makassar. Archival documents were used to obtain the information about the problems in the IELTS writing faced by testees by collecting their sample writing.

The procedure of collecting the data covered several steps namely; (1) analyzed and identified some problems in the participants’ writing, (2) Analyzing the problems that made by the participants, (3) Categorizing the most frequent problems, and (4) analyzing the causes of making error in language use. In calculating the frequency of each problem, the researcher applied the following formula:

$$\text{Frequency of Each problems} = \frac{\text{Total of the given problems}}{\text{Total of the whole errors}} \times 100\%$$

By calculating the frequency of each error, the authors identified the most frequent problem made by the students in the IELTS writing task.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The data described in this research were obtained from the result of the 17 participants’ IELTS writing task 1 competition with the topic “unemployment rates: US and Japan” . the testees described the graph, and the number of words is at least 150 words in 20 minutes. The researcher analyzed the data and found that there were a lot of problems made by the testees in writing IELTS task 1. The problems can be seen in the table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Problems found in the IELTS Writing Task

| No | sort of problems | total problems | Percentage |
|----|------------------|----------------|------------|
| 1  | word choice      | 4              | 5%         |
| 2  | Punctuation      | 9              | 10%        |
| 3  | Spelling         | 6              | 7%         |
| 4  | language Use     | 69             | 78%        |

|       |  |    |      |
|-------|--|----|------|
| Total |  | 88 | 100% |
|-------|--|----|------|

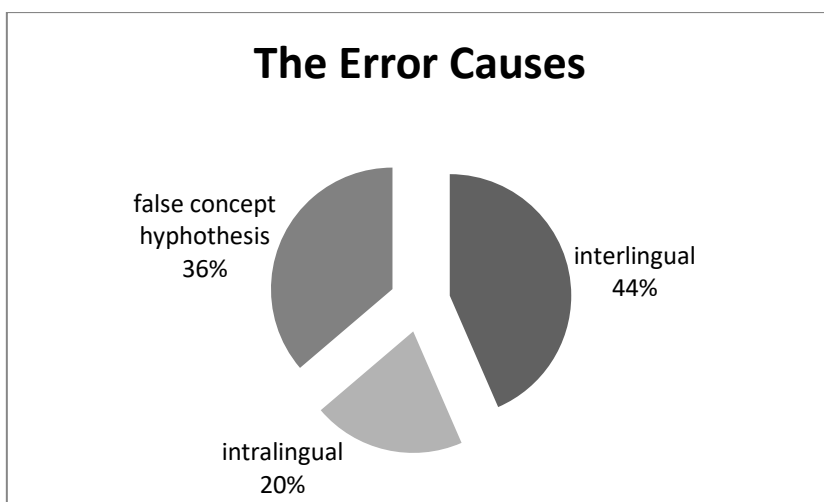
The table above illustrates the total of problems made by the testees which categorized into 4 categories such as word choice with total number of problems 4 (5%), punctuation problems about 9 (10%) , spelling with total problems 6 (7 %) and language use with a number of errors are 69 (78%).

As previous data in table 1 shows that the most frequent problems was in language use with total proportion was 69 or about 78%, and those problems happened because of errors in certain part of speech such as verb 50 (73%), noun 15 (23%), pronoun 1 (1%), article 1 (1%), adverb 1 (1%) and adjective 1 (1%), as shown in this table below. (table 2)

**Table 2.** Total Error in language Use

| No    | Error in Language Use | Total Error | Percentage |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------|------------|
| 1     | Verb                  | 50          | 73%        |
| 2     | Preposition           |             |            |
| 3     | Noun                  | 15          | 23%        |
| 4     | Pronoun               | 1           | 1%         |
| 5     | Article               | 1           | 1%         |
| 6     | Adverb                | 1           | 1%         |
| 7     | Conjunction           |             |            |
| 8     | Adjective             | 1           | 1%         |
| Total |                       | 69          | 100%       |

Considering that the most frequent problems were in language use or errors in certain part of speech, the researcher will classify the error causes. According to perspective of error causes there are interlingual and intralingual errors as the source of error, and it shows as follows:



**Discussion**

This part discuss about the problems made by the testees in writing IELTS task 1. Their data are analized into some problems such as, word choice, punctuation, spelling, and language use, which the language use devides into certain errors in part of speech such as, error in verb, noun, adjective, adverb, preposition and so on.

based on the result findings above, there were some problems found which were made by the testees in writing IELTS task 1.the problems found were word choice, punctuation, spelling and language use, and the most dominant problem was language use with total number 69 errors or 78%. There were many errors found in language use group such as error in verb, noun, adjective, article, adverb, and pronoun. in this part, verb was the highest proportion of error about 50 errors or 73%. This findings also indicate that interference of the first language was the most dominant error made by the testees about 44%, followed by false concept hyphothesis 36 %, and the lowest percentage was overgeneralization about 20 %.

Paul R.Hensel (2008) in his research finding stated that general problems in writing are problems with comma, other punctuation issue, apostrophes, subject-verb agreement (singular and plural issue), sentence structure, word usage, commonly misused expressions and general style issues. Relating to his research, my research also found almost all the problems above, such as problems with comma (punctuation), subject-verb agreement, sentence structure and word usage. those are very significant problems for the testees to pass the IELTS test.

Yahya (2009) stated in his research finding that the causes of error were interference of the learner’s mother tounge, overgeneralization, false concept hyphothesis, and ignorance of rule restriction. This finding strengthen my research that interference of the learners’ mother tounge, overgeneralization, and false concept hyphothesis are the causes of error in writing IELTS Task. Since target language has different rule system from the native language, it becomes difficult for the students to learn the target language. So that, sometimes the students develop hyphothesis of the target language based on their limited knowledge of it, and they apply the target language rule too widely.

## CONCLUSION

In relation with the causing factors of error, the finding shows that the testees's errors in writing IELTS task 1 were caused by several major factors. They were interlingual and intralingual errors. These causing factors of error deal with Ellis's argumentation that, two of the most likely causes of second language (L2) errors are interlingual (between languages) factors, they are resulting from negative transfer or interference from the first language (L1), and intralingual (within language) factors, not attributable to cross-linguistic influence. Intralingual errors are also considered developmental errors and often represent incomplete learning of second language rules or overgeneralization of them. (Ellis, 1994 in Saville and Troike 2006:39).

Suprihardini (2008) found in her research that errors in verbs were the most errors of eight items of errors, preposition errors were the second most errors, the third was errors in noun, then errors in pronoun, errors in adverb, errors in article, errors in modal verb, and the last was errors in adjective. In relation to her finding, the researcher also found that there were certain errors in language use which is done by the testees in writing IELTS Task 1, and the most frequent error was in verb.

In this study, the authors found many problems in writing IELTS, and Language use poses a significant problem to Indonesian students. There were many grammatical errors found in language use. The testees still face difficulties to construct good grammar in writing. It means that learning a new language becomes difficult since the new language (target language) has different rule system from the native language, and this difference sometimes make the testees produce errors especially in applying the grammar of the target language. This finding deals with Sattayatham and Ratanapinyowong statement (2008) that most students also had difficulty in using English Grammar. Error analysis plays an important role in this aspect because it can help the learners to recognize the error, and it aids the learners in writing good paragraphs after learning how to correct these errors through practices. Based on the result of the study, the authors would like to offer some suggestion to cope with the language use issue namely, (1) before the IELTS test, the applicants should be doing more practices in writing IELTS, recognizing the trends' of vocabularies and learning more about how to use punctuation as well as to be more paying attention about their written, so they don't make mistake in spelling punctuation as well as in word choices, (2) the applicants should study more about grammar to write a good paragraph, and (3) the applicants should read more IELTS preparation book to prepare their self before doing the test and to know the technique of writing IELTS.

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