



“Can I Increase My English Test Score?” The Test-Taking Instructional Strategy to Improve Learners’ English

Laila Rochmawati^(✉) and Lusiana Dewi Kusumayati

Politeknik Penerbangan Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
lailarochmawati@poltekbangsby.ac.id

Abstract. This study aimed at assessing the impact of training in the teaching-learning cycle during the training on improving the English language skills of the trainees. The training group was divided into two: the control group with a total of 43 people using strategies other than test taking and the experimental group with a total of 43 participants using the test-taking instructional strategy. The training participants come from the public in the city of Jogjakarta ranging from lecturers, teachers, students, and high school students. The training participants were also homogenized with their language proficiency by conducting the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Quantitative data were analyzed by using an independent t-test, whereas qualitative data from the interview were analyzed descriptively to enrich the study results. This study shows that integrating the test-taking learning strategy in the training process affects the learning outcomes of the trainees.

Keywords: instructional strategy · test-taking learning strategy · TOEIC

1 Introduction

The need for language test results currently has a very important role in the world of education and work. Educational institutions and offices require students and applicants to have the required English test results. English test results become an important role in diagnosing someone’s ability for getting an appropriate job or continuing studying. Users of English test results use it as a source of information to make decisions about individuals. Language test participants need to use strategies to improve their test results on certain question item variety [1]. It needs a deep thought to elaborate on test strategies that might use when taking language tests. Therefore, the researchers need to excavate and rectify the strategies that test takers usually use to finish the test generally, and to conceive each part. The strategy of test-taking is a cognitive process that has been selected and recognized by the participants, at a particular level [2]. Learners, in part, may try to use tricks to complete a language test at random without using a strategy. There is a situation where students take tests without having linguistic, conceptual, epistemic, or procedural knowledge they only take tests based on the experience of the

previously required tests, this is known as test-wiseness (TW) [3]. It is supported by Scruggs & Mastropieri [4] that the reason why the results of the test do not reflect the students' ability is that most of the students do not prepare test-taking strategy well and strategies have enough "test-wiseness". The use of test-wiseness is one of the main sources of invalid testing. One of the successes in working on a language test is the use of instructional strategies in the learning or training process and in conducting language tests.

Based on previous research [5–9] argue that test-taking instructional strategies there was a correlation between the strategy and the student performance. A test-taking instructional strategy is useful for students or trainees who will take a language test. The test takers hope that after using the test-taking learning strategy they can get a higher score than the score before they got the test-taking learning strategy. Teachers can assist their pupils by giving them instructional strategy test-taking that they may adjust when they do the test and encourage them to acknowledge the necessity of the strategies and understand their application of them to reach the desired test results.

There are three varieties of strategies that the students can use when they perform language tests [10]. The first is the strategies used by the students. The strategy here means how the students use their language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and grammar, vocabulary, and translation. The second is the strategy of how they manage their test. The third is the strategy of test-wiseness.

Every single testing format has its strategy [11]. Multiple-choice tests and reading comprehension tests have special testing formats and different strategies. The example of the TOEIC question is in the form of multiple-choice which allow test takers to get guidance from the manuscript significant section and disregard the remaining section which is not accommodated by the test. In reading comprehension tests that complimentary reactions participants realize the benefits of the multiple-choice configuration and apply the preferences and preference section in text lean more significant and valuable reading, particularly within time serious barriers.

The instructional strategy of test-taking brings the learners to take up the features benefit and test configuration to repair students' achievement and elevate test results within test-taking circumstances [12]. Substantial research represented the environment of foreign or second language tests and has a particular group of strategies applied by test participants through a test-taking class [2] and [10]. Test-taking instructional strategies permit the students for applying test nature and configuration to liven up the point in a test-taking condition [12]. Cruz [13] said that the important thing for the learner when teaching test-taking strategy is they not only learn test-taking strategy but also directly practice the strategies until they understand how to apply the technique.

Current language assessment research is only focused on test results, while how to make trainees understand how to take the test is almost neglected. Teachers only focus on test results, not on the process of trainees understanding how to work and produce high learning outcomes. There are still very few studies that examine how test takers should answer test questions. Therefore, this study exploring the potential impact of a test-taking strategy on effective English comprehension by trainees at different language proficiency levels is the main concern of this research. To fulfill the aim of this research, the questions below were asked:

1. Was there a statistically significant effect of test-taking Instructional strategies on trainees' English performance?
2. How did the trainees respond to the test-taking learning strategy?

The effect of language test performance of learners after getting instructional strategy of test-taking knowledge and application on the taking language accomplishment tests and whether the grade of test participants using the strategy of test-taking diverted against distinct parts of the test was investigated, from the EFL point of view [8]. He resumed that language test achievement could be rectified if language teachers and test planners had a better perception of the dissimilar strategies that students engage.

Some investigations have been organized on instructional strategy test-taking arranging that applying a test-taking strategy does increase test points against all level categories. The effect of instructional strategies test-taking on student readiness performance tests was investigated in [7]'s study. It concluded that students who were trained by instructional strategy test-taking had a better score than other students who were not. Teaching test-taking strategies had a significant effect on the student's test achievement and should be taken into a report in preparedness evaluation schedules.

Amer [9] had another result from exploring the influence of giving instructional strategies test-taking for students at secondary school on their achievement in the EFL test. His study shows positive intercourse between instructional strategies for test-taking and appropriate test performance. In the other study, [14] inspected the influence of one of the side test-taking strategies time management and teaching practice. The result of the study showed a definite connection between test-taking instructional strategy and the participant's outcomes, they absolutely can arrange their time, and rectify the test outcome afterward. Researchers have resumed a significant sector of learning outcomes; it was the ability of understanding time application tests.

Vattanapath and Jaiprayoon [15] explored the efficacy of test-taking instructional strategy in an English reading comprehension test for a multiple-choice form. The conclusion indicated that the average score on the English reading comprehension test achieved by the experimental group was superior to the group that did not get an instructional strategy of test-taking strategy. Scharnagl [16] investigated the influence of supplementary instructional strategy test-taking on the reading performance of student lowly achievement in third grade. The outcomes indicated that the group who was given the test-taking instructional strategy also surpassed the control group that was given the usual instructions.

The use of the test-taking instructional strategy was affected by some factors. The first is language response from the students, the second factor is student language competence, the third is test structure, and the last factor is another variable that comes from the environment around the students [10]. Language instructors are required to substitute their traditional instructional strategy by preparing chances for their students to get intimate and employ test-taking instructional strategies.

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

This study consists of eighty-six participants in the English language training consisting of lecturers, teachers, students, and vocational students. Data analysis was randomly divided into one experiment with forty-three trainees and a control group with forty-three trainees. Participants in this training were selected based on convenience sampling. The test-taking learning strategy was given to the experimental group. It is composed of various common strategies of test taking, various particular techniques of test-taking concerning multiple-choice tests, and lastly various beneficial guidance on test preparation.

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 TOEIC Test

These tactics, techniques, and guidance are gathered from some test websites and manual test books. The TOEIC Listening and Reading Test consist of a multiple-choice test for about two-hour with 200 questions splinted into two parts. The first part is the listening section and the second is the reading section. The listening section examines the ability of the participants to understand spoken English. The test taker will be inquired to answer questions based on some statements, talks, and conversations recorded in English. The total time for this listening part is about 75 min. 100 recorded questions are available in this listening section. This section has consisted of four parts. In Listening part 1, there are 10 questions which consist of four statements for every picture. In Part 2, there are 30 questions which consist of three responses to each question. Listening Part 3 deals with 13 dialogues composed of 2 to 5 exchanges per person. Each dialogue is followed by 3 oral questions. Part 4 deals with 10 talks consisting of longer monologues. Each talk in this part is also followed by 3 oral questions. In the reading section, there are three parts, testing how well you understand written English. The reading section consists of various materials and responds to a hundred questions at a speed based on the content of the reading material with a total time of seventy-five minutes. The reading comprehension part consists of one hundred questions. Thirty questions consist of incomplete sentences. A word or phrase is missing in each of the sentences. Four answer choices are given for each sentence. Besides, 30 reading questions also consist of a selection of texts, such as magazine and newspaper articles, letters, and advertisements. Each text is followed by several questions.

The test taker of the TOEIC test is classified as intermediate with a TOEIC score of 405–600, basic working proficiency with a TOEIC score of 605–780, advanced working proficiency with a TOEIC score of 785–900, general professional proficiency with a TOEIC score of 905–990. To achieve the research objectives, the following procedure was carried out in three steps. First, all the trainees received a pre-test at the first meeting before the training begin to make sure that the homogeneity concerning the level of student’s language ability. The experimental group conducted a TOEIC test using a test-taking instructional strategy which was divided into four parts, while the control group performed the test without referring to the test-taking strategy. The participants in the

experimental group were given training in test-taking strategies. Effective test taking is when a student must apply critical reading and thinking skills to the test and avoid making careless mistakes. The researcher tried to explain and exemplify a test-taking strategy that should be applied in the process of responding to the TOEIC questions because the participants need a better understanding of it. Here, the instructors instructed the participants to respond to certain questions explicitly, and the participants must make use of content-relevant information in other test items and options. All the trainees took the TOEIC test after the instructors give a test-taking instructional strategy. The researchers checked the ratings and percentage of the trainees' TOEIC scores to be accommodated and analyzed.

2.2.2 Procedures

To fulfill the target of the research, the procedures were delivered in the following steps:

- 1) The First step has conducted the participants to take the pre-test, before the training starts.
- 2) Participants in the experimental group joined training that use a test-taking learning strategy that lasted for five sessions. Each training lasted for eight hours, four hours for a theory session and four hours for the practice session. The theory session was held in the morning while the practice session is held in the afternoon. In the first meeting, the training was started by learning how to listen. In the listening session, they learned how to predict from the picture, and how to deal with distractors in the question-response type of listening question. In the second meeting, the material was still listening. It deals with short conversations and short talks. In the third meeting, the material was reading comprehension. One problem with reading comprehension is the test taker going back and forth from the text to the question and going back to the text when they forgot what they had read. As a result, it consumed a lot of time. To avoid the problems, tricks and strategies should be implemented. In the third meeting, it discussed incomplete sentences and text comprehension. The fourth and five meetings deal with long paragraph text. For reading comprehension parts, previously students need to analyze the questions after that they can read the text. Scanning and skimming may be used as the tactics come across the right response. Furthermore, they were advised that when reading a reading passage, they must attempt to remember the specifications for replying to the question items which did not discover during the time they read the text. It was a great concept to search a compilation, generally when the participant was concerned with meaning or relating to grammar, which maybe it was a clue to answer the questions. The instructors informed the participants to interpret the structure of words. It might assist the participants to discover the meaning of the odd words they found in the reading passage. Other related tactics about the grammar items and how to get through their pertinent distractors in answering them were also provided. During the training process, the control group worked on the previous test sample without referring to the test-taking strategy. The students in the experimental group were given instructional strategies in test-taking strategies.
- 3) A week later, all trainees took the TOEIC test.

Table 1. Statistic Results

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
English Performance	1	43	496.98	179.338	27.349
	2	43	346.16	134.052	20.443

Table 2. Independent Sample Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
English Performance	Equal variances assumed	6.485	.113	4.417	84	.000	150.814	34.145	82.913	218.715
	Equal variances not assumed			4.417	77.768	.000	150.814	34.145	82.834	218.794

3 Results and Discussion

The study tried to answer the first question, "1. Is there a statistically significant effect of trainees on English performance?" Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (insignificant result Sig. .05), an independent sample test was applied to contrast the performance of both the groups (the control and experimental groups) in the English language learning outcomes section for showing the normality of the score distribution by running the outcomes is provided in the table below.

Table 1 describes the number of each control and experimental group, which are 43 training participants. The average value for the experimental class given the test-taking learning strategy is 469.98. The control class that did not get the test-taking learning strategy got an average of 346.16.

Table 2 not only showed the determination of the effect of the test-taking instructional strategy on learning outcomes in English but also presents Levene’s test to find out the consistency of variance. Aims to check if the difference in marks of the first and second groups are similar. The Sig. Value of Levene’s test is (.11) which is greater than the cut-off (.05) assuming a similar variance was supervised. Moreover, because of the grade (.00) in Sig. (2-tailed) range is smaller than (.05), which means that the data above indicate there is an average distinction value for experimental and control groups. The average distinction between experimental and control groups is also seen, along with a 95% self-confidence interspace of the distinction indicating lower scores and higher

scores. Thus, an independent sample t-test was performed to compare performance in the English section for the control and experiment groups. With the results of the Independent Samples Test, it can be concluded that there is an effect of the test-taking learning strategy on the results of learning English.

The second question is "How do the trainees respond to the test-taking learning strategy?". This second question was answered using a qualitative method in the form of in-depth interviews with five trainees. The participants expressed their positive attitudes. The first trainee stated, "with more time to practice questions using the test-taking strategy, I enjoy learning using the test-taking learning strategy. This strategy helps me to guess answers effectively". The second trainee stated that "the role of this test-taking strategy previously permits me for reciting the preferences after that give me a chance for select the correct answer, with this test-taking instructional strategy I can apply the strategy of doing the exam in real situations while taking the exam". The third trainee "the impact of learning the test-taking strategy made me able to overcome my anxiety in doing the test." The fourth trainee stated "the test-taking learning strategy got me higher marks because I can do tests effectively, and I can manage my time more precisely". The fifth training participant said, "after studying the strategy for working on the questions, I continued to work on the questions from the first item to the last question respectively regardless of the value and distribution".

Related researchers [5, 7, 8, 17, 18] suggested promote using test-taking instructional strategies. They gave definite results that the provision of test-taking instructional strategies encouraged English teachers to provide such learning strategies. Based on the data on the English learning outcomes of the trainees, the experimental group excels control group. The relation between the participants' attitudes and instructional strategies for working on multiple-choice test questions, in general, participants described a positive attitude. This shows that holding training using the strategy of doing questions alone is not enough for them. Test-taking instructional strategies should be practiced in the classroom, representing participants' positive attitudes toward test-taking learning strategies as they learn to integrate these strategies with their lessons. The result is not only expressed that most widely the trainees strongly concurred that the test-taking instructional strategy in this training assisted the participants in choosing the correct answer but also reduced the participants' anxiety in performing the test because they felt pleased with the test configuration and some strategies when doing the test.

These results are consistent with the foregoing researchers' claims that training in the instructional strategy of test-taking can produce good results [9] [10, 15, 16, 19, 20]. Based on the discoveries in their study, these investigators also suggest that teachers should underline the use of the appropriate instructional strategy of test-taking so that trainees can analyze what to do while the test. They also informed that the instructional strategy of test-taking could reduce trainees' test anxiety. Because the test-taking learning strategy rectifies the trainees' test competence, they felt more convinced and active in learning. As stated by Nourdad [21], several possible reasons for the significant influence of test-taking instructional strategies in helping test takers accomplish difficulties while taking the test are transforming the attitude of the participant towards the test and as a result, reducing their anxiety in facing the test. The implementation of a test-taking

instructional strategy is characterized by being emotionally well organized which minimizes the feeling of anxiety [22]. That is, when trainees experience anxiety-provoking factors, the test-taking learning strategy assists language learners obtain temperamental and spiritual control, and in the end, they can adapt to test situations effectively. In conclusion, the test-taking instructional strategy has some advantages. First, it is very useful for improving trainees' behavior against tests and language learning. Second, it is for assisting their performance better on tests. Third, it significantly reduces their test anxiety. In line with other researchers, this research suggests supporting the application of test-taking instructional strategies and encouraging teachers to give these instructional strategies.

4 Conclusion

The language strategies mean that the trainees' phases choose to resolve language assignments. There are four strategies based on what Cohen [23] has outlined, the first is retrieval strategies, the second is rehearsal strategies, the third is cover strategies, and the last is communication strategies. Test-taking learning strategy applies all of those strategies. Firstly, retrieval strategies, which the trainees are necessary to do to practice in the test, secondly, rehearsal strategies require for the trainee before doing the test, thirdly cover strategies are useful for looking good and the fourth is communication strategies required when the test needs it. The trainees are recommended for setting up the test before doing the test by learning the material that is given by the teachers so they can get maximal scores from the test. The trainees not only focus on the test itself but also all the test stages. The training by applying the test-taking learning strategy has an impact on the trainees, especially on the attitudes and test performance of the trainees. The test-taking learning strategy given to the trainees can motivate them to adjust it and can push them to make consequential expectations, have better achievements, and tackle issues or difficulties when taking exams. It also degrades restlessness during exams. The findings of this study indicate that the English training which used the instructional strategy of test-taking made the experimental group more excel than the control group which did not give in the instructional strategy of test-taking. In addition, they have a good attitude towards the test-taking instructional strategy for English tests. However, due to time and administrative constraints, this study was conducted in a five-day training course lasting approximately forty hours. Therefore, this research can be carried out again by being integrated into the class schedule of students for more practice on doing tests. In addition, this study can be rectified in futurity tests taking into consideration other test formats such as essay tests, true-false tests, matchmaking tests, and so on. In short, such a study would provide useful guidance for combining test-taking instructional strategies across all lines of learners to learn English.

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