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Enhancing Speaking Proficiency Through Integrated Language Assessment In Efl Classrooms: A Case Study At SMAN 2 Unggulan Talang Ubi

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Abstrak

Berbicara merupakan keterampilan bahasa yang penting dalam pembelajaran EFL, namun tetap menjadi salah satu keterampilan yang paling menantang untuk dinilai secara efektif. Studi ini menyelidiki integrasi penilaian bahasa dengan keterampilan berbicara di SMAN 2 Unggulan Talang Ubi. Melalui pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana guru menerapkan penilaian berbicara, bagaimana penilaian ini selaras dengan tujuan pengajaran, dan dampak yang dirasakan terhadap kinerja berbicara siswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara guru, dan diskusi kelompok fokus siswa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penilaian berbasis kinerja, khususnya permainan peran dan presentasi lisan, meningkatkan kemahiran berbicara, motivasi, dan kepercayaan diri siswa. Studi ini diakhiri dengan implikasi pedagogis untuk menyelaraskan penilaian dengan tujuan pengajaran komunikatif dan merekomendasikan mekanisme umpan balik yang lebih terstruktur untuk mendukung pengembangan bahasa lisan siswa.

Kata Kunci: Penilaian Bahasa, Keterampilan Berbicara, EFL, Penilaian Formatif, Kompetensi Komunikatif

Abstract

Speaking is a critical language skill in EFL learning, yet it remains one of the most challenging to assess effectively. This study investigates the integration of language assessment with speaking skills at SMAN 2 Unggulan Talang Ubi. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, the study explores how teachers implement speaking assessments, how these assessments align with instructional objectives, and their perceived impact on students' speaking performance. Data were collected via classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student focus group discussions. The findings indicate that performance-based assessments, particularly role plays and oral presentations, enhance students' speaking proficiency, motivation, and confidence. The study concludes with pedagogical implications for aligning assessment with communicative teaching goals and recommends more structured feedback mechanisms to support learners' oral language development.

Keywords: *Language Assessment, Speaking Skill, EFL, Formative Assessment, Communicative Competence*

INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively in spoken English is a fundamental goal of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. In today's globalized world, speaking skills are not only essential for academic success but also for personal and professional advancement. As Richards (2008) highlights, the ability to speak fluently and appropriately is often considered the most desirable outcome of foreign language learning, reflecting the communicative nature of language use in real-life situations.

However, among the four major language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is often considered the most difficult to master and assess. This is due to its spontaneous nature, the need for immediate language processing, and the complexity of interactive communication (Luoma, 2004). Unlike reading and writing, which allow for reflection and revision, speaking requires learners to produce language in real time while simultaneously monitoring grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and coherence. According to Thornbury (2005), spoken language is ephemeral, context-dependent, and syntactically less structured, making it inherently more challenging to evaluate consistently and objectively.

Despite the increasing emphasis on communicative competence, speaking is frequently underrepresented in classroom assessment practices. In many Indonesian high schools, including those that implement the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013), assessment often focuses on reading and writing, with speaking relegated to informal observation or neglected altogether. As Brown (2004) notes, "oral language assessment is often the most

neglected aspect of language testing, despite being one of the most important." This neglect may result from a combination of logistical challenges, lack of teacher training in speaking assessment, and the absence of standardized tools for reliable oral testing (Fulcher, 2003). This imbalance leads to a gap between what is taught and what is assessed, which in turn affects students' motivation and perceived relevance of language learning.

Moreover, students in EFL contexts like Indonesia often experience anxiety and lack confidence when speaking English, especially in formal evaluation settings. Horwitz et al. (1986) describe foreign language anxiety as a significant affective factor that inhibits performance in speaking tasks. Students may fear making mistakes or being judged, which hinders their willingness to participate. Krashen (1982) emphasizes the role of affective filters in language acquisition, arguing that anxiety and low self-confidence can act as barriers to language input and output. Therefore, assessing speaking in a supportive, instructionally-aligned manner is critical to encouraging learners' oral language development.

Language assessment, when effectively integrated into instruction, can serve as a catalyst for improving speaking skills. This concept, often referred to as assessment for learning (AfL), shifts the function of assessment from merely evaluating learning outcomes to enhancing and supporting learning processes (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In the context of EFL classrooms, this means that speaking assessments should not be isolated events but should be embedded in meaningful classroom activities that mirror real-life communication. McKay (2006) argues that when assessments are authentic and contextualized, they not only provide more valid measures of ability but also foster learners' engagement and confidence.

Furthermore, O'Malley & Pierce (1996) advocate for performance-based assessments in language classrooms, which include presentations, role plays, and interviews that allow students to demonstrate their speaking proficiency in dynamic and communicative contexts. These approaches align well with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is mediated through social interaction; thus, speaking assessment should be dialogic and situated within meaningful exchanges.

Given these perspectives, there is a pressing need to investigate how speaking assessment is currently conducted in actual classroom settings. This study aims to investigate how English teachers at SMAN 2 Unggulan Talang Ubi design and implement speaking assessments, how these assessments align with instructional goals, and how students respond to them. The findings are expected to contribute to best practices in speaking assessment and provide recommendations for more effective integration of assessment in EFL speaking instruction.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which was deemed suitable for exploring how speaking assessments are implemented in real classroom contexts and how they align with instructional goals. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is particularly effective when the aim is to understand participants' perspectives, practices, and experiences in natural settings. This approach allows researchers to capture the complexity of classroom interactions, especially in the dynamic and context-dependent nature of language teaching and assessment.

The research was conducted at SMAN 2 Unggulan Talang Ubi in April 2025, with the primary focus on English teachers' assessment practices and students' perceptions of speaking assessments in the context of EFL instruction. This setting was selected because the school has a strong academic reputation and implements the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013), which encourages the development of communicative competence.

The participants in this study included three English teachers who regularly assess students' speaking abilities, and twelve students from Class XI IPA and XII IPS. The student participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative studies to ensure that participants have sufficient experience or knowledge related to the research focus (Patton, 2002). This allowed the researcher to gather in-depth information from individuals directly involved in speaking assessments.

Data collection involved three primary techniques. First, classroom observations were conducted over six speaking lessons, focusing on how teachers designed and implemented speaking assessments during instruction. These observations followed an open-ended protocol to capture both verbal and non-verbal aspects of classroom interaction. As noted by Merriam (2009), observations provide valuable insights into actual practices that may not emerge through interviews alone.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers to understand their underlying rationale, strategies, and challenges in assessing speaking. This method allowed for flexibility while still maintaining a degree of comparability across participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews explored teachers' beliefs about speaking assessment, how they integrated assessment with instruction, and what constraints they encountered in doing so.

Third, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the student participants to gain their collective perspectives and experiences regarding speaking assessments. FGDs are particularly effective in uncovering group norms, shared experiences, and differing viewpoints (Morgan, 1997). Students were encouraged to discuss how they felt about

speaking assessments, how these assessments affected their motivation, and what kinds of support they found most helpful.

To analyze the collected data, the study applied thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved several stages: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining them. The focus of analysis was to explore emerging themes related to the types of speaking assessments used, how well these assessments were aligned with instructional objectives, and their perceived impact on students' speaking skills and confidence.

By employing this methodological framework, the study aimed to produce a rich, detailed, and credible account of speaking assessment practices in an Indonesian EFL high school setting. The use of multiple data sources and triangulation enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), ensuring that the analysis reflected both teacher and student perspectives accurately and holistically.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Predominant Speaking Assessment Practices

The observed classes revealed that a variety of oral assessment formats were utilized, with oral presentations, role-plays, and interviews emerging as the most frequently employed methods. These formats were deliberately chosen by teachers to engage students in authentic communication that mimics real-life situations, rather than isolated language drills. For example, role-plays often involved scenarios such as simulating job interviews, negotiating in marketplaces, or giving opinions on social issues, while oral presentations required students to describe past experiences, explain processes, or advocate for a particular viewpoint. Interviews were typically conducted in pairs or small groups, emphasizing spontaneous language use and interaction.

Teachers emphasized that these tasks not only assessed students' language proficiency but also encouraged important skills such as preparation, collaboration, critical thinking, and spontaneity in speaking. The preparation process involved organizing ideas, practicing pronunciation, and anticipating possible questions, which aligns with the notion that effective speaking involves both planning and on-the-spot thinking (Brown, 2004). Collaboration was also seen as essential, as many tasks required students to work together, thereby promoting communicative competence through meaningful interaction.

One teacher highlighted the pedagogical value of such tasks by stating, "I prefer tasks that allow students to express themselves creatively while using target structures. It shows

me how they actually use the language.” This statement reflects a broader educational philosophy that values meaningful communication and learner autonomy over rote memorization or formulaic responses. It demonstrates the teacher’s awareness that speaking assessments should reveal not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to convey messages effectively in context.

This approach aligns closely with Luoma’s (2004) perspective that “productive speaking tasks should reflect realistic uses of language to capture communicative competence.” Luoma argues that assessment tasks should simulate authentic communication events so that learners are tested on their ability to navigate genuine linguistic challenges. By engaging students in activities that require functional use of language—such as persuading, narrating, or requesting—teachers can better gauge students’ practical speaking abilities.

Furthermore, incorporating these varied formats supports diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences, as proposed by Gardner (1983). For example, oral presentations may benefit students who excel in verbal-linguistic intelligence, while role-plays may engage interpersonal intelligence through social interaction. This variety also helps maintain student motivation and reduces anxiety by allowing learners to demonstrate competence in multiple ways.

In sum, the observed speaking assessments at SMAN 2 Unggulan Talang Ubi reflect contemporary best practices in EFL speaking evaluation by emphasizing authenticity, interactivity, and learner-centeredness. These practices not only enhance the validity of the assessment but also contribute to the development of communicative competence, preparing students for real-world language use beyond the classroom.

Alignment with Curriculum and Instruction

Teachers reported that they consciously aligned speaking assessments with the learning objectives outlined in the syllabus, ensuring coherence between what was taught and what was assessed. For example, following a thematic unit on “Expressing Agreement and Disagreement,” students were tasked with presenting arguments in small groups, which directly reflected the communicative functions emphasized during instruction. This alignment is consistent with the principles of constructive alignment proposed by Biggs (1996), who argues that learning activities and assessments should be directly linked to intended learning outcomes to maximize student achievement.

Such purposeful alignment also resonates with the view of Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), who emphasize that effective language assessments must be “instructionally sensitive,” meaning they assess language functions and skills that have been explicitly

taught. By designing speaking tasks that mirror the syllabus content, teachers help students prepare for assessments while reinforcing key language structures and functions.

However, despite this positive alignment, the teachers acknowledged that not all assessment tasks were communicated to students with explicit rubrics or systematic feedback mechanisms. This lack of transparency can hinder students' understanding of the criteria by which their performance is judged, potentially affecting their motivation and ability to improve. Brown (2004) stresses that clearly defined assessment criteria and rubrics are essential components of fair and objective evaluation. Without these, assessments risk becoming subjective, and students may feel uncertain about how to meet expectations.

The absence of explicit rubrics and feedback also limits the potential of assessment to serve as a tool for formative learning, where feedback guides learners in identifying strengths and areas for improvement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Sadler (1989) similarly highlights that detailed criteria and feedback are necessary to help students internalize standards of quality performance and engage in self-regulated learning.

Therefore, while the alignment of speaking tasks with syllabus goals reflects good practice, the assessment process could be enhanced by developing clear rubrics and providing timely, constructive feedback. Such measures not only promote fairness and transparency but also empower students to take ownership of their learning and progress in their speaking competence.

Student Perceptions and Learning Impact

Students acknowledged that speaking assessments served as a significant motivator for them to practice English more frequently, both inside and outside the classroom. One student remarked, "At first, I was nervous, but now I enjoy role-plays because they help me speak more naturally and confidently." This statement reflects a positive shift in learner attitudes, which aligns well with the concept of assessment for learning (AfL), as articulated by Black and Wiliam (1998). They argue that assessments, when used formatively, have the potential not only to measure learning outcomes but also to enhance learner autonomy and confidence. Through repeated practice in speaking tasks such as role-plays, students gradually overcome anxiety and develop greater fluency and spontaneity in oral communication.

The student's increased enjoyment and naturalness in speaking activities also correspond to Horwitz et al.'s (1986) findings on foreign language anxiety. As students gain more exposure and supportive assessment experiences, their affective barriers tend to diminish, making speaking a less daunting skill to perform. This transformation is crucial in EFL contexts where speaking anxiety is a common obstacle.

Furthermore, students expressed a strong desire for more immediate and specific feedback following speaking assessments. This request highlights the need for timely responses that clearly identify errors and suggest improvements, which are vital components of effective formative assessment. Sadler (1989) emphasizes that detailed, constructive feedback is necessary for learners to understand their current performance relative to desired goals and to take actionable steps toward improvement.

Moreover, Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that feedback is most effective when it provides information about the task, the process, and self-regulation, empowering learners to reflect and adjust their learning strategies. In speaking assessments, specific feedback on pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary use, and communicative effectiveness can help students refine their oral skills more efficiently.

In summary, the students' reflections underscore the importance of integrating speaking assessments that not only evaluate but also motivate and support learners. By incorporating prompt and precise feedback, teachers can further enhance students' confidence, autonomy, and overall oral proficiency.

Constraints in Assessment Implementation

Despite the clear benefits of speaking assessments, several significant challenges were identified during the study. One major issue was time limitations, which restricted the number of students who could be assessed individually within the classroom schedule. This constraint often forced teachers to rely on group activities or abbreviated assessment formats, potentially limiting the depth and accuracy of evaluation. According to Brown (2004), effective speaking assessment requires sufficient time to allow students to demonstrate their abilities fully, and rushed or superficial assessments can compromise the validity of results.

Another challenge was the high anxiety experienced by some students, particularly during assessments that involved being recorded or evaluated in front of their peers. This heightened anxiety often led to reduced performance, which did not necessarily reflect the students' true language competence. Horwitz et al. (1986) highlight that foreign language anxiety is a common affective barrier that can negatively impact speaking performance, especially in evaluative situations. Thus, assessment designers and educators must consider strategies to create a supportive environment that minimizes anxiety, such as using low-stakes assessments or providing multiple opportunities for practice.

Furthermore, the lack of clearly defined speaking rubrics and structured feedback mechanisms was reported as a hindrance to consistent scoring and reducing the formative value of the assessments. Without standardized criteria, assessments may become

subjective and inconsistent, which diminishes fairness and transparency. Fulcher (2010) argues that speaking assessments must be carefully designed to achieve a balance among validity (measuring what is intended), reliability (consistency of scoring), and authenticity (reflecting real-life language use). Well-constructed rubrics help ensure that evaluations are objective, transparent, and aligned with instructional goals, while also providing meaningful feedback for student improvement.

Overall, these challenges underline the importance of deliberate and thoughtful speaking assessment design that addresses practical constraints and learner affective factors, while ensuring fairness and educational value.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating language assessment with speaking instruction enhances learners' communicative abilities when tasks are authentic, instructionally aligned, and supported with constructive feedback. At SMAN 2 Unggulan Talang Ubi, performance-based tasks have proven effective in developing students' speaking proficiency and confidence.

To improve current practices, teachers are advised to:

- a. Develop clear rubrics and share them with students prior to assessment.
- b. Provide regular formative feedback to guide improvement.
- c. Incorporate peer and self-assessment to build reflective learning habits.

Future studies could explore the longitudinal effects of integrated speaking assessments or examine how digital tools (e.g., Flipgrid, Padlet) can support formative speaking evaluation in large EFL classes.

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