

ENGLISH LECTURERS' WAYS IN ASSESSING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILL

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ABSTRACT

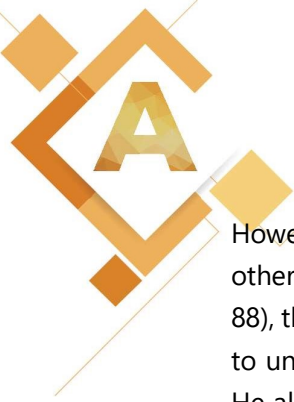
This study analyzes the lecturers' ways in assessing students' speaking skill. The study used a qualitative method to investigate four English lecturers and uses interview as the instrument to obtain the data needed. The findings show that the assessments used can be both formative and summative. The lecturers have utilized both formal and informal assessments to track and quantify their students' learning progress and determine whether the course's objectives have been met.

KEYWORDS: *Assessing Speaking, Lecturers' Ways, Students' Speaking Skill.*

INTRODUCTION

Assessing speaking is one of the important tasks that should be considered by the English lecturers. The lecturers have to know the ways to conduct a correct assessment for speaking since assessing speaking skill is quite challenging (Zaim, Refnaldi, & Arsyad, 2020). Thus, the lecturers have to struggle in assessing speaking skill correctly so as to get the best possible teaching-learning outcome since the success of a course depends on the assessment conducted. According to Fulcher (2003), the success of a learning program is generally defined by the outcome of assessment.

Since language teaching and assessment are inextricably linked, it is crucial to learn how lecturers assess students' speaking abilities. Furthermore, the assessment is used to determine a student's ability or the quality of a teaching course. However, the assessment completed by teachers or lecturers can also be used to investigate the quality of a course's teaching.



However, a speaking assessment is regarded as challenging in this circumstance. In other words, a speaking exam or examination is not simple. According to Heaton (1989: 88), the interdependence of speaking and listening abilities makes any genuine attempt to understand precisely what is being examined at any given time more challenging. He also points out that the most challenging aspect of oral testing is administering it. Because of the short time available, it is usually impossible to test a large number of students. Kitao and Kitao (1999) agree with that viewpoint. They contend that the assessment is one of the most difficult aspects of speaking examination. Although it is critical to develop a system of assessment that could be used as objectively as possible, subjectivity will almost certainly always be present.

Regarding the importance and the difficulty in assessing speaking skill, it is essential to investigate how the English lecturers assess students' speaking skill. This article focuses on how the English lecturers of English Department at a public university assess their students' ability in the speaking class.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SPEAKING ASSESSMENTS

One of the most crucial components of teaching a language is doing an adequate assessment for each language competency. A language lecturer should be able to conduct an appropriate assessment in order to determine the progress of her or his students and diagnose their weaknesses. In line with it, Nicolic and Cabaj (1999) assert that assessment refers to a set of strategies and procedures for determining a student's proficiency, progress, or achievement, as well as diagnosing weak areas. In addition, Nicolic and Cabaj (1999, p. 217) add that:

tests are necessary and used for a variety of purposes, such as to determine proficiency level to guide initial students placement, to measure progress through out a course, to identify particular problem areas where students may need a help and at the end of a course, to determine how well students have achieved objectives of learning.

Suwandi and Taufiqulloh (2009) note that speaking assessment in the classroom, as the most challenging skill to score and administer, should be done in a systematic manner, such as by defining certain assessment processes that include determining instructional objectives, assessment preparation, and assessment implementation, creating scoring processes or rubrics. It is also beneficial to choose appropriate activities for teachers to achieve the assessment's purpose and objective. Rahmawati and Ertin (2014) add that due to the subjective nature of speech assessment, careful considerations must be made when establishing speaking assessment. They mention that Brown and Abeywickrama's criteria, which include a specified criterion, an appropriate task, a

maximum output, and a practical and reliable scoring system, can be utilized as recommendations to construct a speaking assessment. Teachers need to be conversant with the issues of practicality, validity, reliability, authenticity, and wash-back effect because they are the ones that carry out this form of assessment. Furthermore, because many teachers may lack expertise of speech assessment, it is suggested that linked institutions and the government work together to provide support for teachers to improve their professionalism, such as through trainings, workshops, or seminars

Speaking is the most difficult skill to evaluate when compared to the others. It follows that assessing this crucial skill is difficult. However, this does not rule out the possibility of a valid speaking exam. Current speaking examinations should be assessed with care and precision. Assessments are used to determine where students should be placed in a class, to conduct pre- and post-testing, and to evaluate students. The aim of the assessment, the students' degree of language proficiency, and the goal of using the speaking skill in the classroom all influence how the speaking skill is assessed.

O'Malley and Pierce (1996) state that teachers who assess oral language in the classroom confront at least three challenges: choosing the time limit, selecting assessment activities, and creating evaluation criteria. Teachers do not conduct a systematic oral language evaluation because they face problems to find the time or choose the appropriate activities or procedures for the materials in the lesson plan.

TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS

Generally, there are two types of assessments, formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment involves assessing learners since they are developing their abilities and capabilities with the purpose of assisting them in continuing their development. Summative assessment, in contrast, is commonly done at the end of a class to measure or summarize what a learner has studied or unit of teaching (Brown, 2004).

There are also types of assessments, namely formal and informal assessments. Informal assessment, according to Brown (2004), can take many forms, including unexpected reactions and comments and other spontaneous feedback to learners. He also gives examples of informal evaluation, such as stating "Nice Job!" or "Good Work!" or "Did you say can or cannot?" (p. 5). Formal assessment, on the other hand, includes activities or procedures created to access a bank of skills and knowledge (Brown, 2004). Formal assessment is systematic and well-thought-out used to assess student achievement. He continues by stating that while not all formal assessments are tests, all tests are formal

assessments. Almost every type of informal assessments is formative; however final exams and proficiency exams are instances of summative assessment (Brown, 2004).

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are several studies concerning speaking assessments. A study conducted by Rahmawati and Ertin (2014) aimed at designing assessments for speaking suitable for the Indonesian context at a university level. It focused on the criteria of effective assessments proposed by Brown and Abeywicrama consisting of a specific criterion, an appropriate task, a maximum output and practical and a reliable scoring procedure. Another study by Suwandi and Taufiqulloh (2009) focusing on designing a speaking test aimed at describing some steps in assessing speaking covering the areas as follows: identifying purpose of the test, planning the test, designing rubrics an scoring procedures and setting standards.

RESEARCH METHODS

This pilot study utilized a qualitative method. The participants of the study were four lecturers (two males and two females) of English Department at a public university who taught Speaking courses. They were selected purposively, taking into account gender and teaching experiences. This study used interview guide as the instrument to obtain the data. The researcher interviewed the lecturers in one-on-one interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The English lecturers who were interviewed assessed the students' speaking ability correctly and appropriately. They were aware that assessment could be used as a guideline for their teaching activities to measure students' speaking proficiency and to know whether the goals or objectives had been achieve or not. They thus could find the ways or techniques to improve the students' speaking skill.

One of the lecturers explained that:

"for formal assessments, generally, we have four: quiz, midterm, assignment, and also final. I give them assignments to tell a story, for quiz, I ask them to do a presentation in a sort of a talk show, and for midterm, I use an oral test and also for the final I will ask them to record and I will measure them. I will evaluate them at home by myself. But, during the class, I also look at the students' progress every meeting. I also assess them informally every meeting. "

Another lecturer said that:

"every meeting I assess them, so there are sixteen times. For sixteen meetings I assess them. I also assess them and give them scores of the activities used as the midterm and final examination."

Based on the interviews, the assessments carried out could be incidental or intentional. The lecturers used both formal and informal assessments to assess and measure their students' progress in learning and to know whether the goals of the course have been achieved. They also used formative and summative assessments.

a. Informal and Formal Assessment


The lecturers used both formal and informal assessment. They often used informal assessment that they started with incidental, unplanned responses along with incidental feedback. They also conducted formal assessment that they have planned and informed the students before conducting the assessment. They frequently conducted informal assessments of their students in order to measure their development in speaking. However, the formal assessments were only completed a few times in one semester.

b. Formative and Summative Assessment

The lecturers used formative assessment and summative assessment. They assessed their learners' progress with the purpose of supporting them in improving their speaking abilities and providing relevant criticism. They also carried out quiz, midterm exam, final exam, and gave assignment for speaking class.

The lectures also believed that assessing speaking ability is more complex and hard than assessing other language skills. They, therefore, used the scoring systems to assess the students' speaking achievement. To assess the speaking skill properly, they used the scoring categories of oral proficiency which are in line with the theories of assessing speaking. In addition, they also adapted their own criteria in scoring relating the level of the students and the goals of the course.

Oral proficiency scoring areas used in evaluating speaking can include grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, pronunciation, and task. The categories that are used to assign scores, on the other hand, are based on the lecturers' concerns, actions, and needs. Kitao and Kitao (1999, p. 59) embrace this notion as well. According to them, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, organization, and content are among the qualities of oral ability that might be assessed in the scale of assessment. In this study, the aspects assessed were modified by the lecturers.



Brown (2004) also explains that oral production or speaking performance assessment activities are divided into five categories: imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive. On the other hand, the activities chosen are different from one another. Some of the lecturers interviewed used group discussion, oral presentation or giving a talk, pair work, interview and role play to assess students' speaking achievement, while others used oral presentation, retelling a story and some other activities. For the oral presentation they used the checklist of the evaluation of oral presentation.

Since assessing oral skill is more difficult than assessing other language skills, the lecturers were very careful in how they conducted the tasks and how they scored the students. In line with it, Mackey (2011) asserts that because of the combination of speaking and listening activities that may be performed, assessing oral language is difficult: Sometimes there is more speaking than listening (as in news reporting); sometimes there is a blend of both (as in conversations); and sometimes there is more listening than speaking (as in teacher-led class discussions).

To this end, the lecturers should realize that effectively measuring speaking is critical in order to achieve high-quality speaking instruction, to help students improve their speaking abilities, and to become good English speakers who can speak English accurately and fluently. They, hence, state that the scale can be a single, it can be divided into several components of speaking ability, such as grammar, pronunciation and organization, or it could be used as a generic scale for total speaking ability. However, that scale would be determined by the speaking activity or task used to assess students' ability to speak.

Regarding this point, Heaton (1989) points out that the most significant component of language testing is assessing one's ability to talk. However, he also claims that it is an incredibly difficult skill to test at all levels beyond the most basic levels of mimicry and repetition, because it is far too complicated a skill to allow any valid analysis for the purpose of objective assessment. In addition, Heaton (1989) discusses several ways to assess students speaking skills. They are reading aloud; retelling a short story; describing pictures, maps and diagrams; oral interview, short talk, group discussion: problem-solving activity, puzzle, consensus-seeking activity and role play.

Further, Ur (2008) contends that the majority of the feedback we give our students is ongoing correction and assessment, aimed at specific bits of learner-produce language with the goal of improving it; this type of evaluation is sometimes referred to as "formative," because its primary goal is to "form": to improve rather than "end" a process. This is in contrast to the so-called "summative" evaluation, in which the teacher assesses an overall element of the learner's knowledge in order to summarize the

situation: how proficient he or she is at a given point in time, for example, or how far he or she has advanced through a given course. Summative evaluation may have little or no impact on the ongoing teaching/learning process, yet it is an important element of the teacher's work that we must master.


From the interview, the study found that the lecturers conducted both formative and summative evaluation. The activities chosen were interview, giving a talk, telling a story, role play, collaborative task and discussions, question and answer, giving direction and recording of speaking. Through interview, one of the lecturers assessed the students' speaking skill by using the recorder. He asked the students to record their dialogues. He then assessed and evaluated them at home. The recording of the students' dialogues was used for final examination. In accordance with the use of recording, Kitao and Kitao (1999) and Heaton (1989) point out that since the spoken language is ephemeral, it is impossible to use processes like those used in marking compositions, where examiners can look back and make an assessment at their leisure. They need to use a tape recorder.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of interviews on four English lecturers regarding their ways to assess the students' speaking skill, the study concludes that the assessments used by the lecturers are both formative and summative. The activities for assessments include having an interview, giving a talk, telling a story, role play, collaborative task and discussions, question and answer, giving direction and recording of speaking. The lecturers have also utilized both formal and informal assessments to track and measure the progress of the students in speaking and determine whether the course objectives have been achieved.

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