

Assessing EFL Students Speaking in the Classroom from Kurdish Instructors' Perspectives

Zahraa S. Qarani

Department of Dentistry, Cihan University-Erbil,
Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Abstract—*Nowadays*, students are required to improve their speaking skill more than any other language skill. Since, speaking skill is difficult to develop in EFL classes teachers need to use effective strategies to teach and assess this skill. A student's ability to speak is determined by their ability to explain something or express themselves verbally. This paper aims at finding out Kurdish instructors perspectives on their role on assessing EFL students in the classroom and the strategies used for assessing speaking in EFL classes. This paper tries to find out an answer to the following question: What is the Instructor's role in the assessment process? and what are the strategies for assessing speaking in EFL classes from instructors' perspective? Furthermore, The paper has been limited to instructors of Cihan University-Erbil and Salahaddin University-Erbil for the academic year 2022–2023. The population is (21) instructors from College of Languages, Education, and Basic Education. The data have been collected by a questionnaire and the tool adopted for analyzing the data is SPSS. It is concluded that the most common strategies applied by the instructors in the assessment of speaking sessions were direct questions and answers, interviews, and storytelling. Moreover, the data analysis has indicated that the main role that the majority of the instructors gave importance to have been the objective assessment and rubric, taking into consideration the students interest in the topic, and the content of the conversation or discussion in addition to the interaction.

Keywords—Assessment, EFL Classes, Speaking, Teaching EFL, Techniques of assessing speaking.

I. INTRODUCTION

The assessment process is an important component of the teaching-learning process. In spite of the fact that assessment is essential for evaluating the students' progress in learning. There has been a steady development of speaking skills over the past four decades in teaching and learning of English as a second language. For students to speak in English during class, teachers must motivate and inspire them to do so. Interaction between peers is a key component of promoting the development of studying a foreign language (Govindasamy and Shah, 2020).

Spoken language is essential in students' social and academic development. English language teachers are aware that they are responsible for designing and administering English speaking tests which is difficult. This difficulty refers to little practice opportunities for communicating in the target language. Some factors affect learners such as age, gender, culture, motivation, personality, and different level of each individual can assume spoken competence. When students are involved in the tasks, they can speak more fluently and perform better. One of the best ways to manage a speaking

classroom is related to teachers' ability to promote group work and setting correct strategies for teaching and testing speaking skills.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part is dedicated to theoretical background of the main topics in the paper, which comes to include a definition and background information of assessing speaking, teachers role, and techniques of assessing speaking.

A. Assessing Speaking

Even though language assessment has garnered the attention of practitioners and scholars, there is not enough time and space dedicated to the process of assessment. Humans communicate with each other daily in different ways and languages. To communicate, speaking is very essential which means to have the ability to understand and respond to something. The capacity of applying the language to answer some questions is known as speaking. Bapir (2016, P:22) sees that "Assessing speaking examines learners' mastery in

the oral aspect of the language.” However, Huxham (2010) assumes that assessing speaking refers to a test in which students are required to produce spoken answers to some questions. In comparison, it is concluded that any assessment points out students’ educational knowledge about something that is governed by spoken words is labeled as oral testing.

Assessing speaking is merged with some issues faced by both students and teachers. According to Almashy (2017) the most prevalent issue is perhaps disability of students in using correct phonology and syntax, followed by their ability to communicate effectively even if they have little knowledge. One of the challenging points for teachers is to design suitable tasks that represent student’s ability at the end taking students’ level into consideration. Meanwhile, Nakatsuhara (2009) present presents other difficulties of oral testing, firstly code complexity that is related to difficulty and difference in linguistics, vocabulary items of the task and secondly, communicative stress includes time pressure, speed of the presentation, number of test takers in the class, and the interaction between the tester and the testee. In addition, according to Schmitt (2010) preparation and production of the speech happen together concurrently for students in which; they do not have time to change or retrieve what has been said. He also states that students need to provide the correct respond and try to use words which can deliver the context they want to say.

B. Teachers Role in Assessing Speaking

There is an internal reason for the growing popularity of language assessments in English language teaching, which has to do with teachers’ understanding of the importance of assessment in the language learning process. (Genc et al., 2020) In Assessing Speaking, the personality of the test taker (teacher) has a significant effect on the examinee, the result of the test and the flow of the task. Sullivan (2000) classifies a number of qualities in the examiners. First, the teacher needs to start the task with simple questions like a daily conversation to make students feel comfortable. Second, supplying the students with linguistic simplification, to help the students to provide the answers needed. Followed by, being ready to answer students’ questions and clarifying the instruction before the task. Third, the teacher has to be skillful enough to create a good cooperation with the students during the task, and allocating more time for the student to speak. Fourth, the teacher must avoid interruption and screaming on students because this will increase their anxiety. Fifth, the use of a soft voice and correct intonation of sounds during the test is more preferable by the teacher; this will help students to feel free and interact more. On the other hand, according (Nurhalimah et al., 2020) to a systematic approach to assessing speaking needs to be developed, which includes identifying the objectives for instruction, planning assessment, and determining rubrics or scoring procedures. Besides, teacher’s selection of appropriate activities is also important in order to meet the assessment’s goals and objectives and considering learners’ interest in selecting the topic. In contrast, (Khamkhien, 2010) states that when

assessing speaking abilities, important elements such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, content, and timing should be taken into consideration.

C. Techniques for Assessing Speaking

Various strategies are used by teachers of EFL classes for testing students speaking ability. Nation and Newton (2009) identifies several techniques. First, role play: A teacher and his/her students have a role to play. The students are supplied with situations to perform in the class. The teacher in this task has a role in directing the conversation and providing various situations to test their ability. *For example, Students are supplied with a situation in which they need to take the role of a doctor and Patient.* Second, interview which consists of two people the examiner and a participant, the teacher prepares a set of questions on a particular topic to be answered by the students. The interview takes place as a conversation between two people. *For example, an interview with a company director and a Job Seeker for the position of manager.* One of the shortcomings of this task is that the interviewer has to manage and keep the conversation going, in addition to focusing on assessing the interviewees’ speech.

On the other hand, Ur (2012) confirms other tasks. Picture description for testing student’s ability to speak. In picture description, students are asked to describe a picture or a number of pictures that are provided by the teacher. This kind of task is more appropriate for testing students at beginners’ level. *For example, Students are required to describe a picture of a playground.* The advantage of this task refers to its easiness in providing full focus on assessing the students since the tester does not take part in the conversation. Ur adds another task which is presentation. In this type of test, teachers request the students to present information and explanation on a specific topic. The students must represent their ideas and knowledge in front of the class. Moreover, (Huxham et al., 2010) assume another task for testing speaking which is problem-solving. In this task, a teacher provides students with real or imaginary problems that students’ need to think and find solution for. This task is beneficial and monitors students’ problem-solving skill in their real life and in a different situations. Moreover, (Thornbury, 2005) classifies some other strategies. First, Live monologues: In this task, students need to choose a topic for adapting and introducing a short talk about it. Speakers’ capacity in cooperating and controlling of speech can be shown by discussion form the other students’ side. *For example: presenting a short talk about politics.* Second, Collaborative tasks and discussions: Learners are required to express their ideas and attitudes on a given topic. This task presents learners’ independent ability in participating in authentic situations. *For example, Students own idea of using technology in education.* Furthermore, (Zaim et al., 2020) advises some other strategies. First, directed question and answers: The teacher prepare some questions to be responded the students. The student’s answers are controlled by the teacher questions. Second, storytelling response strategy can be used to test speaking. The teacher tells a story then

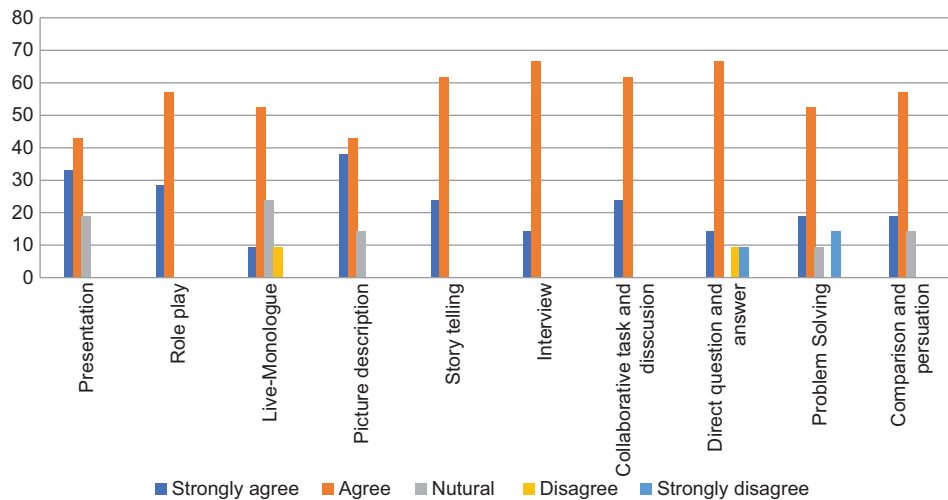


Fig. 1: The strategies for assessing speaking.

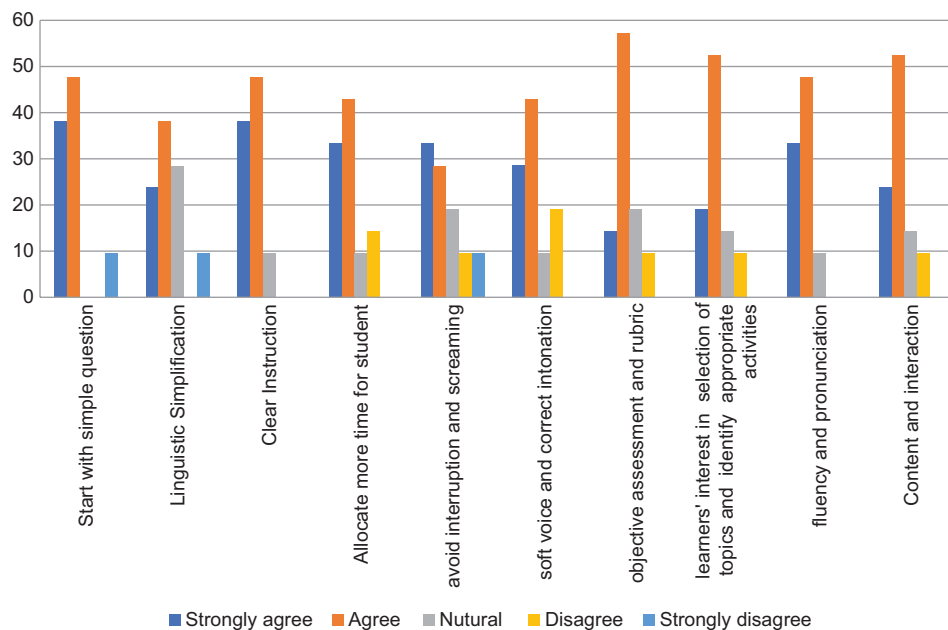


Fig. 2: Part three: Instructors' role in the implementation of speaking assessment.

asks students some questions about what they think about a specific part of the story? or describe one character from the story. Third, comparison and persuasion can be applied to assess students speaking whereby they are presented with two objects events or people to compare between or to persuade someone with certain attitude, perspective.

III. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

A. Population and Sample

The paper has been limited to instructors of Cihan University-Erbil and Salahaddin University-Erbil for the academic year 2022–2023. The population is (21) instructors College of Languages, Education and Basic Education. The instructors who participated in the study are (17) MA holders with current scientific title of Assistant Lecturers and the rest were PhD holders with teaching experience mostly 1–5 years.

B. Data Collection

The data have been collected by questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into three parts; the first part devoted to general information about the participants. While, the second one to the strategies for assessing speaking, and the third part to teachers' role in the implementation of speaking assessment. Furthermore, each part consisted of (10) items. The tool adopted for analyzing the data is IBM-SPSS.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Introductory Notes

This part is devoted to present the process of data analysis of the present study. The data are collected by namely a questionnaire. The analysis of the questionnaire is done by SPSS and Sample responses have been calculated and then the results are transformed to percentages in the bar chart below.

The rating scale of the analysis in the questionnaire is numerical as 1 – strongly agree, 2 – agree, 3 – neutral, 4 – disagree, and 5 – strongly disagree.

B. Analyzing the Instructors' Questionnaire

As shown in Fig. 1 the strategies for assessing speaking. In the response to the items of "5, 6, and 8", 68% of the instructors recommend direct questions and answers, interviews and storytelling as highly effective technique for assessing speaking. Moreover, picture description technique is highly ranked in percentage among instructors who strongly agreed on applying it in their classes.

While, concerning item "3" 28% of the resonance do not mind using this technique from time to time in the sessions. Followed by, items "1, 10) presentation and comparison and persuasion: Which signifies that according to the instructors were adopted from time to time in the sessions to achieve the goal.

As far as items "3 and 8" <10% pointed out their disagreement regarding evaluating students speaking through live-monologue and direct question and answer.

Finally, one can notice that, the only item the respondents strongly disagreed on is item "9" 16% problem solving, which reveals that this technique is not suitable due to some instructors and would not be applied in assessment of students in their sessions.

Fig. 2 presents the instructors' role in the Implementation of Speaking Assessment. In the response to the items of "7, 8, and 10," 58% of the instructors prioritized objective assessment and rubric, taking into consideration the students interest in the topic, and the content of the conversation or discussion in addition to the interaction between the presenter and the listener in the activity or the group discussion as their most efficient role in the assessment process.

While, concerning items "1, and 3," 37% of the resonance supported starting the session with simple questions to create relaxed and motivated environment for discussion. Followed by, giving clear instruction of the activity and the requirements from the participants before or during the activity.

As far as item "2," 28% of instructors indicated that it is normal to facilitate the assessment process by giving linguistic simplification to the speaker. Followed by, items "5, 7" gained equal importance as 18% avoid interruption and set rubrics: Which signifies that according to the instructors avoiding correction and interference while the speaker is trying to express about the topic.

As far as item "6," the major point of instructors disagreed about close to 19% using soft voice and correct intonation during the assessment process.

Finally, one can notice that, the items that the respondents strongly disagreed on are items "1, 2" <10% giving linguistic simplification and starting the lesson with simple questions, which reveals that according to some of response these are not suitable due to decreasing the critical thinking level.

V. CONCLUSION

The concluded points are primarily intended to serve as a link between the previous theoretical background of the paper and the practice part of it, the outcome of the analyzed data.

Having completed the paper and from interpreting the data collected, it is concluded that:

1. The most common strategies applied by the instructors in assessment of speaking sessions were direct question and answer, interview, and storytelling. Furthermore, picture description as highest effective technique. In contrast, the instructors suggested preventing live-monologue and problem solving techniques for assessing speaking.
2. The data analysis presented that the main role that majority of the instructors gave importance to were objective assessment and rubric, taking into consideration the students interest in the topic, and the content of the conversation or discussion in addition to the interaction.
3. During the assessment process giving linguistic simplification and starting the lesson with simple questions, which revealed that according to some of instructors were the minor points to be implemented as their role in the speaking process.

REFERENCES

- Almashy, A. (2017). Issues in testing english as a foreign language speaking skills: A case of Saudi schools. *International Journal of Current Research*, 9, 46460-46461.
- Bapir, N. (2016). *Evaluation Teacher-Made Tests and Central Tests for "General English for University Students" Course at Salahaddin University Erbil*. Erbil: Salahaddin University.
- Gene, E., Çalıřkan, H., & Yuksel, D. (2020). Language assessment literacy level of EFL teachers: A focus on writing and speaking assessment knowledge of the teachers. *Sakarya University Journal of Education*, 10, 274-291.
- Govindasamy, M., & Shah, P.M. (2020). Students' perceptions on collaborative speaking tasks in ESL classrooms. *Creative Education*, 11, 2280-2292.
- Huxham, M., Campbell, F., & Westwood, J. (2010). Oral versus written assessments: A test of student performanc attitudes. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 37, 125-136.
- Khamkhien, A. (2010). Teaching english speaking and english speaking tests in the Thai context: A reflection from thai perspective. *English Language Teaching*, 3, 184-190.
- Nakatsuhara, F. *Onversational Style in Group Oral Tests: How is the Conversation Co-Constructed*. Available from: <https://ethos.bl.uk/orderdetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.499803> [Last accessed on 2009 Feb 26].
- Nation, I., & Newton, J.M. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking*. London: Routledge.
- Nurhalimah, H.N., & Hidayat, D.N. (2020). An exploration of english teachers' beliefs and practices of speaking assessment: Bring english teachers into focus. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, 6, 41-48.
- Schmitt, V. (2010). Teachers' classroom assessment practices. *Middle Grades Research Journal*, 5, 107-117.
- Sullivan, B.O. *Towards a Model of Performance in Oral Language Tests*. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/34018219_Towards_a_model_of_performance_in_oral_language_tests [Last accessed on 2000 Jan 15].
- Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to Teach Speaking*. Edinburg: Edinburg Univerity Press.
- Ur, P. (2012). *A Course in English Language Teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zaim, M., Refnaldi, R., & Arsyad, S. (2020). Authentic assessment for speaking skills: Problem and solution for english secondary school teachers in Indonesia. *International Journal of Instruction*, 13, 587-604.