

Students' perception of speaking assessment in the English education study program

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ABSTRACT

Speaking proficiency is a vital aspect of language learning. Speaking skills have become an orientation that most students encounter in the educational field, particularly in the English Education Study Program. Therefore, this study aims to find out students' perception of the implementation of speaking assessment. Moreover, this study also describes the issues with speaking assessment problems that students encountered. This study used a mixed method research design. The data were collected by distributing close-ended questionnaire and conducting semi-structured interview. The questionnaire adopted the theory, according to Brown (2018), and consisted of 25 items that were divided into five categories of principles in assessment: practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. There were 44 students who filled in the close-ended questionnaire and 8 students as the interview participants. The results of this study show students' positive perceptions of speaking assessments. It indicates that the speaking test is effective because it does not require them to use paper or any other materials (Mean=3,28). The speaking test provides clear rubrics that are applied consistently to assess their speaking skills (Mean=3,20). The speaking test provides opportunities for collaboration and communication activities that can enhance their social skills (Mean=3,43). The difficulty of the topic in the speaking test affects their performance in an oral presentation (Mean=3,20). In addition, an impromptu speaking test with limited preparation time made the students find it difficult.

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1. Introduction

When learning and using languages, there are typically four primary language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Typically, the four primary abilities of reading and writing, speaking and listening are tightly connected (Qizi & Gayratovna, 2021). Speaking is a language skill that supports the teaching of foreign languages, as it serves as the foundation for communication between individuals during interactions. Individuals require communication in order to convey information and express their thoughts (Ghafar & Raheem, 2023). According to Chaney and Burk, speaking is the process of generating and expressing meaning in a variety of contexts through employing both verbal and nonverbal symbols (as cited in Kazemi & Moradi, 2019).

In addition, speaking ability serves as a channel for interpersonal interaction, communication, discussion, and the sharing of individual points of view about their surrounding environment (Raba, 2017). In a study, Kiruthiga and Christopher (2022) stated that speaking is more than just uttering words, it is also about putting ideas into words. On the other hand, Santhanasamy and Yunus (2021) argued that speaking has always been the most challenging ability for learners to take control. According to Vellayan et al., (2020), speaking is one of the four skills, along with reading, writing, and listening that are considered to be most important and in increased demand in our competitive era.

In the classroom, specifically in the English Department, speaking skills are common in daily conversation and also play a part in the students' proficiency. Moreover, learners can utilize their speaking ability when they need to perform competently in their particular field of profession (Rao, 2019). In terms of proficiency in speaking English, assessment is important because the results of the assessment can reveal the current level of students' speaking ability, with subsequent learning and instruction decisions being predicted and designed (Syahidah & Umasugi, 2021). Brown (2018) defines assessment as an ongoing process that results from the interaction between teaching and learning, with the goal of improving student learning. Black and Wiliam (2018) indicated in their study that teachers use the term "assessment for learning" to guide their teaching, while "assessment of learning" refers to the use of assessment to determine the extent to which students have achieved their learning objectives.

According to Brown (2018), speaking assessment as a process in educational settings that assesses an individual's oral communication skills. It is a form of evaluation that measures how effectively an individual can express themselves, convey ideas, and communicate verbally in a given language. According to Sari (2018), speaking proficiency assessments are utilized to ascertain the level of competence that learners possess in verbal communication. According to Fulcher, speaking assessment is a difficult undertaking because oral production requires one's inventiveness (as cited in Qizi & Gayratovna, 2021). According to Brown (2010), an analysis of the speech process commonly recognises the following six components of speaking: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, task, and comprehension.

One aspect of psychology that influences the way we look at something that has been experienced is perception. People may present arguments throughout this process in support of how they perceive things (Hartini & Madya, 2019). According to Goldstein (2012) in his book, perception is concerned with understanding how the senses work in addition to the experiences and behaviors imposed by sensory stimuli. Perception is the decision we make concerning what will catch and maintain our attention, hence, it may have significance based on prior experiences (Qiong, 2017). Perception refers to the belief you have that might undermine or negate a justification (Pryor, 2000).

According to McDonald (2012), perception is a uniquely personal experience. According to Walgito (2010), perception is composed of three elements that establish structure and behavior; they are cognitive, affective, and conative. Hoffman (2016) stated that our perceptions are typically veridical, in the sense of accurately describing the state of the environment. Furthermore, Thornton and Mitchell (2018) describe in order to successfully deal with complexity, it is necessary to form a perception of the other person. In this study, perception refers to the students' interpretations of something can be feelings, impressions, or processes.

In the English Education Study Program at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan in the 2023-2024 academic year, students enrolled in the Speaking in Academic Context class in the fourth semester. The goals of this class are to improve students' speaking skills in an academic context, including proficiency in conducting academic presentations, arguments, and forum group discussions. The preliminary interview results formed the background of this research and aligned with the study's objectives regarding the implementation of a speaking assessment with some 2022–2023 academic year students enrolled in the Speaking in Academic Context class. It indicates that a significant number of students still struggle with speaking assessments, particularly in an academic setting. Furthermore, students are less aware of grammatical structures, a pronunciation that may be difficult to produce accurately, and a limited academic vocabulary that may cause them to struggle to find the right words to manage their thoughts.

The psychological aspect also contributes, as some students face difficulties in doing their speaking performances in English. These challenges include anxiety about speaking English, particularly due to fear of making mistakes or facing judgment from others, as well as a lack of practice that leaves

them unprepared for speaking assessments. The preliminary results reveal some of the challenges students face during speaking assessments. According to Wisker (2005), gaining proficiency in speaking in an academic context is essential for participating in conversations and exchanges involving the need for critical thinking and problem-solving. In addition, conducting assessments helps measure the extent to which students have achieved the learning objectives and outcomes set by the curriculum. According to the Ministry of Education, assessment entails the timely and concentrated collection, analysis, interpretation, and integration of data that can show student improvement (as cited in Brown, 2018).

In the findings presented by Al-Nouh et al., (2015), they found that oral presentation as a form of assessment offers numerous benefits. However, college students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) recognize the difficulties they face when delivering oral presentations. Understanding how students perceive speaking assessments is essential to promoting meaningful learning experiences, particularly in speaking practices in the English education study program. The preliminary interview findings motivated the researcher to investigate students' perceptions of speaking assessments. Furthermore, the researcher is interested in identifying issues with the speaking assessment problem during teaching and learning activities.

2. Method

This research uses mixed methods. The reason for choosing mixed-methods research is that it provides numerous benefits for resolving complex research problems by combining quantitative and qualitative data in a way that simplifies the problem and provides meaningful explanations (Fetters, 2016). According to Creswell (2018), in a sense, combining or integrating the quantitative and qualitative data will provide a better understanding of the problem at present. Quantitative data in the form of numerical data was obtained from questionnaires to answer questions about students' perceptions of speaking assessment. The questionnaire adopted the theory, according to Brown (2018), and consisted of 25 items that were divided into five categories of principles in assessment: practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. Meanwhile, qualitative data in words was obtained from the results of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview contained of indicator that asked participants' perception toward the speaking assessment in terms of issues with the speaking assessment problem.

The research was conducted on fourth-semester students in classes A, B, C, and D, Speaking in Academic Context, majoring in English Education, at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The research was conducted from January 3 to March 24, 2024. The population for data collection were students from the fourth-semester Speaking in Academic Context classes of the English Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (N = 50).

The sample size is always smaller than the population as a whole (Osikhotsali, 2023). This study employs the random sampling technique. According to Sugiyono (2017), the random sampling technique is a simple technique because taking sample members from the population is done randomly without seeing or paying attention to the similarity or strata that exist in the population. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), if the population equals 50 students, the required sample size for quantitative data collection would be 44 students to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was adopted according to Brown (2018) and consisted of 25 items that were divided into five categories of principles in assessment: practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. The questionnaire uses a Likert scale, which is divided into four categories: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Furthermore, the researcher employed interviews to confirm and complete the data obtained from the questionnaire. The semi-structured interview consisted of two indicators that asked participants' perceptions toward the speaking assessment in terms of (1) their feelings toward the assessment and (2) issues with the assessment. Furwana (2019) stated that when measuring something, one must consider the validity of the test. Expert judgment from the English Education Study Program verified the validity of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview.

Table 1. Mean Range of Perceptions Scale Scores

Score	Mean Range	Degree	Interpretation
4	4.00-3.00	Strongly Agree	Positive
3	2.99-2.00	Agree	
2	1.99-1.00	Disagree	Negative
1	1.00-0.99	Strongly Disagree	

Calculating Score

The mean score is calculated using the following formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

\bar{x} : mean

$\sum x$: sum of all score

n : total number of data

The results of the questionnaire were calculated as a mean score and presented in the form of table and descriptions. The questionnaire results were calculated into percentages, means, and level of interpretation. In writing this thesis, there are five stages of data analysis, referring to the analysis model by Creswell (2018):

1. Step 1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis.
2. Step 2. Read or look at all the data.
3. Step 3. Start coding all of the data.
4. Step 4. Generate a description and themes.
5. Step 5. Representing the description.

3. Findings and Discussion

The data related to the students' perceptions of speaking assessments were obtained by distributing closed-ended questions and conducting semi-structured interviews with the subject. The presentation of findings in this part covers five principles of assessment: practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. In addition, the researcher identify the issues with the speaking assessment problem in order to get more detailed information.

3.1. Practicality in Speaking Assessment

Based on the questionnaire results, the researcher attempted to explore the students' perceptions of practicality as a principle in speaking assessment in this study through questionnaire among 44 students of the fourth semester of the English Education Study Program in the Speaking in Academic Context class at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan.

Table 2. Practicality in Speaking Assessment

Statement	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Mean	Degree	Interpretation
1. The instructions for the speaking test given by the lecturer are already clear	23	16	5	0	3.40	Strongly Agree	Positive
2. The speaking test is time-efficient with the appropriate duration	18	21	5	0	3.30	Strongly Agree	Positive
3. The speaking test is effective because it does not require us to use paper or any other materials	17	22	5	0	3.28	Strongly Agree	Positive
4. The deadline for the speaking test given by my lecturer is reachable	15	25	4	0	3.25	Strongly Agree	Positive
5. The frequency of the speaking test is manageable because it does not burden the students	11	27	5	1	3.10	Strongly Agree	Positive

Table 2 shows students' perception of practicality as a principle in Speaking Assessment. Almost all students strongly agree that the instructions for the speaking test given by the lecturer are already clear (Mean= 3.40), which has the highest score. Next, many students strongly agree that the speaking test is time-efficient with the appropriate duration (Mean= 3.30). The speaking test is effective because it does not require them to use paper or any other materials (Mean= 3.28). Moreover, the deadline for the speaking test given by their lecturer is reachable (Mean= 3.25). Furthermore, many students strongly agree that the frequency of the speaking test is manageable because it does not burden the students (Mean= 3.10), a low average score.

3.2. Reliability in Speaking Assessment

According to the questionnaire's findings, the graph below displays the average reliability of the speaking assessment.

Table 3. Reliability in Speaking Assessment

Statement	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Mean	Degree	Interpretation
6. The speaking test provides clear rubrics that are applied consistently to assess my speaking skills	16	22	5	1	3.20	Strongly Agree	Positive
7. The rubric criteria for the speaking test is understandable	17	24	3	0	3.31	Strongly Agree	Positive
8. The speaking test rubric covers certain criteria of speaking (grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary)	21	21	2	0	3.43	Strongly Agree	Positive
9. The speaking test given by the lecturer is always done fairly	19	21	4	0	3.34	Strongly Agree	Positive
10. The result of the speaking test reflects my speaking competency	20	22	2	0	3.40	Strongly Agree	Positive

Based on the research results on the reliability in speaking assessment, almost all students strongly agree that the speaking test rubric covers certain criteria of speaking, such as, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary (Mean= 3.43). These results are in line with a theory from Brown (2004), an analysis of the speech process commonly recognises the following five components of speaking: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, task and comprehension. In addition, many students strongly agree that the result of the speaking test reflects their speaking competency (Mean= 3.40). Moreover, the speaking test given by the lecturer is always done fairly (Mean= 3.34). Furthermore, the rubric criteria for the speaking test is understandable (Mean= 3.31). The speaking test also provides clear rubrics that are applied consistently to assess their speaking skills (Mean= 3.20). Supported with study from Crosthwaite et al., (2016) that the assessment rubric employed should be clear in terms of good performance.

3.3. Validity in Speaking Assessment

According to the questionnaire's findings, the graph below displayed the average validity as a principle in speaking assessment.

Table 4. Validity in Speaking Assessment

Statement	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Mean	Degree	Interpretation
11. The implementation of the speaking test is relevant to the learning objectives in the syllabus	16	25	2	1	3.27	Strongly Agree	Positive
12. The speaking test always requires me to present ideas academically	17	23	4	0	3.29	Strongly Agree	Positive

13. The speaking test provides structured key points (relevant theories, evidence, explanations, and examples) to support an academic presentation	17	25	2	0	3.34	Strongly Agree	Positive
14. The speaking test in the form of presentations helps me improve my speaking skills	23	18	3	0	3.45	Strongly Agree	Positive
15. The difficulty of the topic in the speaking test affects my performance in an oral presentation	12	29	3	0	3.20	Strongly Agree	Positive

According to the results on the validity in speaking assessment, almost all students strongly agree that the speaking test in the form of presentations helps them improve their speaking skills (Mean= 3.45). As supported by the study from Ati and Parmawati (2022), an approach that can be employed to improve students' speaking abilities while learning English is oral presentation. In addition, many students strongly agree that the speaking test provides structured key points such as relevant theories, evidence, explanations, and examples, to support an academic presentation (Mean= 3.34). Moreover, the speaking test always requires them to present ideas academically (Mean= 3.29). Furthermore, the implementation of the speaking test is relevant to the learning objectives in the syllabus (Mean= 3.27). Almost all students strongly agree that the difficulty of the topic in the speaking test affects their performance in an oral presentation (Mean= 3.20). This finding is in line with research conducted by Nurlinda (2017), the difficulty of the topic is the reason behind students' low performance in an oral presentation.

3.4. Authenticity in Speaking Assessment

Based on the questionnaire's findings, the graph below displayed the average authenticity as a principle in speaking assessment.

Table 5. Authenticity in Speaking Assessment

Statement	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Mean	Degree	Interpretation
16. The speaking test reflects my communication skills encountered in real-world situations	16	25	3	0	3.29	Strongly Agree	Positive
17. The speaking test provides opportunities for me to choose topics relevant to my life	18	23	3	0	3.34	Strongly Agree	Positive
18. The speaking test provides opportunities for collaboration and communication activities that can enhance my social skills	19	25	0	0	3.43	Strongly Agree	Positive
19. The speaking test allows me to demonstrate my critical thinking that contributes to my daily life	17	22	5	0	3.27	Strongly Agree	Positive
20. The speaking test in this class is suited for my needs and preferences	17	24	2	1	3.29	Strongly Agree	Positive

Based on the results on the authenticity in speaking assessment, most of students are strongly agree that the speaking test provides opportunities for collaboration and communication activities that can enhance their social skills (Mean= 3.43). These result supports Raba (2017) statement that speaking ability serves as a channel for interpersonal interaction, communication, discussion, and the sharing of individual points of view about their surrounding environment. Moreover, the speaking test provides opportunities for them to choose topics relevant to their life (Mean= 3.34). Next, the two research results have similar scores. First, students strongly agree with the speaking test which reflects their communication skills encountered in real-world situations (Mean= 3.29). This finding is in

accordance with Guebba (2021) that the speaking tasks offer students the chance to engage in the practical application of real-life speaking. Moreover, the experience of implementing the assignments will demonstrate the students' competence in using the language in real-life situations (Inayah et al., 2019). Second, students strongly agree that the speaking test in this class is suited for their needs and preferences (Mean= 3.29). In addition, the speaking test allows them to demonstrate the critical thinking that contributes to their daily life (Mean= 3.27). This finding is in accordance with Wisker (2005), that acquiring proficient academic speaking skills is important for actively engaging in discussions and exchanges that involve critical thinking and the ability to solve problems.

3.5. Washback in Speaking Assessment

According to the questionnaire's results, the graph below displayed the average washback as a principle in speaking assessment.

Table 6. Washback in Speaking Assessment

Statement	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Mean	Degree	Interpretation
21. The implementation of the speaking test does not encourage me to improve my speaking skills	0	2	10	32	1.31	Disagree	Negative
22. The speaking test has a positive effect on reflecting my understanding of the materials	16	25	3	0	3.29	Strongly Agree	Positive
23. The types of speaking tests employed in the class encourage me to actively engage in oral communication practices	11	27	4	2	3.06	Strongly Agree	Positive
24. The feedback given in the speaking test influences my subsequent speaking performance	17	24	1	2	3.30	Strongly Agree	Positive
25. The structure of the speaking test in academic presentations significantly influences my learning strategies	16	23	4	1	3.22	Strongly Agree	Positive

Based on the results on the washback in speaking assessment, almost all students strongly agree that the feedback given in the speaking test influences their subsequent speaking performances (Mean= 3.30). This statement supports Muslem et al., (2021) that feedback, regardless of whether it is given orally or in written form, is considered a means to improve a student's learning. In addition, the speaking test has a positive effect on reflecting their understanding of the materials (Mean= 3.29). Furthermore, many students strongly agree that the structure of the speaking test in academic presentations significantly influences their learning strategies (Mean= 3.22). The students reported that the types of speaking tests used in class encourage them to actively engage in oral communication practices (Mean= 3.06). Moreover, many students strongly disagree that the implementation of the speaking test does not encourage them to improve their speaking skills (Mean= 1.31).

3.6. The Issues of the Speaking Assessment Problems

The interviews revealed that each student expressed individual viewpoints regarding the speaking assessment issues. The student felt burdened by an impromptu speaking test with limited preparation time. He says, "In my opinion, an impromptu speaking test where you are only given a short time and then suddenly told to go to the front of the class to present the topic is very difficult." The problem is that the preparation is tight, so there needs to be additional time, and because the topic is quite heavy, in my opinion, looking for one source is not enough." Students also mentioned that the difficult topics impacted their ability to find supporting information. He says, "The topic was probably the most difficult when it came to gathering the necessary data from the speaking test." This result matches two studies. First, according to Nurlinda (2017) research that the difficulty of the topic is the reason behind students' low performance in an oral presentation. Second, a study by Kiruthiga and Christopher (2022), when it comes to speaking, students need to understand the content in order to produce language. The students also mentioned that sharing the assessment rubric with them was

considered very important to review the components periodically to improve their preparation. She says, *"In terms of speaking assessment...The RPS typically requires the lecturer to explain the rubric during the first meeting, but we are interested in knowing the specifics. If the lecturer provides it, students can prepare themselves to avoid immediate surprise."*

In addition, the lecturer simplified the rubric assessment by adjusting the weight of the criteria to match the students' abilities. She says, *"About the assessment rubric, it is too high; if at the beginning it is burdensome when the score comes out, the weight of the rubric was lowered by my lecturer."* This finding is in accordance with Inayah et al., (2019), teachers can modify and simplify the rubric assessment to align with the level of competence of the learners. In addition, students encountered internal struggles within themselves, such as incorrect pronunciation of certain words, speaking anxiety, and a lack of supporting data. She says, *"Sometimes I get nervous because I personally lack good speaking skills and a limited vocabulary. I have already prepared myself to say blah, blah, blah, and sometimes I forget."* This result supports research by Ghafar et al., (2023), which states that the occurrence of speaking anxiety in the classroom can be linked to the wide range of language proficiency levels demonstrated by the students. In addition, students reported that there are group friends who are less willing to work together. She says, *"Perhaps the external obstacles are caused by friends who can be difficult to collaborate with and learn from."* This result is the same as Ghafar et al., (2023) study, which raised another concern pertaining to the lack of participation in the speaking class.

Meanwhile, some students expressed positive opinions about their class's speaking assessment. The students expressed satisfaction with the speaking test's effective completion. In addition, the speaking assessment was relevant to the assessment principle, which included clear components that ensured both cost and fairness. Other students also mentioned that every step and progression of the speaking test was clear. Lecturers always provide feedback to students to help them evaluate their performance in speaking assessments. Lecturers provide feedback both verbally and through written forms. They say, *"The lecturer consistently motivated us that it's acceptable to make mistakes as we collectively learn and that it's acceptable to rectify mistakes for future improvement. If our work is correct, we can sustain it. Regarding the assessment itself, there aren't many challenges to overcome. Because the lecturer always made room for us to improve, we really learned together."*

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion of this research, the researcher concludes that the students' perceptions of the speaking assessment were positive. Students express positive perceptions about the speaking assessment, such as that the test is effective because it does not require them to use paper or any other materials (Mean= 3.28). Moreover, the speaking test rubric covers certain criteria of speaking, such as grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary (Mean= 3.43). Furthermore, the speaking test provides structured key points such as relevant theories, evidence, explanations, and examples to support an academic presentation (Mean= 3.34). Also, the feedback given in the speaking test influences their subsequent speaking performance (Mean= 3.30).

According to the results of the interview, there are issues encountered in speaking assessment based on the students' perceptions. The issue was that students felt burdened by an impromptu speaking test with limited preparation time and a difficult topic. Furthermore, sharing the assessment rubric with them was considered very important to review the components periodically to improve their preparation. The impact was that it affected students' performance when finding supporting information, and it was difficult to deliver the presentation.

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