Oral Assessment in EFL Class: Is it a burden?

Dian Asti Anggraeni[1]) , Rita Endriyati[2]), Bambang Widi Pratolo[3])
[1]Universitas Ahmad Dahlan
email: dian1708042048@webmail.uad.ac.id
[2]Universitas Ahmad Dahlan
email: rita.endri82@gmail.com

Abstract

EFL teachers need to create chances and opportunities for their students to be able to use English as much as possible. They need to design the teaching learning proses and the assessment that can make the students speak spontaneously in English and show their English proficiency level. However, assessing spoken language is not easy. The students could experience some stress, nervous, or unconfident when they aware that they become focus of their teacher's or their friends' attention. As a result their English proficiency during the assessment was not their real capability. Students' perception and students' involvement should be considered in order to make the teaching and learning process will be more effective and efficient. The research purpose was to find out about the EFL students' perceptions of the implementation of oral assessment in English Classroom in higher education context. Descriptive analysis was applied for this research. The Data were obtained from a Google form questionnaire and depth interview. 65 students were asked to complete questionnaire and 7 students were interviewed. The result of the research is the students' perception of oral assessment is positive but it should be followed by the adequate time to prepare to reduce the anxiety factor and the scoring criteria should be clear.

Keywords: *Students' perception, EFL, oral assessment*

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Research

English is a foreign language for the people in Indonesia. It means that they do not use English as a means of communication in their daily life. However, English is taught in school, college, and university and it is considered to be one of the important subjects that the students in Indonesia need to master. In relation to the globalization, Indonesian government is very concerned and decided to make the students learn how to communicate in English. English then has become a burden for some of the Indonesian students. The students especially in higher education think English is their nightmare. They need to learn the grammar, they need to learn how to speak and how to pronounce the words, they have to be able to pass the minimum requirement score of English proficiency test but they cannot use it easily because there are only a few people can speak or communicate in English. They do not have chances or the opportunity to listen, speak, read, or write in English. The only time they can practice or apply English is in the classroom with their EFL teachers. It means that EFL teachers are bound to face many challenges. They need to create chances and opportunities for their students to be able to use English as much as possible.

The EFL students need to prove their English proficiency. They need to apply what they have learned, such as grammatical rules and vocabularies, and use it in the form of communication. They need to understand what their partner said and give their response. The students of higher education should also be prepared to be able to speak in front of the public. They need to be familiar with oral presentation, interview or give speech in front of audience because those are what they will do in their class in higher education and in their future career.

Moreover, the students' abilities to communicate orally and spontaneously are the evidence that their learning process is rewarding. So, many EFL teachers are trying to make their classes more communicative. They need to design the teaching learning proses and the assessment that can make the students speak spontaneously in English and show their English proficiency.

In English Language Testing in Indonesia, authentic assessment has been promoted to be implemented in English teaching and learning process. Authentic assessment is a "form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks to demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills" (Mueller, 2016). The authentic assessment is usually done in the form performance based assessment and it could be in written or oral assessment. In higher education, the public speaking skills are very important to be mastered so oral assessments are preferred nowadays.

Oral assessment has become popular subject of current research. Oral assessment makes the students speak spontaneously so the teachers are able to find out about the students' English proficiency. Oral assessment includes any assessment of student learning that is conducted, wholly or in part, by word of mouth (Joughin, 2010). According to Hughes (2003), Oral tests serve many purposes. Those purposes are to measure language proficiency, to assess achievement of the objectives of a course of study, to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses, to identify what they do and don't know, and to assist in the placement of learners within a teaching program. Furthermore, he also outlines three general formats for assessing oral skills, one-on-one interview with an interviewer, paired or group interaction and voice-recorded speech (Hughes, 2003). However, it is believed that assessing spoken language is not easy.

The students in university get English lesson as one of the compulsory subject. It means that everybody is expected to be able to communicate in English in this industrial era. Nowadays, it is very easy to get information from all over the world. It will also open so many opportunities for the students to work in another country after they graduated from the university. On the other hand, that will also mean the people from all over the world will easily come and work in Indonesia. Their rival will not be only Indonesian anymore but people from all over the world. Based on the preliminary observation, the students have many different level of ability in English, especially their spoken skill. However, the students who enrolled in English were assessed in the form of spoken or oral assessment only. They had to pass three oral assessments to evaluate their learning process and submit two oral performance assignments in the form of video recording as essential requirements of their score. They have been asked to do oral presentation, they had one-on-one interview with the lecturer, they had to tell a past experience story in front of the class, they have performed role play in pairs and in groups in front of the class, they have interviewed some foreigners, and they have been asked to record a monolog video, group video, or advertisement.

However, performing in front of the class and even in front of their lecturer is not easy to be done. The students were often faltered and some of them even skipped the class to avoid the performance. They made some excuses in order to perform the oral assessment. Some of the students were trembling so hard in front of the lecturer even before they started to speak and in the end they did not remember what they have learned previously. It means that the students have difficulties in being assessed orally and it makes me questioning the result of the assessment whether it was valid and reliable or not because it seems that it was not their real capability. Is it fair for the students to be assess just based on their oral performance?

This study, therefore, is aimed to examine the EFL students' perceptions of the implementation of oral assessment in English Classroom in higher education context.

The objectives of the Research

The research purpose was to find out about the EFL students' perceptions of the implementation of oral assessment in English Classroom in higher education context. The result of this research will be very helpful for the teacher to design the teaching learning material and assessment in the future, for the stakeholders to understand and provide the students requirements better and for the students to understand the importance of assessment so they can be more prepared and do their best. The research questions for this research paper are:

1. What are the EFL students' perceptions of the oral assessment? What kinds of oral assessment that the students prefer?
2. What factors are affected the students' performance during oral assessment?

A. Literature Review

According to Larry Davis (2009: 367) a lot of different factors are interrelated to ultimately produce a score in spoken or oral language assessment. The teacher does not know what the students think and feel about the assignment or assessment and the students could experience some stress, nervous, or unconfident when they aware that they become the focus of their teacher's or their friends' attention.

The lecturer should try to find a better way to make the assessment less burdensome. One of the way that the lecturer or teacher can try is they should listen and consider to their students' perception and make the students involve in the teaching and learning process therefore the teaching and learning process will be more effective and efficient.

The students' involvement is quite necessary in assessment. According to Bachman and Palmer (2010:107) "One way to promote the potential for positive consequences of assessment use is through involving test takers in the development of the assessment, as well as collecting information from them about their perceptions of the assessment and the assessment tasks." Students as the one who take the test or being assess will think that assessment is not something that they need to be scared of. They know how to get a better result and they will be motivated.

However, although there are a lot of discussions about the importance of the students' involvement, the researches that have been done are still narrow. The evidences that supports whether students' attitudes and perceptions of assessment are taken into consideration especially for oral assessment are still limited. Some of the study focused on oral presentation as an assessment tool. The research discussed oral presentation exclusively or compared it to written assignment such as the research that had done by Akindele & Trennepohl in 2014. A large number of studies investigated the effect of anxiety on oral performance (Joughin, 2007). This kind of research focused on the factors that made the oral assessment is difficult to be done. Meanwhile, the other research covered how competence is compared to performance in oral presentations (Alwi & Sidhu, 2013). The study about oral assessment that conducted by Anna Muñoz and Mart E. Alvarez in 2010 was concentrated on the wash back effect of oral assessment and the results showed positive effect in some of the areas examined and that means that oral assessment has a positive effect in the English teaching and learning process (Muñoz & E. Alvarez, 2010). Furthermore, the researches were usually done in English as Second Language (ESL) contexts not in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The most recent research in EFL context was focused on the difficulties in oral presentation as s a Form of Assessment (Al-Nouh; Abdul & Taqi, 2015). Hence, research providing more detailed insight into the students' perception of the implementation of oral assessment in EFL higher-education settings as a form of assessment needs to be conducted.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was Qualitative method. Descriptive analysis was applied as the approach of the analysis. The participants of the study are the students of private university in Yogyakarta who were enrolled in English Class and the course is called English for Daily Usage. The course had three oral assessments to evaluate their learning process and two oral performance

assignments in the form of video recording as essential requirements to fulfil their scorein one semester. English is a compulsory subject and one credit semester was given because English was considered as a practicum subject.

The data were collected through the students' response of questionnaire and depth interview. The questionnaire were 20-items with a five-point Likert-type Scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree) that was self-developed by researcher in order to investigate participants' perceptions of the implementation of oral assessment. The questionnaire consisted of three categories in which the researcher wants to prove that those have effect to the students' performance during oral assessment and the questions about the students' preferences of assessment. The categories are (1) preparedness, (2) anxiety, and (3) English proficiency. Questions in the category on preparedness are asked to find out whether the students' preparation had an effect to their performance and what kind of preparation they did before they faced an oral assessment. Consisting of two items, the preparedness section was on the question number 2 and 16. There were 4 questions for the anxiety category. They were on the number 1, 3, 4, and 5. Those questions were asked to find out whether the students felt anxious before or during the assessment. The last category was dealing with their English proficiency. Consisting of seven items, the questions for the students English proficiency level were on the number 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, and 19. The questions were asked to find out whether their English speaking ability affected their performance during oral assessment. The questions about their preferences of what kind of assessment could be found on the number 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 20. The respondents for the questionnaire were 65 students. The questionnaire were designed and distributed by using Google Form. Google Forms is a free tool from Google. It allows you to create forms such as questionnaire, surveys, or quizzes. You can also ask your students to submit their writing, picture, or file directly, and they can complete the forms online and Google form will collect all the responses in a spread sheet, and even provide you with the summaries of the collected data. It can also show you the charts or graphs based on the response (Curts, 2016). The students got the form in the form of a link and they finished the questionnaire from their mobile phone.

In order to proof the reliability and the validity of the data, the researcher also did one-on-one interview. The respondents of the interview were seven students who enrolled in an English class in the odd semester in the academic year of 2018/2019. The students were from different major and they were chosen randomly. All interviews were conducted by the researcher. The interviews were conducted in the students' first language and were recorded. Each interview took between 3-6 minutes. The audio recording was transcribed and the data were analysed manually by doing categorization.

3. RESULTS FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The first research question aimed to find out EFL students' overall perceptions the EFL students' perceptions of the oral assessment and how the students perceived the purposes and practices of oral assessments. The questions about their preferences of what kind of assessment could be found on the number 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 20. The questions were about oral presentation, interview, oral performance in the form of video recording, and role play. The result of the questionnaire showed that 27% of the respondents did not have a problem with oral presentation as an assessment tool. The number of respondents who did not like to be assessed orally was the same as the respondents who did not have problem in being assessed orally. This questionnaire results were also supported by the result of the data analysis of the interview. Most of the respondents prefer to have an oral assessment in English class. Respondent 1 (R1) stated, *"I enjoy doing oral assessment. I do not feel nervous because I like to speak in front of the teacher or my friends.* The Second respondent or R2 also stated her preference. She said, *"I prefer to have an oral assessment because I do not like reading in English. In oral assessment, I*

can just speak based on what I think of meanwhile if I need to memorize something from book, I have to be very thorough."

Hence, many students chose neutral in the questionnaire. From the interview, the researcher found the meaning of their neutral side was sometime they liked it but sometimes they dislike it. R3 stated, "*I like it because I can practice to speak in English, it will make me more confident. However, I do not like to be assessed orally because I think I still lack of vocabularies.*" This statement was supported by the statement of the fifth respondent. R5 said in her interview that she felt nervous during oral assessment but she liked both written and oral assessment. Thus, based on questioner results and the interview, in general the students' perceptions towards the oral assessment were positive. Furthermore, the students preferred to have oral presentation as the form of the assessment. This was supported by the result of the questionnaire. The oral presentation was chosen by 27% of the respondents. Meanwhile, only 10 students preferred interview, 11 students chose producing some video, and 12 people picked role play. R4 mentioned in the interview that the use of oral presentation, interview, and role plays, etc. were more effective to make the students practice to speak in English. "It is boring to only listen to the lecturer explanation. Presentation is more challenging," she added.

The second research question could be discussed in the three major terms. They are preparedness, anxiety, and English proficiency level.

3.1 Preparedness

Be prepared and well prepared are the key to have a satisfying result in every situation especially during test, exam and assessment. Preparation time have strong effects for immediate performance and gradual performance so students should not disregarding the importance of the preparation and apply the suitable language learning strategies to avoid the troubles during oral assessment (Bensnes (2016), Restrepo & Medina (2014), Abad & Alzate (2016)). The teachers need to be able to help the students to apply learning strategies when they are preparing for an assessment, every kind of assessment. Good memory, speedy recollection and students' ability to express their ideas and opinions can make oral assessment less intimidating. Practicing and understanding the scoring system helps students to perform better.

The preparation of EFL students before they had an oral assessment can be seen both in the results of questionnaire and interview. The result of the questionnaire presented 19% were strongly agree and 57,1% of them were agree with the statement of "I prepare and memorize the material several days before the assessment." Furthermore, they result of the questioner also displayed the percentage of more than 58% in the statement that indicated the preparation have to be done because the students could not cheat during oral examination.

The interview to the every respondent also had the same result that supported the questionnaire result. Most of the students at least prepared for the assessment one day before the assessment schedule. According to the students, their preparation was depended on the assessment material. It could be long or short. It could take days or just a minute before they had the assessment. They believe that the preparation would make them performed better during the assessment.

3.2 Anxiety

A test might encourage learners to do their homework, take the subject being tested more seriously, and so on and it is also noted that a 'good' test, on the other hand, could have adverse effects by bringing about learner anxiety (Alderson & Wall, 1993: 117-118). In the questionnaire, the statements on the number 1, 3, 4, and 5 were intended to find out about the anxiety on the students during oral assessment. Many researches were already conducted in anxiety. Horwitz (1986) believes that anxiety in speaking a certain language can affect students' performance. It can influence the quality of oral language production and make individuals appear less fluent than they really are (Sylvia and Tiono, 2004). Burns and Joyce in Nunan (1999); Schwartz (2005); and Thornbury (2005) argue that psychological factors such as anxiety

or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of mistakes are the factors commonly that hinder students from speaking.

Based on the data analysis, the EFL students also experienced anxiety during the oral assessment in the classroom. 58,7% students were agree and 14,3% were strongly agree to the statement "I feel nervous during assessment." This result showed that more than a half number of the participants were nervous before and during the assessment. Moreover, the interview also had the same outcome. R3 stated, "I got nervous easily. If I got nervous, I would not remember the English words that I have learned before. I tried my best to complete the assessment." R6 respondent had the same opinion but she added that she felt uneasy only in the beginning. She said that after a while she would feel relaxed. The anxiety also had relation to the students' preparedness. The participants were asked about the spontaneous oral assessment and the respond was they were not confident to do an oral assessment directly or without any preparation. It means that as long as the students had time to prepare they would perform better because the level of anxiety was lower. R6 shared that opinion. She said, "I am not afraid about the oral assessment because I always prepared myself before any assessment."

3.3 English Proficiency Level

The lack of vocabulary, grammar and fluency made the students self-conscious of their own English proficiency level during an oral assessment. According to King (2002:403), speaking in public such as in the form of oral presentation can actually undermined students' confidence and is ineffective in developing students' oral proficiency because students (are) put on the spot. Moreover, Bukhsh and Rasul (2011: 2043) state "examination system has extrinsic, intrinsic and personal factors, which affect directly or indirectly on students' performance in examination." One of the personal factors were the students were afraid of making any mistakes when they needed to speak in English. During the interview, R1 stated, "The difficulties are sometimes the lecturer uses the unfamiliar words, or when I could not understand my lecturer's questions. Sometimes I know the answer but I could not express myself in English." The meaning of the previous statement is the students had some difficulties during oral assessment and it was related to their English proficiency level such as lack of vocabulary, made a grammatical error, wrong pronunciation and not fluent yet in English. "The problem is I am afraid to make any mistake when I have to speak in English." added R4. The difficulties related closely to the students motivation and self-confidence. The students were reported to have higher motivation to learn new vocabularies and practice to pronounce some words correctly in the oral assessment preparation. R6 and R7 stated that the oral assessment motivated them to memorize some new vocabularies related to the assessment, learned the grammatical rules and sentence structure when they make draft for their presentation or dialogue, and they practiced to deliver the speech or oral performance over and over again.

4. CONCLUSION

The result of the research indicated that the EFL students had quite positive perception of oral assessment and oral assessment can be used to assess the students' English proficiency. However, the oral assessment should be followed by the adequate time to prepare and the clear explanation of scoring criteria. It is also important to reduce the anxiety factor so the students would perform better. The students were nervous but they still enjoyed the oral assessment in English classroom. The students believed that the assessment made them more confident and motivated them to improve their English proficiency level. In other words, the EFL students find that oral assessment as a challenge that can help to improve their spoken ability and their English eventually.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

[Creswell,_J.]_Research_design_Qualitative,_Quant(b-ok.xyz) FOURTH ED. (n.d.).

Abad, J., & Alzate, P. (2016, 1 28). Strategies Instruction to Improve the Preparation for English Oral Exams. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 18*(1), 129-147.

Ataç, B. (2012). *The journal of language and linguistic studies.* (Vol. 8). Www.jlls.org.

Farrall, M. (2012). Oral Language Assessment. In M. Farrall, *Reading Assessment* (pp. 139-161). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Galaczi, E. (2008, 4 24). Peer–Peer Interaction in a Speaking Test: The Case of the <i>First Certificate in English</i> Examination. *Language Assessment Quarterly, 5*(2), 89-119.

Galaczi, E. (2014, 12). Interactional Competence across Proficiency Levels: How do Learners Manage Interaction in Paired Speaking Tests? *Applied Linguistics, 35*(5), 553-574.

Gan, Z., Oon, E., & Davison, C. (2017, 12 4). ESL students' oral performance in English language school-based assessment: results of an empirical study. *Language Testing in Asia, 7*(1), 19.

Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M., & Cope, J. (1986, 22). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125.

Hughes, A. (2002). *Testing for Language Teachers.* Cambridge University Press.

Jane King, jane [at] mail.scu.edu.tw, & Soochow University (Taipei, T. (n.d.). *King - Preparing EFL Learners for Oral Presentations I-TESL-J.* Retrieved from http://iteslj.org/Lessons/King-PublicSpeaking.html

Johannessen, S. (2018). Oral assessment in the English subject. Teachers' understandings of what to assess. *100.*

Joughin, G. (2007, 6 12). Student conceptions of oral presentations. *Studies in Higher Education, 32*(3), 323-336.

Joughin, G., Leeds Metropolitan University., & University of Wollongong. (2010). *A short guide to oral assessment.* Leeds Met Press in association with University of Wollongong.

Kerby, D., & Romine, J. (2009, 12 31). Develop Oral Presentation Skills Through Accounting Curriculum Design and Course-Embedded Assessment. *Journal of Education for Business, 85*(3), 172-179.

Kramsch, C. (1986, 24). From Language Proficiency to Interactional Competence. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(4), 366.

Laborda, J., Juan, N., & Bakieva, M. (2015, 6). Co-participation in Oral Paired Interviews: Preliminary Findings of the OPENPAU Project. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 191*, 559-563.

Lazaraton, A., & Davis, L. (2008, 11 11). A Microanalytic Perspective on Discourse, Proficiency, and Identity in Paired Oral Assessment. *Language Assessment Quarterly, 5*(4), 313-335.

Maulidah, I. (2018). Vlog: the Mean to Improve Students' Speaking Ability. Atlantis Press.

May, L. (2009, 7 24). Co-constructed interaction in a paired speaking test: The rater's perspective. (L. Taylor, & G. Wigglesworth, Eds.) *Language Testing, 26*(3), 397-421.

Mueller, J. (2005). *The Authentic Assessment Toolbox: Enhancing Student Learning through Online Faculty Development.*

Mueller, J. (2016). *Authentic Assessment Toolbox Home Page.* Retrieved from : http://jfmueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm

Mukundan, J., Hajimohammadi, R., & Nimehchisalem, V. (2016, 3 14). Developing An English Language Textbook Evaluation Checklist. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER), 4*(6), 21.

Muñoz, A., & Álvarez, M. (2010, 1). Washback of an oral assessment system in the EFL classroom. *Language Testing, 27*(1), 33-49.

Muñoz, A., Palacio, M., & Escobar, L. (2012). Teachers' Beliefs About Assessment in an EFL Context in Colombia. *Profile Issues in Teachers` Professional Development, 14*(1), 143-158.

Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching & learning.* Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Nurhidayah, :. (n.d.). *AN ANALYSIS ON THE STUDENTS' ABILITY IN WRITING NARRATIVE TEXT AT GRADE IX MTs ALI IMRON MEDAN SKRIPSI Submitted to Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teachers Training as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Sarjana Pendidikan.*

Prasetyo, H. (2018, 6 28). PAIRED ORAL TESTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW. *Language and Language Teaching Journal, 21*(Supplement), 105-110.

Sumardi, S. (2017, 11 13). PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT AS A CURRENT TREND IN ELT: INVESTIGATING ITS WASHBACK EFFECTS ON SECONDARY-SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARNING. *Kajian Linguistik dan Sastra, 2*(1), 1.

Terry, R., & Hughes, A. (2006, 8 16). Testing for Language Teachers. *The Modern Language Journal, 74*(3), 383.

Tragant, E., & Muñoz', C. (2004). *Second Language Acquisition and Language Teaching.*

Wang, B., Teo, T., & Yu, S. (2017, 3 15). Teacher feedback to student oral presentations in EFL classrooms: a case study. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 43*(2), 262-264.