

# Alternative Assessment Practices and Difficulties on EFL Students' Speaking Skill

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines emerging strategies and problems of alternative assessment for the teacher. Although the concept of an alternate test or an instructor appraisal is a different assessment approach than traditional methods, speaking skill remains a good learning process. The participants of this study were two EFL teachers with classroom teaching experience and alternative assessment practices. This study is qualitative research that used semi-structured interview to evaluate the data and that is the main data from this study. The objectives of this study are: (1) to explain the alternative assessment used by the teachers for evaluating EFL speaking skills, and (2) to describe the challenge faced by English teachers in conducting alternative assessments of EFL speaking skills. The findings showed that English teachers usually use multiple methods, such as peer evaluation and student observation in the class. Teachers focused on their communicative ability and provided authentic material for many group activities to use alternate assessment strategies. Teachers strengthened student participation in activities like role-playing, so that short dialogues, plays, discussions, and presentations could be captured. Teachers have already compiled the students' observations, addressed the exam elements, and posed issues in order to resolve learners. English teachers had difficulties in carrying out alternative assessments of EFL students' speaking abilities like a weak pronunciation and grammar, and a lack of vocabularies among students that makes their students less comfortable and motivated. Teachers also have had not enough time to assess all their learners' credentials.

**Keywords:** *Alternative assessment, EFL students, speaking skill*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is one of the main elements of education. This helps determine whether the students learned or acquired language elements from the instructor of a foreign language in students whose language abilities are limited and can interact with them. That means the teacher's assessment that the students' capacity needs to be known. That ensures the appraisal the instructor needs to know the magnitude of the abilities of the students. It is also necessary to assess the process of teaching and learning depending on the ability level of students.

McNamara [1] said the alternative assessment differs from traditional paper and pencil assessment, which encourages students to demonstrate abilities that cannot be evaluated by multiple-choice tests. It's a different assessment. It also includes approaches for analyzing linguistic learning and performance without examining them [1] [2]. Such a style of the appraisal can be incorporated into the classroom more effectively than conventional. This assessment is much more specific to any student, in addition to the simple details to grasp.

This promotes awareness and improves educational exposure and equity [3]. Lizasoain [4] said traditional assessments normally evaluate performance instead of competence. Nevertheless, the language production of people does not reflect the basic knowledge automatically. The study also indicates that modern tests test more skill than traditional. In reality, by writing and oral tests, the conservative concept of alternative assessment supports traditional assessments. Conservative teachers focus on preparing students with a good result in external or internal summative tests, and an alternative assessment is called destruction as they do not see this as leading to improved performance in the final exams. They do not deny the value of alternative evaluation in learning, but they think that it can be an enhancement to existing practices only if it does not interfere with the preparation of students for final examination.

The realistic idea of alternative assessments reflects on the efficacy of different types of assessment and the need for improvement in order for each student to achieve desired results. Teachers with a practical concept recognize the limitations of conventional

assessment and thus make use, in order to complement existing practice, of alternative and traditional evaluations as complementary paradigms that are mutually compatible and enriching. The progressive definition of the alternative assessment highlights the need for the teaching process to reflect on making developmental results that go beyond the curriculum and outside the time limits of the academic year. Innovative teachers see alternative evaluations as progressive developments, emphasizing the inadequacy of conventional assessment in assessing learning results that students may apply in their future lives while emphasizing the advantages of alternative evaluation within the same framework.

A number of alternative assessments may be carried out: assessment of the skills and skills of students in open type problem solving, self-assessment of students, student portfolio assessment, individual and collaborative student projects and so forth. Roberts and Kellough [5] list alternate assessment form like: videos, audio and video, check lists, diaries, journalistic projects, mind mapping, etc. Quite much in literature, related ideas is discovered as an authentic assessment, which is a type of alternative assessment that incorporates assessment of academic content into an assessment of lifelong learning skills of students. The performance assessment is also a concept that requires students in a practical situation related to real life to develop, show or incorporate knowledge and skills.

Alternative assessment seeks to evaluate the reasoning and interpretation skills of students, their capacity to adapt expertise in different contexts and their comprehension of the link between concepts. The advantage is that a multitude of data regarding the comprehension of students can be obtained, as it allows students to interpret, illustrate or justify responses. The assessment is student-centered and aims at allowing students to take on the learning process and track it. It forms an integral part of learning environments and allows students to develop, introduce and replicate their own learners through a large spectrum of cognitive and metacognitive skills [6], [7], [8]. Alternative assessments also include the assessment of students' results through an informal and continuing method [5]. It is time-consuming rather than conventional and enables teachers to be more trained in role design, which encourages students to talk about ideas and not simply to repeat information.

Speaking is one of the qualities needed to assess foreign language skills [9]. This is a language competence that helps determine how the students are willing to grasp and develop their acquired foreign language. Nunan [10] said that, in addition to publishing, language teaching is also efficient. It is very difficult to evaluate language skills because there are many aspects involved, such as terminology, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension which are converted into communication skills.

It is necessary to understand what the writer implies in this article by alternative assessment before further discussion of the subject. According to Hughes,

alternative assessments or predictions made by teachers are often referred to as classroom assessments [11]. Different from conventional pencil or paper experiments are other approaches, such as research, portfolio, flyers, reports, roles performing, self-assessment, record-keeping, reviews and evaluation, peer analysis and follow-up, findings, seminars or interviews, study journals and learning record [12]. The schools suggested in comparison that assessments were aimed at clarifying students' analytical thinking and testing ability through open-ended activities, which often take longer, such as portfolio, explanation and conferences.

Ercilia's [13] research showed an assessment of the programs in schools and their integration and the different advantages and outcomes in the everyday learning process. Yildirim and Orsedemir [3] investigated the performance of young students as an alternative evaluation. In addition to pen and paper tests, it is also suggested that alternative assessment methods, including in the partnership with teacher reviewing the project results, portfolio, self-assessment and peer review, are given to young language learners in classroom activities [3]. Musfirah [14] describes the implementation of peer assessment of speaking skill. She found that the successful implementation of peer assessment was based on teacher's attention on scoring the pair and encouraged the students to conduct assessment, thus making them optimistic that they could perform the peer assessment task [14].

A description of the main terms, including alternative assessment and language ability, is necessary after reviewing the relevant literature. This test analysis is referred to as an alternative evaluation which is considered more credible. Alternative assessment is an efficient means of meeting both educational goals, creating links between teaching and learning, and encouraging students to be aware and conscious in their own learning experience through self-assessment.

Whereas, speaking skill is characterized as a combination of language skills and linguistic expertise that enables speakers to use their target language. The speakers are not just capable of understanding grammar, but of using linguist information in various communicative contexts. More specifically, Hughes [11] said, with respect to the speech evaluation, "measuring correct speaking ability isn't a simple feat because it requires time and energy to achieve clear and consistent outcomes, including preparation". When instructors evaluate speech abilities through complicated tasks, they will take into account other factors before evaluating, such as offering speech lessons and the segment on success assessment. Until measuring, they can achieve more accurate outcomes.

Thus, teachers need to discover the best and effective technique for their learners to reduce the difficulties of the teaching-learning cycle by utilizing alternative assessments for evaluating the competencies of students' speaking skills in a classroom such as a subject that is important and will be comprehensively explored in this report.

The study's analysis question is, 'How can English teachers now use alternate assessments of the speaking ability of EFL students and their challenges in performing the assessment?' The objective of this study is to explain how English teachers use the alternative assessment currently of the speaking expertise of EFL students and to identify the difficulties encountered in the evaluation by English teachers.

Logically, this research should be viewed as a guide for teachers in English to upgrade their alternate professional appraisal approach to improve the enthusiasm of the students to study. It may also improve language teaching efficiency and allow other researchers to recognize outlets of alternate speaking competence assessment. In action, this research will provide teachers with more details about how the current usage of alternate assessment techniques for the speaking skills of EFL students is. The writer wants this study will inspire students to study further and meet the curriculum goals that will enable them to gain greater speaking ability. In fact, they become more positive for students. To the author, this work may improve the author's understanding of possible tests of speaking competence.

## **2. METHOD**

This research is a qualitative research with the involvement of two EFL teachers at a senior high school. The first teacher has eight-year teaching experience started in 2013 while the second teacher has twelve-year teaching experience started in 2019. Both of them are teaching in the same senior high school and they are qualified EFL teacher who fulfills the standards for selection. The selection of the participants in this study followed the criteria proposed by Kyriacou [15] for teachers to have between five and ten years of teaching experience. The writer also used semi-structured interviews to evaluate the data in this study and that is the main data from this study. The advantage of the interview is that even if interesting issues arise during the conversation, the interviewer has structured guidance. Datko [16] notes that a semi-structured interview will make it easier for researchers and participants to express their views more freely.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

An overview of the outcomes of the discussion with two English teachers about their alternative assessment process, English teacher assessments were made, exercises were conducted to improve students' involvement in teaching and studying, and a challenge in assessing EFL students' speaking skills was discovered. This part briefly discusses the main findings of this research on alternative assessments used by English teacher and problems in assessing students' speaking skills.

### ***3.1. Implementation of alternative assessments of teachers***

Based on the result of an interview, the researcher found that English teachers use guidance to make students the subject of learning. Then, teachers encouraged students to use authentic materials or real example to speak English as a subject. In the interview with T1, it is noticed the teacher had instructed the students on the subject before the test was performed or orally. The test was carried out after the students learned the content and evaluated their knowledge and abilities. The test was done before the course in order to create student confidence. The teacher has employed many different appraisal methods, including peer analysis, self-assessment, presentation and role-playing.

These approaches are very important in order to keep the students from being bored during the assessment period. The approaches also improve the vocabulary of the students implicitly. Lizasoain's [4] finding suggests that self-assessment, portfolio, exam tailored for students, and a student-centered evaluation; presentation, project, and drama are seen as more forms of alternate assessments.

The first teacher designed the students in front of the class to implement alternative evaluation to assess the speaking ability of students. The teacher first told the students that they had planned the dialogue. The students were then classified into certain groups. Their teams talked about the idea of the story and the teacher asked them to talk. After the dialogue, the students forwarded it to the teacher. And the teacher told them to do what they had been talking about before the class.

The first teacher asked students to speak and memorize the vocabulary to get the meaning of the material and to understand it. Other speech activities are also used to monitor the material provided such as the drama at the end of the class. Not only grammar but other competencies were stressed by the instructor, such as how students should think about how to use lessons studied and exercised. Lizasoain [4] points out those competences are assessed by certain important competencies like critical thinking, communication and understanding [4]. It not just focuses on language skills.

T1 claimed that the form of alternate assessments that actually measure the speaking skill of students provide the students with cases or issues to be addressed. By having a simple dialogue, teachers can see how often students talk. This activity could be used to determine how students are involved. When the environment enhances English every day, students get used to speaking English. Drama can be used as an alternate kind of test which should enhance students' vocabulary and grammar which is a barrier to student speaking. Drama has also established students' creativity and self-confidence; it motivates students to speak English.

Meanwhile, the second teacher (T2) considered English to promote its academic achievement, task-based language training and language instruction in an increased communication perspective. T2 encouraged students to complete gaming missions in the application

of alternate tests in the assessment of student's oral competence. The teacher first showed students how to play and learn from the topic. The teacher then split the students into many roles. The game was then played by the students. The teacher has always noticed how far students have done with their teaching activities and corrected their pronunciation as a corrective feedback throughout the entire class. In addition, T2 regularly encouraged students to sing which were memorized together to amuse the optimism of their students for ice break times.

The students may receive direct feedback from their participation in the classroom. T2 argued that many essential topics such as language, pronunciation, grammar and fluency are measured in student's oral competences. Before testing student oral skills, he presented the students with information and vocabulary to be taught, memorized and elements to be analyzed so that they could respond correctly when they were questioned randomly. Oral evaluations are typically done either with the teacher (face-to-face) or with peers during a conversation.

The teacher uses a number of group works to enable students to communicate in English with others to use alternative evaluation strategies. On the basis of class remarks the teacher also evaluated the activity of the students. A secondary assessment or assessment of the classroom offers teachers more opportunities for observing linguistic achievement directly through class observation or direct evaluation [17].

The compilation of student notebooks as an added value also constitutes an alternative assessment. In order to prevent the boring learning process and to allow students to become more involved in the class, T2 provided material through an LCD projection system, simple songs and games. The effects were positive as the students felt satisfied and were able to accept the content easily. Classroom assessment can serve as an efficient strategy and can be beneficial when taking the exam to decrease student nervousness [18].

T2 stated that by linking previous materials, the alternative evaluation method, which in fact measures students' oral skills, repeats a sentence, or new materials so that students don't forget materials easily. T1 presented real-life content that makes it easier for students to remember and use it in their daily life. The instructor argued that it would be interesting to learn English while the students learned a new exam. One of the benefits of class assessment, as already stated by Lee [18], is the measurement of oral ability as criterion for performance reviews and contact assessments. The assessment grade should encourage the validity of the exam. Students can also conduct research experiments that imitate problems or interactions in their real life. It is nearly observed that students speak English with real resources or real examples.

The kind of alternative evaluation activities used are varied based on interview result. The teachers used observation to evaluate the oral skills of students when they talked in class. The teacher carried out two activities throughout the classroom activity, short

questions and answers and a presentation of an oral report. The English teachers' alternative strategies included group work, self-evaluation, peer review, and singing. Their practices allowed the students to give comments and feedback with their friends. The methods have also made learning through innovative games more attractive.

Finally, alternative assessments have an effect on the learning process that enables them to utilize the language in different situation, to become motivated to learn, and to take responsibility for their own judgment and their achievements. The conclusion is that an elective method is used to combine communication language training to improve academically their accomplishments and make them happy to learn.

### ***3.2. Difficulties with the implementation of Alternative Assessment in Speaking Skill***

#### ***3.2.1. Pronunciation and Grammar***

Speaking is the main language skills that enable students to understand the target language and communicate in it. Nunan [10] stated that "The challenge for linguistic evaluation is the need for a number of capabilities such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and communication skills". Speak is a constructive language skill that acts as a method of evaluating how students in the target language can understand and communicate that "what makes a language test challenging is that many talents are involved."

*"The vocabulary and the apprehension of errors in word order constrain students while speaking English. Because many students fear to make pronunciation and structure errors, so the teacher used Drama to motivate them to speak English"* (First teacher)

In the first teacher's statement, most students are prevented from speaking English as they are afraid of grammar errors. Another explanation is vocabulary, which is difficult for students to speak English.

*"They are basically able to communicate, it's just the way they develop their confidence. But unfortunately, most students are frightened in pronunciation and vocabulary. In reality, they will mitigate the problem if they have confidence."* (Second teacher)

The second teacher stated that students may normally speak English, but have little belief in their grammar or vocabulary. The straightforward approach and questioning approaches would allow students to recognize and trust, and to develop connections with and include other students. This approach allows the instructor to consider the success of the pupils. The interview findings indicate that students are worried about spelling and speech, losing their own confidence and lack of spoken inspiration.

### 3.2.2. Lack of Vocabulary

One reason why learners are not able to speak English is lack of vocabulary.

*“The main problem for English is understanding vocabulary and I always give them 5 vocabularies in every meeting (there are three meetings in a week) before starting the learning process and ask them to memorize in order to improve their vocabulary”*  
(First teacher)

This finding shows that first teacher got difficulty in assessing the students' speaking skills that have lack vocabulary, and the teacher gives them the necessary vocabulary to acquire and overcome the difficulties. The vocabulary is the fundamental information for the English language students and represents a challenge for teachers.

### 3.2.3. Limited Time

Insufficient time for the assessment of speaking tests often influences the willingness of the students to speak and to study English. In fact, senior high school students are not inspired to study because of inadequate time to assess all high school students' skills in speaking language.

Nevertheless, Hughes also found that it is not easy to determine correct speaking jurisdiction. Efficient and consistent outcomes take long time and commitment, including preparation [11]. By testing the capabilities of speakers as difficult tasks, students need to prepare certain criteria before studying, such as communicating and evaluating the students' progress in changing the title, in order to achieve more practical outcomes. The study showed that it was difficult for teachers to assess the speaking competence of the students in the class as the time required measuring the skills of the students as a whole is limited. In fact, it is challenging for students to love and encourage themselves to talk.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Based on this study, both of the teachers at one of the senior high schools in Gresik have been shown to use different methods and strategies in order to utilize the alternative assessment practices in speaking of EFL students. Alternative methods of assessment include peer assessment and observation by students in class. The teachers focus on alternative assessment strategies for the speaking skills of EFL students and utilize a variety of community activities that enable students to interact with their peers. The teacher gave authentic material as the subject of learning or as a true example.

The work includes collecting student notebooks, solving cases or student problems and telling the elements to be evaluated. Teachers utilized many strategies in order to improve student participation in the learning phase by practices like role-playing, memorizing the short conversation, presenting the short

dialog to other learners, plays, discussions and presentations. The teachers also suggested that students' speaking skills must also be evaluated externally, in order to monitor the students' ability to practice English both within and out of the classroom.

Because the learners' weak of grammar and pronunciation, the students lack vocabulary, which makes them less comfortable, inspiring and slow learning, teachers have many difficulties according to the results. Teachers didn't also have the chance to evaluate the entire students because of limited time. This study showed that English teachers need alternative tools to assess the speaking skills of students and that alternative evaluation tools, especially speaking skills, may improve the learning process.

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