Exploring assessment practices of teachers in Advanced Speech courses

Endalew Molla Tessera[✉1], Animaw Anteneh Kassa[1]

[1]Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Article Info

Abstract

_____

In Ethiopia, there is a general public concern that most university students lack communicative competence, and hence they could not communicate effectively in English. There are many contributing factors to this and most of these factors are related either to the curriculum, the teaching-learning process, or the assessment practice. Only a few studies have been conducted on the assessment practice of speaking skills since most researchers have focused on the teaching-learning process. This inquiry was made to look into the practice of assessing the Advanced Speech course. Specifically, it focuses on the assessment methods employed by teachers, the extent of measuring the sub-skills of speaking, and the effectiveness of the feedback given by the teachers. Forty-three students and six teachers were included in the study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. The findings revealed that not many assessment methods were employed to assess the students. Sixty percent of the assessment of the course was covered by written assignments and a written final exam. Only two individual and group presentations were given as practical assessments. In addition, the assessments did not measure the students' accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. In the end, the feedback provided to the students was not effective. Students were not given a chance to correct their own errors, and they were not allowed to practice peer correction, either. This implied that teachers' assessment practices were not effective to measure the students' speaking performance in the intended manner and this is one of the factors that minimizes the quality of education.

[✉]Correspondence Address:
Addis Ababa University,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
E-mail: menduca.m@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Many academics have emphasized that the majority of language learners worldwide acquire a specific language to become proficient in the target language (Richards, 2002). Most learners want to improve their speaking skills, but the skill seems one of the difficult aspects of language learning. In line with this, Brown & Yule (1983) highlighted that one of the most challenging components of language learning is frequently thought to be the production of spoken language or mastering the ability to speak in the target language.

This challenge is not distinctive to students. Teachers also face the same problem since the task of teaching and assessing speaking skills requires knowledge, skill, and commitment. Bygate (1987) also emphasized that one of the fundamental issues in teaching foreign languages is getting students ready to be able to use the target language. Similar to this, Yang (2010) contends that the primary goal of oral English training is unquestionably the development of the capacity to carry on a natural conversation in a working or everyday situation.

In Ethiopia, the teaching of speaking skills is a challenging task. There are different factors for this. One of the prominent factors is that many language classes throughout the country heavily focus on the language system or the grammar (Melkamu, 2003). This practice is against the major principles of teaching a foreign language because the main objective of any English language instruction, according to Davies & Pearse (2000), should be to enable students to communicate clearly and effectively in English.

What, how often, and how to assess students should be given equal status with the teaching of the sub-skills of speaking. Nunan (1991) contends that proficiency in the target language is the key to successful language education and that students should be judged on their ability to engage in a conversation in the language.

Not only the teaching-learning process but also the assessment method and frequency is a major factor that affects the success of language teaching. According to Alam (2012) and Bruton (2009), assessment determines the students' actual level of competency or proficiency or it is a way to measure language development over time (Crooks, 1988; Heywood, 1987; Newble & Jaeger, 1983); it also determines students' behavior and teachers' actual classroom practice.

In Ethiopia, much research has been conducted on the teaching-learning process of speaking skills. On the contrary, only a few studies have been conducted on how teachers assess their students while they teach spoken English courses. When compared to how important it is to teach speaking skills in the curriculum, assessment of speaking abilities frequently lags far behind in the globe. According to Knight (1992), the problem is very common in Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia, most English language teachers agree that most of their students cannot communicate using the language (Animaw, 2011; Hailom & Woldu, 1998). Because of this, different studies have been carried out on teachers' teaching practices. On the contrary, less has been researched on the assessment practice. Particularly in Ethiopia, as far as the researchers were concerned, there was not any study conducted on teachers' assessment practices on the Advanced Speech course. The way teachers assess their students is one of the key factors that could minimize the quality of education. Therefore, this study tried to fill this research gap and, basically, it tried to answer the following questions:
1. What are the methods used to assess students while they learn the Advanced Speech course?
2. Do the assessment methods used cover accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar according to the learning goals?
3. How do teachers give feedback to students?

The study is hoped to bridge the existing research gap in the area and give some insights to the Ministry of Education about curriculum reviews. Additionally, it will be helpful to material developers on how to design speaking activities in line with the basic principles of teaching and assessing speaking skills. Moreover, it gives teachers insights on the appropriate methods of assessing their students and effective feedback provision.

Assessing speaking skill

Speaking abilities are a significant component of the language teaching curriculum, making them a significant subject of evaluation as well. However, evaluating speech is difficult because numerous elements affect how well someone can speak a language and because we expect test results to be reliable, fair, and suitable for our purpose. This is a difficult task, and in various situations, teachers and testers have attempted to complete it all using a variety of different techniques (Luoma, 2004).

Even though speaking skills are generally regarded as the most crucial component of an EFL course, the challenges associated with measuring oral abilities frequently force teachers to use subpar oral assessments or even refrain from testing speaking abilities altogether. Speaking evaluation is a multi-stage process. People act and interact at each stage to develop something for the following stage. The examinees, interlocutors, raters, and score users all have a part to play in the activities, even if the assessment developers are the essential participants in the spoken assessment cycle (Luoma, 2004).

The task of teaching and assessing speaking skills is one of the most challenging areas. Because of this, it has traditionally been a headache for English teachers and it is not surprising that many well-established tests do not even have an oral component (Brown & Yule, 1983) because the hardest talent to evaluate is undoubtedly speaking (Coombe et al., 2007; Heaton, 1988; Luoma, 2004; Kitao & Kitao, 1996). According to these scholars, spoken teachers have to pay attention to the following aspects. *Fluency:* the ability to communicate clearly, somewhat quickly, and without frequently pausing. *Pronunciation:* The act or outcome of making speech sounds, including articulation, stress, and intonation. *Vocabulary:* the collection of words used in a given language. *Accuracy:* how language learners use grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary systems. *Interaction:* the ability to interact with others during communicative tasks. *Communication:* the students' ability to transmit her/his ideas. *Grammar:* using acceptable and correct grammar structures in a speech.

Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria for speaking skills are varied from institution to institution and from teacher to teacher. But the following are very common and comprehensive criteria that are recommended by scholars in the field (Wu et al., 2012; Luoma, 2004; Knight, 1992; Hughes, 2003; Bachman, 1990; Brindley, 1989 and Fulcher, 1987).

- Grammar: range and accuracy
- Vocabulary: range and accuracy
- Pronunciation: individual sounds (especially phonemic distinctions), stress and rhythm, intonation, and linking/elision/assimilation
- Fluency: speed of talking, hesitation while speaking, and hesitation before speaking
- Conversational Skill: topic development, initiative (in turn-taking, and topic control), cohesion (with own utterances & with interlocutor), and conversation maintenance (including clarification, repair, checking, pause fillers, etc.)
- Sociolinguistic Skill: distinguishing register and style (e.g. formal or informal, persuasive or conciliatory) and use of cultural references
- Non-Verbal: eye contact, body posture, gestures, and facial expressions
- Content: coherence of arguments and relevance

Techniques of responding to learners' errors

As agreed by most scholars, errors are natural and they are signs of learning. But, they should be handed systematically so that the students will not be irritated or miss-leaded. According to Parrott (1993), teachers can respond to learners' errors and mistakes in several ways as teaching speaking skills is concerned. The following is a list of some methods for doing this.

The teacher can stop the student and either encourage him/her to correct himself/herself, point out the type of error or mistake or where it was in the phrase, or invite him/her to do so. They can make a note of the inaccuracy or mistake and draw attention to it at a later time individually or with the entire class, they can choose not to respond, or they can give a 'correction' themselves.

As the decision about how to respond to the students' errors and mistakes is concerned, there are factors teachers need to take into account (Parrott, 1993). These factors are; the student's purpose in speaking (was he/she concentrating on accuracy or fluency?), the nature of the error or mistake (is this something the learner can correct himself?), the personality of the student (is he/she confident?), the ability of the student (is accuracy a priority for him?), and the ease with which the error or mistake can be corrected (Parrott, 1993).

METHODS

This is a descriptive study. Since the study is mainly concerned with describing what is actually being practiced by language teachers to teach Advanced Speech as it exists at present in its natural setting, this method is preferred over others. As described by Kothari (2004), the researcher has no

control over the variables; he can only report what has happened or what is happening. Such research design, according to Best & Kahn (2006) and Kothari (2004), is concerned with: conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs or processes that are going on, etc. Moreover, the researcher felt that it would enable him to have access to multiple instruments of gathering information.

Debre Markos University was chosen purposively as the research site because of the researcher's familiarity with the environment. This opportunity can enrich and validate the data that the study sought to gather as in analyzing how culturally alien and/or appropriate the language contents and tasks and activities embodied in the course syllabus are (Balbi, 2008).

For this study, six teachers that have the experience of teaching the course (Advanced Speech) were included based on the homogeneous sampling technique. In such a sampling technique, the researcher selects from a particular sub-group who share some important experience relevant to his/her study (Dorneyi, 2007). Among the six teachers included in the study, three of them have a Ph.D. in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Their teaching experiences ranged from 11 to 17 years. The remaining three have MA degrees in TEFL, with teaching experiences ranging from 6 to 9 years. In addition, six students that were capable of responding to the interview were chosen purposely based on their willingness. All of the students included in the study are second-year students of English language and literature. Three of these students were group leaders and the remaining three were group members. Therefore, the total sample size of the research is twelve. A well-designed qualitative study often needs a manageable sample size to produce the saturated and rich data required to comprehend even nuances in the phenomenon under study (Dorneyi, 2007).

An in-depth, semi-structured interview was conducted with sample teachers and students. The data on teachers' assessment practices was collected through this tool because face-to-face interviews are the best instruments to collect reliable data on the interviewees' beliefs, practices, and conceptions (Dorneyi, 2007). To do this, an interview guide was prepared in line with the objectives and the literature review of this study.

The other major tool that the researcher used to collect data was classroom observation and observation of facilities (Library and Language Laboratory). Assessment must include an element of classroom observation to assess teachers' actual performances and its impact on English language teaching/learning practices in the classroom (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005). By using this tool, the researcher observed how the Advanced Speech course teachers assess their students. Moreover, whether the teachers use effective assessment methods, feedback provision ways, facilities like the library and the language laboratory, and other related issues were observed six times. To do all this, an observation checklist was prepared in line with the literature review of this article and the basic principles of teaching speaking skills.

In addition, document analysis was conducted because this technique provides authentic and rich information when compared to other methods of data collection (Dorneyi, 2007). By using this instrument, the course syllabus, which has been used by the department for the advanced speech course, was analyzed. Moreover, it was used to assess written assessments like quizzes, tests, assignments, and final exams along with the course syllabus and the basic principles of teaching spoken English. To do all this, a syllabus assessment checklist was prepared by adapting Cunningsworth's (1995) evaluation checklist along with the basic principles of teaching speaking skills. This checklist is chosen because it is well-established and elaborate (Harni, 2018; Jayakaran et al., 2011).

The researcher followed the following procedures to collect the data. First, the Advanced Speech course syllabus was reviewed, mainly before the classroom observations and interviews, so that possible variations between policy and practice could easily be detected. Then the researcher explained the purpose of the research to the participants. Classroom observations were done before the interview because teachers and students would not act artificially since they had no information on the focus of the research. If the interview was done first, an artificial classroom environment might be created during the observation time. Finally, observation of facilities was conducted. The observation was conducted six times until the researcher got enough information.

The researcher analyzed the data that was obtained from the above data collection instruments qualitatively. To do so, the researcher employed grounded theory. Grounded theory refers to a theory that is developed inductively from a corpus of data. If done correctly, this indicates that the result of the theory perfectly fits one dataset (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this

research, three kinds of coding (open, axial, and selective) were employed, as recommended by Glaser & Strauss (1978) and Corbin & Strauss (2008). The main concept was to create a single storyline that served as the foundation for everything else. By doing this, the researcher developed detailed and logically sequenced data for the research

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the assessment methods employed by sample teachers. Teachers were asked how they evaluate their students. Their responses were similar. They said that their students had been evaluated both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the students were given assignments or tests to check whether they understood the course module or not. Practically, the students were evaluated on how they can speak at an advanced level. Regarding this issue, one of the teachers said the following:

> … *Usually, I evaluate my students by giving them theoretical assignments or tests and practical presentations. First, they will be assessed from theoretical perspectives because I should check whether these students have grasped the theoretical parts properly or not. Next, they will be evaluated practically on how they perform in front of the classroom.* (T3).

This teacher's response to the assessment methods is linear with the responses of other teachers and students. In fact, it is advisable to give theoretical and practical assessments. Hughes (2003) claims that speaking assessment tasks should allow students to demonstrate both comprehension and production. This is made possible by developing tasks that constitute a representative sample of the population of oral tasks, which should elicit behavior that accurately represents the candidates' proficiency in the foreign language.

Furthermore, teachers were asked to state the kinds of assessments that they used to evaluate their students. They responded that they used individual and group assignments, quizzes, tests, and finally a written final exam. But, practically, as cross-checked by the observation, only one written group assignment, one written individual assignment with a presentation, one group presentation, and a written final exam were given to the students. Teachers' main reason for not using other assessment techniques is a shortage of time. According to them, more practical assessments could be employed if the theoretical parts were minimized in the syllabus.

Two presentations (individual and group) were given to the students. Each of these presentations was evaluated out of 20 percent. The remaining 20 percent was given to an individual written assignment. Ten minutes were given to each student for the individual presentation. But all of the students did not use even half of the time. The maximum presentation time used by the students was 3 minutes and 47 seconds. On the other hand, on average, there were four students in each group. These groups were given an assignment on memorized speech a week before their presentation and they were told that the assignment would be presented by one of the group members. The presenter would be selected randomly so they were told to prepare themselves for the presentation. But on the presentation day, only group leaders presented the group work. Other group members followed the presentations and in the end, they were asked very few questions by their teacher to check whether they had participated in the group work or not.

Moreover, the data from the document analysis revealed that all the written assessments given to the students were not helpful to enhance and/or measure the students' speaking skills. This is an advanced speech course and the nature of the assessment should be more practical. But, theoretically, only forty percent of the course was practical. The remaining sixty percent of the assessment was left to a written assignment and a written final exam on the theoretical parts of the syllabus. The following are the questions that were given as an individual written assignment:
- o Give a brief description of the basic elements of communication. Where possible, provide practical examples. (5 pts).
- o What factors should a sender of a message take into account when he/she selects a communication channel? List six factors in the following spaces. (3 pts)
- o What are the major causes of stage fright/nervousness people encounter in public speech delivery? List four causes. (2 pts)
- o What measures can a public speaker take to get rid of nervousness at the various stages of the speech? Mention ten such measures. (3pts)
- o List and briefly explain the different things that a person who plans to acquire speaking skills should master. (3pts)

o Mention four methods of speech delivery and explain in what situations each method can be used most appropriately (4 pts).

It can be noted that all written assignments and tests are prepared in the above manner. As it has been said so far, giving more writing tests in the advanced speech course is a paradox to teaching and assessing speaking skills because such kind of assessment does not measure the students' speaking proficiency. A good speaking test should include a variety of assignments, which is quite significant. The exam items should be chosen in accordance with the learning objectives. Additionally, it ought to communicate as much as possible.

On the other hand, the burden of the whole group work was loaded on the shoulders of group leaders. Two of the group leaders who were interviewed said the following:

> … *Personally, I don't like group work. When we are given group work, the whole burden is on me. Other group members never helped me. They only helped me collect money for printing and binding. Otherwise, none of my group members contributed any ideas for the assignment.* (Student 1)
>
> … *Being a good student is really a burden. When I do the group assignment, others do their own business. It is done by me and I also present it at the end. So this thing must be improved.* (Student 3)

These students' responses were cross-checked in the observation. During the observation, some of the students were permanent group leaders whenever group tasks were given. At the same time, they were secretaries to write down notes from their groups' discussions. They were also reporters and finally presenters. Other group members get marks on the performance of these students. Ivan (2010) quoted Arădăvoaice (2008) in saying that one aspect of a group's performance and quality is how well its members connect with one another. A group can produce synergy, which shows that the interactions between the participants are essential to the whole and that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

On the other hand, teachers were interviewed on how they give marks for group work and a teacher who was giving the course said the following:

> … *Giving marks for group work is one of the challenging aspects of the teaching-learning process. Usually, I gave equal marks to all group members. To do that, I checked whether all group members have done the group work or not. During the presentation time, I asked every group member a few questions to check whether they have participated or not. I think that is the right way of assessing them.* (T3)

Teachers gave the same mark to all group members. Whenever group work is given, looking at individual differences among the group members is vital. Otherwise, evaluating the group members only by the group leaders' performance will minimize the quality of education. Every student should be evaluated based on the objectives of the course and the standards set by the institution. Moreover, teachers were expected to record and follow every student's performance from the first assessment to the final exam. A meticulously maintained teacher's record of the daily oral performance of his or her students will make a great cumulative oral test. But, as Underhill (1987) stated, there was no ongoing record of the learners' daily oral presentations; thus, the teachers were unable to monitor the development of each of their students.

The practice of assessing the students' accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation
Teachers were asked to confirm whether the assessment methods they employed focused on accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Almost all of them responded that their assessment methods highly depend on accuracy and grammar. Teachers in the interview disclosed that assessing accuracy and grammar is very easy and is not tiresome. Moreover, assessing the students' accuracy and grammar does not need exceptional skills. When they assess their students, they focused on how each student performed the speaking activity accurately. Regarding this issue, one of the teachers said the following:

> *When I assess my students' speaking performance, I focus on their accuracy and grammar level. Do they do the intended tasks accurately according to the instruction? To what extent is their grammar correct? Do they do major errors? These are some of my focus areas to assess my students (Teacher 5).*

Teachers were asked further questions on why their assessment methods do not focus on fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. They replied that since these sub-skills are not taught to the students, it could be worthless to include them in the assessment. There are no topics on fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation in the syllabus; hence, it becomes difficult to teach and assess these sub-skills. The following is the response of one of the interviewed teachers on this issue:

> *How can I evaluate my students' fluency, vocabulary, or pronunciation without teaching and training them? If it is not in the syllabus, then I am not forced to evaluate their pronunciation or fluency (Teacher 6).*

These teachers have another reason for not assessing pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary. According to them, measuring fluency and pronunciation needs special knowledge and skill. They highlighted that some expertise and software are needed to do so. The software is related to a language laboratory. There is a language laboratory at the university but it was not functional. These teachers' complaints are similar to what scholars like Knight (1992) believe. According to him, assessing speaking skills can cause problems in a classroom situation, for instance, because assessing oral skills requires time and equipment, the problem of finding productive and relevant tasks, and the problem of assessing students consistently.

Moreover, teachers were not confident with their fluency and pronunciation and this leads them to skip these sub-skills when they assess their students' speaking. The response of the following teacher will strengthen this data:

> *Who am I to measure the students' fluency and pronunciation? As a teacher, I don't have the expected fluency level and the right pronunciation. As you know, our English is highly affected by our mother tongue. So, I don't attempt to measure my students' fluency and pronunciation because I, myself, am not free from such problems (Teacher 2).*

As Demirezen (2010) studied, due to a lack of resources, inappropriate role models, and other factors, non-native English teachers in developing nations frequently have pronunciation and intonation issues in their speaking. This is one of the factors that could affect the quality of spoken language teaching. If teachers feel that their fluency and pronunciation are poor, they will not have the confidence to assess their students' speaking.

A similar kind of data was gathered through classroom observation. During their presentation session, the students were producing jumbled sentences that lacked coherence and unity. In addition, they were uttering some words and sentences in Amharic. With such practice, it was very difficult to measure the students' accuracy and grammar. The data from the document analysis also strengthens this finding. Some exam and assignment questions were evaluated by the researcher and two other evaluators. The data revealed that most of the questions are designed to measure the students' accuracy, and other sub-skills of speaking are forgotten. Especially the written assignment and the written final exam focused on the theoretical concepts of the course.

Feedback provision

Feedback is an essential part of the teaching-learning process. The number of errors committed by the students on the Advanced Speech course were many and constructive, and timely feedback should be given to the students to improve their speaking skills. According to the data collected through the interview and the classroom observation, it was very difficult to find a student who can construct a sentence that is correct in grammar and pronunciation. Grammar and pronunciation errors were made very frequently. The use of their mother tongue and fear of speaking in front of the students were other persistent problems for the students. Regarding this issue, one of the teachers said the following when he was interviewed:

> *Especially in spoken English classes, students made dozens of errors every day. I can say that it is difficult to find a student who can speak a sentence correctly. So, the number of errors is high. Some of the students make pronunciation errors, and others make grammar errors. Some of them use inappropriate words which are neither English nor Amharic (Teacher 1).*

If the students make such kinds of errors, feedback should be given at different stages; if not, it will affect the students' performance. According to Sadler (1989), feedback is information given to a learner in educational settings to help close the performance gap between present performance and a desired objective.

Teachers were asked how they give feedback to their students. Accordingly, most of the teachers stressed on the delivery of timely and constructive feedback to the students. Although teachers have a positive understanding of the value of feedback, most of them do not give feedback to their students for the following reasons. First, according to them, shortage of time was a big constraint to give timely and constructive feedback to every student. The bulk of the course time was used to teach theoretical concepts and the students made plenty of errors. Therefore, giving feedback to each student on every practical session was challenging. Regarding this difficulty, one of the teachers had the following to say:

> *If I tried to give feedback to every student whenever they make presentations, I may not cover even half of the course. In addition, it is difficult to improve the students' speaking problems through comments. These problems are persistent and have been developed in many years and you can't fix them with a single comment. Moreover, most of our students don't like feedback (Teacher 3).*

As it was cross-checked by the observation, no comments were given to the students during the students' presentation days. They made pronunciation and grammar errors. Many students spoke Amharic words and sentences in the middle of their presentations. However, the teacher did not give oral or written comments either at the middle or end of their presentation.

The other factor raised by the teachers was the students' attitude towards the feedback. According to these teachers, their students do not like feedback. Interviewed teachers stated that most of their students do not care for their learning. They simply need grades at the end of the course. Because of this, most teachers do not give feedback.

According to the data from the interview and classroom observation, most teachers abstained from giving feedback on presentations for the above reasons. A few of them give comments to the whole class at the end of the presentations. One of these teachers, as witnessed in the classroom observation, listed down the errors that the presenters had made on a paper and he reflected it to the whole class before he left the class. The following quote from an interviewed teacher may strengthen this data:

> *It is very challenging to give feedback to every student. If I tried to do so, I will encounter shortage of time. Instead of leaving some of the portions of the course uncovered, I preferred not to give any kind of comment to each student. But, if it is group work, I can give group comments at the end of their presentations (Teacher 1).*

With such practice, the feedback was not addressed to the right person because the students were not aware of which kind of errors they committed. Other teachers give comments only on group presentations. Since group presentations were presented by the group leaders only, very general comments were forwarded to each group.

Two of the interviewed teachers believed that only positive comments (encouraging comments given to the students when they do something good) should be given in the classroom because other students will be initiated by their progress. Corrective feedback (comments given to the students to amend their errors), according to these teachers, should not be given inside the classroom because the students who committed those errors will be irritated. Therefore, these teachers preferred to give such feedback outside the classroom. The student who made the error would be called and told his errors privately. One of these teachers described his experience in the following manner:

> *Giving encouraging feedback in the classroom may motivate the students while giving comments of improvement will discourage the students and they will hate the teacher because they are humiliated in front of their classmates. So if the students do good things, I encouraged them by using words like 'very good' or 'excellent'. But if they make errors, I never tell them in the classroom (Teacher 4).*

There are different ways of providing feedback. Teachers could let the student find out his/her fault for self-correction. But according to the data, none of the teachers did so. They could also create an atmosphere for peer evaluation/correction. Both in the interview and the classroom observation, the idea of peer correction was not raised by the teachers. The only kind of feedback applied by the teachers was teacher correction. Studies show that feedback given by teachers is less effective compared to self-correction and peer feedback. Feedback should offer suggestions for future development and be utilized to create revised goal targets that are at or just beyond learners' present capacities (Hattie, 2011; Locke & Latham, 1990).

Discussion

The first research question sought to explore the assessment methods used by the teachers. The data revealed that individual and group presentations, written assignments, and a written final exam were used to assess the students. In this case, a variety of assessment methods that are capable of measuring the students' fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, etc. were not employed. This finding is similar to the findings of former studies conducted by Mebratu (2018), Eyasu et al. (2023), and Genet (2017). According to their findings, effective assessment was not employed because of a shortage of time, a lack of sufficient material, and the large class size. According to Hatipoğlu (2017), techniques for assessing speaking skills must include imitation tasks, reading aloud, direct response tasks, dialogue completion tasks, interpreting games, limited picture-cued tasks, question and answer, giving instructions and directions, paraphrasing, oral presentations, retelling a story, and news events. Moreover, the students will only learn how to write if the assessment is restricted to written exams (Ahmad, 2011; Akiyama, 2003; Ali et al., 2012). The most important component of language testing, according to Heaton (1988), is speaking proficiency testing. The use of oral assessment encourages students to hone and enhance their speaking abilities (Huxham et al., 2010; Lee, 2007). In this regard, the assessment methods employed were not in line with what is recommended by scholars in the field. When teachers assess speaking, they should measure the students' talk by the tasks that they give. To do so, they should give clear instructions on the content and general format of the talk to be assessed, and they should also provide the context for it (Luoma, 2004).

The second research question aimed to examine whether the assessment methods used covered accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar according to the learning goals. The findings suggest that the teachers do not measure the students' pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary. Even accuracy and grammar were not assessed properly by the teachers. In their studies, Esayas (2018) and Sisay (1999) indicated that there is an imbalance between assessing the accuracy and fluency of the students. Some of the basic components of speech, according to Bachman & Palmer (1996), include pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and appropriate tone. Furthermore, Scarcella & Oxford (1994) emphasized the importance of teaching and assessing pronunciation through a variety of activities in all foreign language classes because, according to Wong (1987), despite non-native speakers' excellent grammar and vocabulary, they are unable to communicate effectively and efficiently if their pronunciation is below a certain threshold level. In addition, Morley (1991) places a strong emphasis on meaningful communication, contending that clear pronunciation is a crucial element of communication proficiency. Teachers should expect their students to achieve well in their courses and include pronunciation in them.

The last research question was aimed at finding out the nature of the feedback given to the students. Accordingly, a few ineffective oral and written comments were given. The same finding was presented by Animaw (2011) and Kebrewessen (2011). Both of them agreed that effective feedback was not given to the students. Effective feedback, in the words of Race (2010) Race & Pickford (2007), is dynamic, behavior-specific, timely, interactive, constructive (it must increase future learning), and it must be attended to. In the eyes of such scholars, these teachers' feedback

was not effective. Some teachers were giving feedback only on written tests and assignments. According to these teachers, giving comments on individual presentations is impossible because of a shortage of time, and they prefer to write comments on tests and assignments. When the students made some language errors, they underlined or circled the word or phrase that they believed had an error. In addition, if some sentences are not clear, they put question marks next to them. Circling, underlining, and putting question marks for these teachers is written feedback. If comments are not clear, the students will not learn from their mistakes. Clear feedback helps learners feel more confident about their current performance level and desired objective (Bangert-Drowns & Kulic, 1991).

CONCLUSION

The overall goal of giving the Advanced Speech course at a tertiary level of education, as indicated in the course syllabus, is to enhance the students' speaking skills at an advanced level by developing techniques of advanced speech delivery, increasing confidence in delivering a speech and demonstrating the elements of advanced speech in instruction. Therefore, the assessment methods employed should be consistent with these learning goals. In addition, the assessment of spoken English should focus on whether the students use English accurately and effectively in communication, but not on dozens of written tests and assignments.

The following conclusions could be drawn based on the findings of the study. First, a variety of assessment methods were not employed by the teachers. Most of the assessments were written assignments and the final exam was totally a written one. Only two (individual and group) presentations were given as practical exams. The group presentations were presented by the group leaders. Therefore, the practical assessment given to the group leaders is 40% whereas for the majority of the students, it is only 20% since the group presentation was presented by the group leaders only. Second, accuracy and grammar were given priority over the other sub-skills. The assessment methods do not include fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary skills. Even accuracy was not taken into consideration to evaluate the students' presentation. Since most of the assessment was written; teachers were focusing on the grammar accuracy of the students' tests and assignments. Lastly, effective feedback was not given to the students. Teachers' understanding of the value of timely and focused feedback is minimal. The ineffective feedback provision was due to their lack of understanding. As a result, timely and clear feedback was not given. In addition, students were not given a chance to correct their own errors, and peer feedback was not practiced, either.

The following recommendations are given based on the findings of the study. A variety of assessment methods should be used to evaluate the students' speaking performance. In addition, there should be a reasonable balance between assessing the students' accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar. Finally, teachers should give appropriate, constructive, and timely feedback to each student.

The implications of the study are presented as follows. This research explored teachers' assessment practices while they taught the Advanced Speech course. Thus, the researcher feels that the role of media in assessing the students' speaking skills needs to be studied. Moreover, conducting further research to assess the teaching of spoken English I and II courses at the tertiary level might also be a useful area for further research.

Finally, this study was conducted on the Advanced Speech course. As a result, the results of the study couldn't be generalized to other spoken courses. Furthermore, it should be stated that the present study is only programmatic and data-based. Hence, it does not make any claims either of comprehensiveness or of exhaustiveness. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations given above are based on its underlying assumptions and the analysis of corresponding data.

REFERENCES

Ahmad, N. (2011). Analyzing the spoken English needs in Pakistani academic legal settings. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS)*, *31*(2), 449–469.

Akiyama, T. (2003). Assessing speaking in Japanese junior high schools: Issues for the senior high school entrance examinations. *Shiken: JALT Testing & Evaluation SIG Newsletter*, *7*(2), 2–11.

Alam, M. (2012). *Assessment of oral skills development among the students of master in education in the public sector universities of Punjab* (*Unpublished MA thesis*). University of Sargodha Sargodha.

Ali, A., Tariq, RH., & Topping, KJ. (2012). Perspectives of academic activities in universities in Pakistan. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 1–28.

Animaw, A. (2011). *Oral corrective feedback: An exploratory case study of the interplay between teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, and rationales* (*Unpublished dissertation*). Addis Ababa University.

Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing.* Oxford University Press.

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests.* Oxford University Press.

Balbi, R. (2008). *Resources and activities for young learners. in Dereboy, N., Nagy, P., Garton, S., Willies, J., and Balbi, R. Teaching young learners module.* Aston University.

Bangert-Drowns, R., & Kulic, C. (1991). The instructional effect of feedback in test-like events. *Review of Educational Research*, *61*, 213–238.

Best, J. W., & Kahn, J. V. (2006). *Research in education.* Pearson.

Brindley, G. (1989). *Assessing achievement in the learner-centered curriculum.* National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.

Brown, & Yule. (1983). *Teaching the spoken language.* Cambridge University Press.

Bruton, A. (2009). The vocabulary knowledge scale: A critical analysis of language assessment. *Quarterly, Cambridge, CUP*, *6*(4), 288–299.

Bygate, M. (1987). *Speaking.* Oxford University Press.

Coombe, C., Folse, K., & Hubley, N. (2007). *A practical guide to assessing English language learners.* The University of Michigan Press.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* (Third Edition). CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Crooks, T. J. (1988). The impact of classroom evaluation on students. *Review of Educational Research*, *58*(4), 438–481.

Davies, D., & Pearse, E. (2000). *Success in English teaching.* Oxford University Press.

Demirezen, M. (2010). The principles and applications of the audio-lingual pronunciation rehabilitation model in foreign language teacher education. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *6*(2), 127–148.

Dorneyi, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.

Esayas, T. (2018). An investigation of the practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills in spoken English classes: Dilla university in focus. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, *49*.

Eyasu, Y., Dereje, A., & Tesfa, A. (2023). EFL teachers' and students' attitudes and practices regarding oral communication in English classes: Ethiopian high school context. *International Journal of Language Education*, *7*(2), 255–270. https://doi.org/Doi: https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v7i2.23062

Fulcher, G. (1987). Tests of oral performance: The need for data-based criteria. *ELT Journal*, *41*(4), 287–291.

Genet, Z. (2017). T*eachers' perception and practices of Efl speaking skills assessment in North Wollo zone at Habru, Kobo and Woldia Woreda general secondary and preparatory schools grade 10 in focus* (*Unpublished MA thesis*). Addis Ababa University.

Hailom, B., & Woldu, M. (1998). *Upgrading the English language communication skills of TTI instructors for the primary cycle. Quality education in Ethiopia: Vision for the 21st century.* IER, Addis Ababa University Press.

Harni, J. (2018). The models of checklist method in evaluating ELT textbooks. *Journal Al-Lisan*, *3*(2). http://journal.iaingorontalo.ac.id/index.php/al

Hatipoğlu, Ç. (2017). Assessing speaking skills. in Ekrem Solak (Editor). *Assessment in language teaching.* Pelikan Printing Press.

Hattie, J. (2011). Feedback in schools. in R. Sutton, M. J. Hornsey & K. M. Douglas (Eds.). *Feedback: The communication of praise, criticism, and advice.* Peter Lang Publishing.

Heaton, J. B. (1988). *Writing English language tests.* Longman.

Heywood, R. (1987). The use of animals in testing. *Alternatives to Laboratory Animals*, *14*(4), 329–333.

Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for language teachers.* Cambridge University Press.

Huxham, M., Campbell, F., & Westwood, J. (2010). Oral versus written assessments: A test of student performance and attitudes. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, *00*(0) 1–12.

Ivan, P. (2010). The roles played by the team members in the human resources performing management. *The Annals of the "Ştefan Cel Mare" University of Suceava. Fascicle of the Faculty of Economics and Public Administration*, *10*(Special Number), 231–240.

Jayakaran, M., Reza, H., & Vahid, N. (2011). Developing an English language textbook evaluation checklist. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, *4*(6). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1072790.pdf

Kebrewessen, G. (2011). *The practices and challenges of feedback provision and error correction in teaching speaking skills. The case of Bishoftu and Dukem preparatory schools* (*Unpublished MA thesis*). Addis Ababa University.

Kiely, R., & Rea-Dickins, P. (2005). *Program evaluation in language education.* Palgrave.

Kitao, S. K., & Kitao, K. (1996). *Testing speaking. ERIC*. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED398261.pdf

Knight, B. (1992). Assessing speaking skills: A workshop for teacher development. *ELT Journal*, *46*(3), 294–302.

Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques* (Second Edition). New Age International Ltd. Publishers.

Lee, Y. (2007). The multimedia assisted test of English speaking: The Sopi approach. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, *4*(4), 352–366.

Locke, E., & Latham, G. (1990). Building a practically useful theory of goals setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey. *American Psychologist*, *57*, 705–717.

Luoma, S. (2004). *Assessing speaking.* Cambridge University Press.

Mebratu, M. (2018). An investigation into the extent and challenges of assessing students' speaking skills in selected secondary schools: The cases of Wolayita zone, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Education*, *11*(1), 78–86. https://doi.org/doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.17509/ije.v11i1.12165

Melkamu, Y. (2003). *Perceived awareness, usefulness, and frequency of use of speaking strategies among students of micro-link information technology college, and teachers views* (*Unpublished Master thesis*). Addis Ababa University.

Morley, J. (1991). Listening comprehension in second/foreign language instruction. in M. Celce Murcia (Ed.). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language.* Heinle & Heinle.

Newble, D., & Jaeger, K. (1983). The effects of assessment & examinations on the learning of medical students. *Medical Education*, *20*, 162–175.

Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers.* Prentice Hall.

Parrott, M. (1993). *Tasks for language teachers.* Cambridge University Press.

Race, P. (2010). *Making learning happen: A guide for post-compulsory education.* Sage Publications. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264680423

Race, P., & Pickford, R. (2007). *Making teaching work.* Sage Publications.

Richards, J. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice.* Cambridge University Press.

Sadler, D. R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. *Instructional Science*, *18*(2), 119–144.

Scarcella, R., & Oxford, R. L. (1994). Second language pronunciation: State of the art in instruction. *System*, *2*, 231–243.

Sisay, A. (1999). *Classroom interaction and its influence on the development of students' speaking skill in English at grade 11 level in government schools* (*Unpublished MA thesis*). Addis Ababa University.

Underhill, N. (1987). *Testing spoken language.* Cambridge University Press.

Wong, R. (1987). *Teaching pronunciation: Focus on English rhythm and intonation.* Prentice Hall Regents.

Wu, W. C., Marek, M. W., & Huang, H. W. (2012). *Using Skype and Facebook as social media to enhance learner communicative competency and cultural awareness in an EFL advanced conversation class. Research Gate.* Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266674176_Using_Skype_and_Facebook_as_social_media_to_enhance_learner_communicative_competency_and_cultural_awareness_in_an_EFL_advanced_conversation_class

Yang, X. (2010). How to achieve authentic context in classroom oral English teaching. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *1*(3), 339–342.