





Oral Interaction Assessment through Video-recorded Group Discussion: A Case of English for Communication Skills (ECS) for Graduating Students

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Abstract. Possessing a good language proficiency could significantly help one to speak better. However, taking an online test in that target language could impact one's performance. This paper aims to investigate online test anxiety in a group discussion among graduating students majoring in TESL. Oral interaction assessment is one of the components of ECS tested on students' workplace readiness for graduating students. Before the pandemic, the assessment was conducted face-to-face. However, when the pandemic hit, it had to be done online. The group discussion must be recorded and submitted through a Google form where the students must answer a questionnaire within the allocated time. Analysing the data collected from the online questionnaire and students' test results, the findings showed that more than half felt anxious when recording the discussion, although they were well-prepared for the assessment. They believed they needed more oral practice online to improve their performance. Despite these concerns, 75% were confident in taking the test. The students' test results showed that their performance is satisfactory and effective based on two assessors assessing their videos, indicating their anxiety and perceived lack of practice do not interfere with their actual performance when they are confident with their speaking abilities. However, since this study only involved twenty respondents from the TESL program, the findings may not represent the general population of the students in the same faculty. Future studies with a larger sample from various faculties are needed to investigate this phenomenon further.

Keywords: Oral Interaction, Online Assessment, Video-recorded, Group Discussion.

1 Introduction

In 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, it impacted not only the health sector but the education. The usual face-to-face class had to be abandoned entirely to contain the spread of the virus. Worst of all, it forced most countries to go on a lockdown, with Malaysia being no exception. With the lockdown, schools and universities had to close their doors, so courses and classes had to be conducted online. Even tests and final exams had to be implemented online, something that were alien to most public universities in Malaysia before the pandemic. However, online tests and exams are not unusual for language proficiency tests like IELTS as it has been computerized since 2015 [1]. Other proficiency tests such as TOEFL and APTIS have also opted for online platforms and made the necessary adjustment to cater to the pandemic [2], [3], [4], [5], [6]. Hence, the exit test, English Communication Skills (ECS) for graduating students in UTM, had to be converted online to cater to the lockdown during the pandemic. This change had to be executed, or students may be unable to graduate accordingly.

1.1 English for Communication Skills (ECS) for Graduating Students

ECS has been carried out since 2011 and was formerly known as the Test of English for Communication Skills (TECS). The idea came about due to the demand for a workforce that will not only hire graduates who are excellent in their CGPA but also well-versed in communication, especially in English. Thus, ECS is structured to assess the graduates of their language productive skills, writing, and speaking skills [7]. Both are conducted face-to-face. Oral communication assessment was conducted in the form of a group discussion between four students with the presence of two assessors. The students were given two minutes to prepare for their discussion after the question paper was revealed to them, and then, they had 15 minutes to conduct the discussion. The assessors would assess each student's performance based on the rubric comprising (i) professional image, (ii) interactive ability, (iii) contribution to the task, and (iv) language. When the mode of this oral interaction assessment had to be changed to online mode, the ECS task force decided to retain the model of execution but with a slight modification whereby students had to record their group discussion using Google Meet.

With the online mode of ECS oral interaction, within the allocated time, students are to read the question, prepare discussion points for two minutes and then record their discussion in groups for 15 minutes. After completing their discussion, the group leader who recorded the discussion will have to wait a few minutes for the recorded video to be available in his or her Google Mail. Finally, the group leader will share the link with other group members so that they can copy the link into the Google form provided by the ECS task force, with other personal details and the questionnaire that has been filled in. Since the online mode of this oral interaction is rather new at that time, it is paramount to investigate whether the online assessment affects students' oral interaction performance.

1.2 Test Anxiety

Test anxiety significantly refers to an individual's anxiety when taking a test. This anxiety does not only affect the well-being of a test taker like feeling worried, low self-esteem and unprepared, it could also affect the cognitive ability of the individual [8]. The cognitive ability is hampered by anxiety because the mind now is preoccupied on thinking of the emotion rather than the test itself. Due to this, the test result for the test-taker could also be affected. Studies have shown that assessments can lead to anxiety among students, and the anxiety may even be higher if it involves technology. [9] claimed that moderate anxiety among students can improve their performance while high anxiety level can adversely affect their academic performance [10]. Another factor that adds to this anxiety is their ability to speak in English, which is a second language among students in Malaysia. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has been found to affect students' language learning and performance [11], [12] and eventually results in unsatisfactory performance in the assessment or test [13], [14]. Other factors contributing to the FLA include insufficient rehearsal or practice [15], inadequate self-assurance [12], and fear of making mistakes [16], [17]. A study conducted by Liu and Xiangming [18] found that high anxiety among university students had a negative effect on their test performance, especially performance in speaking tests. Since ECS was first implemented through an online platform in 2020, this study investigated whether test anxiety and the use of technology affect the oral interaction assessment performance among graduating students in UTM.

1.3 Oral Interaction Assessment

In order to evaluate the proficiency of a language learner, an oral interaction assessment has to be conducted because speaking skill entails various elements like vocabulary, grammar, fluency, interaction ability, and task fulfillment [19]. Assessing speaking skills through a group discussion has a different impact on the assessee because it tests one's ability to speak in social situations. Regardless of how the group discussion is conducted, whether online or face-to-face, the requirement is still the same where everyone who is participating in a group discussion needs to explain, argue, describe, persuade, convince, agree, and disagree with one another. With a group discussion conducted online, the participants need to have different skills in reading cues from their counterparts.

2 Methodology

A triangulation mixed method design was adopted in this study. Data were collected quantitatively and qualitatively to understand the situation better. Feedback from the test takers was collected from a survey and the test providers' official records of video submissions were gathered.

2.1 Participants

A total of 20 students from a population of 1828 who took ECS in Semester 1 2021/2022 were conveniently sampled for this study. The participants were final year Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) undergraduate students when they sat for ECS.

2.2 Survey

A survey of 28 questions using a Likert scale was administered to the participants using a Google Form where each student had to indicate their responses on the form before they submitted their ECS Oral Interaction video to be assessed.

2.3 ECS Oral Interaction Results

After their videos were assessed, the participants' results were extracted and used to triangulate the findings from the survey.

3 Results and Findings

The summary of the survey results is grouped into four broad categories: (1) anxiety during the test; (2) cognitive processes of test anxiety; (3) attitude towards the test. These categories are reflected in the four constructs in Figure 1.

For the first category, Figure 1 shows an equal percentage of participants agreeing and disagreeing with the statement representing anxiety during the test construct: 'During the test, I feel anxious even when I am well-prepared for the test.' Similar to the first category, the second construct, represented by the statement 'During the test, my performance is affected by thoughts of failing the test,' also shows an equal number of participants who agreed and disagreed.

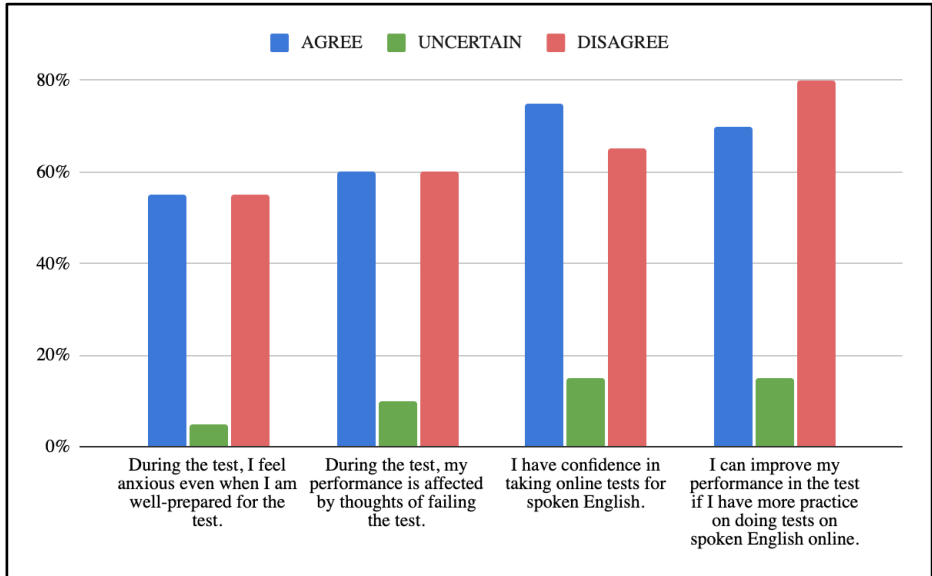


Figure 1. Survey results

Table 1. List of students' Oral Interaction results.

STUDENTS	RESULTS	STUDENTS	RESULTS
TESL-1	5	TESL-11	4
TESL-2	5	TESL-12	4
TESL-3	5	TESL-13	5
TESL-4	5	TESL-14	5
TESL-5	5	TESL-15	4
TESL-6	5	TESL-16	4
TESL-7	4	TESL-17	5
TESL-8	5	TESL-18	4
TESL-9	4	TESL-19	5
TESL-10	4	TESL-20	5

4 Discussion

Despite these concerns, 75% were confident in taking online oral interaction tests, supported by their performance in the assessment as they scored level 5 and 4 high based on two assessors assessing their videos. As shown in Figure 1, an equal percentage of students felt anxious during the test, although they had prepared well. However, compared to their oral assessment results, they scored really well, indicating that speaking anxiety has no effect on their performance, aligned with the findings of the study by Tridinanti [12] on undergraduates in Palembang that their speaking anxiety has no significant relationship with their speaking achievement.

Although an equal percentage of students agree and disagree with the statement that fear of failing the test could affect their performance, the results by the assessors proved otherwise. This finding disputes the claim made by Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel [17] that fear of failing a test can cause language anxiety. The reason for this contradictory finding is perhaps because the current study's students are TESL teacher-trainees who have been in the program for four years. Hence, the fear of failing the test does not affect their actual oral interaction performance.

As can be seen from the graph, 70% of the students were confident about taking the speaking test online, attributed to the experience that these students have of using online platforms during their teaching practice. Although their teaching practice does not involve them in a speaking test, the experience of managing online platforms such as Google Meet and teaching using it leads to their high confidence level. Hence, this is aligned with a study by Tridinanti [12] that there is a significant correlation between self-confidence and speech achievement, as those with high confidence levels tend to have higher achievement. Suparlan [16] also claimed that having confidence does not contribute to test anxiety.

The findings of this current study also show that anxiety and insufficient practice do not interfere with their actual performance (refer to Table 1) when they are confident with their speaking abilities. When it comes to having more practice, although there is a difference of 10% between those who agreed and disagreed, it is important to note that more than 50% agreed that more practice contributed to better results. This finding is not aligned with the claim made by Bárkányi [15] that inadequate rehearsal or practice can contribute to FLA, which eventually affects test performance. The current study's findings proved otherwise, as the students scored well, although they felt that more practice could help them achieve better results.

However, since this study only involved twenty respondents from the TESL program, the findings may not represent the general population of the students in the same faculty. Future studies must include more respondents from various faculties to investigate if it produces the same findings.

5 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that although students perceived to have high anxiety levels before the oral interaction assessment, their performance results showed a good achievement. All the participants scored high level 4 (satisfactory) and mid-level 5 (effective), proving that anxiety level does not affect their oral interaction performance. It is believed that factors such as proficiency level and teaching practice experience could contribute to students' better performance despite experiencing text anxiety.

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