

Attitudes and Perceptions of the Students and Instructors towards Testing Speaking Communicatively

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the attitudes and perceptions of the students and instructors towards the speaking test at a School of Foreign Languages. For this purpose, the data were collected through questionnaires delivered to two groups of participants. The first group was composed of 210 students who were asked to assess their perceptions and attitudes about the speaking test as pre-, while and post-tests. The second group was composed of 32 instructors who were given a questionnaire to find out their attitudes and perceptions towards the rating scale, the materials, and the procedure followed during the test and the assessment period. The students were in two levels ranging from pre-intermediate to intermediate in the preparatory program from different faculties. Our data revealed that most of the students had no experience of any speaking test before, and therefore, they had higher anxiety during the test. Among the students, the speaking test was regarded as the most difficult test when compared to the testing of other language skills. Students pointed out that they could not express themselves adequately during the test, and claimed that they needed to have more oral practice in the classroom. On the other hand, the instructors emphasized that the speaking test was the most difficult one to apply and assess, however, the scale and rubrics were adequate enough to assess the students' oral performance.

Key words: *Speaking test, attitudes, proficiency exam, speaking skill, English as a foreign language*

İngilizce Hazırlık Öğrencilerinin ve İngilizce Okutmanlarının İletişimsel Konuşma Sınavına İlişkin Tutum ve Algıları

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizce hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin konuşma sınavına yönelik, sınav öncesi, sınav esnası ve sınav sonrasındaki deneyimlerini, tutum ve algılarını belirlemek, ayrıca okutmanların sınav sırasında kullanılan sınav ölçeği, materyaller ve konuşma sınavı süreci hakkındaki algılarını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Katılımcılar hazırlık sınıflarında öğrenim görmekte olan orta-alt ve orta düzey olmak üzere 2 seviye grubundan toplam 210 öğrenci ve onların derslerine giren ve sınav yapan 32 İngilizce okutmanıdır. Veriler konuşma sınavı sonrası öğrencilere ve öğretim elemanlarına uygulanan sormacalar yoluyla elde edilmiş ve betimsel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın bulgularına göre, öğrencilerin büyük bir çoğunluğunun daha önce herhangi bir konuşma sınavı deneyimi yoktur. Bu tür deneyimlerinin bulunmayışı onların konuşma sınavına yönelik kaygı düzeylerini artırdığı saptanmıştır. Sınavın bölümleri ve içeriği hakkında önceden bilgi sahibi olmalarına rağmen, bu bilgilendirme onların kaygı düzeylerinin azalmasına herhangi bir katkı sağlamamıştır. Konuşma sınavı, diğer beceri sınavlarıyla karşılaştırıldığında en zor sınav olarak görülmektedir. Öğrenciler ayrıca sınav sırasında anlatmak istediklerini tam olarak ifade edemediklerini ve bu nedenle derslerde daha çok konuşma pratiğine ihtiyaç duyduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Diğer yandan, öğretim elemanları konuşma sınavının uygulaması en zor sınav olduğunu ve sınav sırasında kullanılan ölçeğin yeterli olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Konuşma sınavı, tutum, yeterlik sınavı, konuşma becerisi, İngilizce öğretimi*

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Introduction

In the era of communicative language teaching, teaching and testing four language skills is inevitable. As teaching and testing are important components of the same process, we have to take assessment into account as part of the learning process, and we have to test four skills as well as we teach them (Bailey, 1998; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Brown, 2004; Brown & Hudson, 2002; Genesee & Upshur, 1996; Hughes, 2003; Shohamy, 2001; Weir, 1990). Any skill which is not tested will simply be ignored by the learners, and it will have a negative backwash effect on the learners. As speaking plays an important role in communication, we have to teach and test it as part of communication. Provided that we ignore testing speaking, the students do not have to bother about studying or getting ready for speaking tests, and eventually will ignore speaking skill.

Although there are some approaches to teaching speaking from structural, functional and interactional points of view, we look at the issue from interactional perspectives. According to Hughes (2003), the ability to interact successfully in that language involves comprehension as well as production. Thus, in both the teaching and the testing process of speaking, teachers need to be aware that it involves both listening and speaking. According to Kitao and Kitao (1996), emphasis is placed on appropriateness rather than on ability to form grammatically correct sentences in testing productive skills. For that reason, for the purpose of testing speaking, teachers should bring meaningful tasks which represent daily life such as description, providing information, explanation, narration, reporting an event, having a discussion on a topic, and should provide prompts, elicit responses and provide feedback.

Speaking skill has been tested in many institutions and universities for the past few decades because it is one of the most important skills to test as well as the most challenging one (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Brown, 2004; Brown & Hudson, 2002; Hughes, 2003; Nakamura, 1993; Shohamy, 2001; Underhill, 1987). For the test to be fair, reliable and valid, speaking test requires a good planning, organization, and administration different from the other skills.

It is necessary to prepare both students and instructors to get to know the whole process; the test item types, the assessment scale and the procedures because "testing speaking is widely regarded as the most challenging of all language tests to prepare, administer, and score" (Madsen, 1983, p.147).

Speaking tests are the most challenging and stressful part of the language exams for the students due to many factors during the test. Students are tested one-by-one or two as a pair and are expected to talk about on a given task. Thus, students are affected by various factors such as concentration, self-confidence, limited time, the attitudes of the assessors during the test. On the other hand, assessors may not have enough experience or have no experience about testing speaking, and they may have some conflicts with their colleagues to carry out the test objectively and provide rater's objectivity (Brown, 2004). For that reason, which scale to be used for valid and reliable results is the main concern for assessors in many institutions because speaking consists of many sub-skills, and tests the ability of speaking the target language. Therefore, performance tests generally require raters to judge the quality of examinees' spoken language relative to a rating scale (Turner & Upshur, 2002). The important components of a speaking test are; 1. Real life tasks 2. Face validity 3. Authenticity and performance (Fulcher, 1997; Fulcher, 2000). Each institution may use different scales, and this can change according to the type of the test, the institution, the number of hours a day/week they have for speaking classes, their level, their age and background. There are some assessment scales proposed by various institutions (Cambridge Exams, ielts, Common European Framework) and scholars (Brown, 2004; Hughes, 2003).

This study aims to discover about the backgrounds of the students about speaking tests, their reflections about pre-test, during and post-test, how they get prepared for the speaking test, how they feel during the test, how they are affected by the assessors, their thoughts about the assessors' objectivity and their perceptions after the exam. Furthermore, we also attempted to find out

the attitudes of the instructors as assessors about testing speaking, their challenges during the exam, their thoughts about the speaking scale, and the accordance among the assessors. This study attempts to address the following research questions: 1) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the students about the speaking tests? a) are there any differences among male and female students? b) are there any differences among pre-intermediate and intermediate students? 2) What are the instructors' perceptions and attitudes towards the factors for the speaking test: the rubrics and the materials used, and the procedures followed?

Methodology

Participants and the Setting

The participants were the students and the English instructors in the School of Foreign Languages at Pamukkale University. The first group of the participants was composed of 210 students, of whom 55% were female and 45% were male, and 82% were from pre-intermediate and 18% were from intermediate level. The age of the students ranged from 17 to 24, and the mean was 19.56. When their educational background was examined, 60% came from Anatolian/Super high schools where they had more English classes, 39% came from State high schools, and only 1% came from Science high schools. They had 25 hours of English classes per week including four skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. On the other hand, 32 instructors, 6 of whom were male and 26 of whom were female, constituted the second group of the participants who took part in the speaking test as the assessor or interlocutor. They had different teaching experiences from 1 year to 18 years. They graduated from different departments ranging from English Language Teaching to English Language and Literature or Department of Translation and Interpretation. Most of them (93.75%) had 1-10 years of teaching experience.

In the School of Foreign Languages, all the instructors used the same curriculum, text books and materials, and the students were given the same test materials for four skills prepared and administered by the testing office. The students took the exam through

one-to-two interview type; initially, they were asked some personal questions as a warm up activity to lower their anxiety level, and then, some questions/tasks from the activities they had had during the class were asked in the form of an interview, and the last part of the test was a picture description/a picture-story in which the students were required to describe it and/or answer the questions about it. Some extension questions were also asked to make them express themselves in a natural conversation style. The duration of the test varied from 5 to 12 minutes. Each instructor had a marking rubric consisting of content, organization, vocabulary; fluency and accuracy (see Appendix 1).

Instruments

Two questionnaires adapted from Güllüoğlu (2004) were designed to collect data from both students and instructors. The first questionnaire, administered to the students, had 44 items to find out perceptions and attitudes of the students about the speaking tests, their experiences before, during and after the test. It had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .78. The second questionnaire, administered to the instructors, had 26 items to reveal the instructors' perceptions and attitudes towards the procedure, the scale used and the materials. It had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .76. Both questionnaires were constructed on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected from the students through the questionnaire in a class hour and from the instructors by distributing them in their offices. The instructors returned them in a week's time. The results were analyzed through SPSS 16.0.

Results and Discussion

According to our data, the most striking result is that most of the students (96.1%) had never experienced a speaking test before they took this test ($\bar{X}=1.30$, $sd=1.183$). Although these students had had education on English in primary and secondary schools (approximately 1400 hours), their teachers had never assessed their speaking skills before. This factor may have negatively affected their attitudes and perceptions towards the

speaking test, and may have affected the performance of the students in the speaking test negatively and increased the anxiety level of the students. Thus, a majority of the students (63.3%) pointed out that they were nervous and stressful before the test ($\bar{X}=3.77$, $sd=1.301$) although they were informed about the procedures to be followed before they took the test. On the other hand, the students reported that 63.8% of them prepared for the test on their own, 27.1% prepared for it

with their friends, 4.3% had private tutoring from a teacher, and 4.8% did nothing about it. Although this is the case, 37.7% believed that the speaking test was the most difficult test among the other skills ($\bar{X}=3.03$, $sd=1.412$). Moreover, 76.2% of them emphasized that they were not comfortable before the test despite the fact that 36.7% of them stated that they were informed about the procedures of the test before they took it (see Table 1).

Table 1. The distribution of students' attitudes towards the speaking test before it is administered N=210

Items	Mean	sd	Participation Level	%
5 I studied for the test on my own	3.78	1.183	Agree	63.8
2 I was more anxious and nervous compared to other skills before the speaking test	3.77	1.301	Agree	63.3
9 Speaking test was the most difficult one for me among the others	3.03	1.412	Partly Agree	37.7
10 I did not have any idea about the assessment scale	3.12	1.393	Partly Agree	39.6
4 I was informed about the procedures of the test	2.98	1.285	Partly Agree	36.7
11 I thought that the speaking test would be more comfortable compared to written tests	2.32	1.248	Disagree	60.5
8 I was comfortable before the speaking test	1.94	1.261	Disagree	76.2
1 I have had a speaking test in my previous schools	1.30	.826	Completely Disagree	96.1

The data on while-test section revealed that although 40% of the students pointed out that the materials/tasks in the speaking test were parallel to the content of the speaking course, 55.7% of them emphasized that the questions/tasks in the speaking test were explicit and clear, and 66.2% of them reported that the questions/tasks were as they had expected. In spite of everything, 68.1% of the students pointed out that they had difficulty in expressing themselves clearly and in an adequate way during the test ($\bar{X}=3.93$, $sd=1.161$). It seems that despite the fact that the students could understand the questions/tasks, they felt they could not express their ideas and feelings sufficiently. The speaking activities done in the class helped them understand the situation (40%) but they still had difficulty in expressing themselves in English. Therefore, for the reasons for their failure, 54.7% of them thought that they had

insufficient vocabulary or they were not good at using appropriate vocabulary, and they (53.8%) stated that they made simple grammar mistakes that should not have been made (see Table 2). It seems that the procedure of the test, the questions/tasks to be carried out during the test and the materials chosen were suitable for the students' level. However, it was not enough to alleviate their anxiety and nervousness before and during the test.

Regarding the students' concerns related to the assessor/interlocutor whom they had not met before, 30% of them was negatively affected and they got nervous; therefore, they had a bad performance in the test. On the other hand, a majority of the students (60%) expressed that they were encouraged and motivated by the assessors/interlocutors during the test ($\bar{X}=3.65$, $sd=1.177$). Although some students (53.3%) did not have any difficulty in understanding the style and

pronunciation of the instructors, 23.4% did. It means that some students have not encountered enough exposure to speech

varieties during the class activities, and when they do not know the person they speak to, they may have problems, and it may

Table 2. The distribution of students' attitudes towards the speaking test during the test N=210

	Items	Mean	sd	Participation Level	%
14	I had difficulty in expressing myself clearly and in an adequate way during the test	3.93	1.161	Agree	68.1
21	I had insufficient vocabulary or I was not good at using appropriate vocabulary	3.66	1.074	Agree	54.7
22	I was encouraged and motivated by the assessors during the test	3.65	1.177	Agree	60.0
19	I was more anxious and nervous compared to other skills during the speaking test	3.48	1.324	Agree	50.4
23	I made some simple grammar mistakes	3.47	1.160	Agree	53.8
13	The questions/tasks in the speaking test were explicit and clear	3.44	1.205	Agree	55.7
12	The materials/tasks in the speaking test were parallel to the content of the speaking course	3.13	1.169	Agree	40.0
18	The assessor whom I hadn't met or studied with before affected my performance negatively	2.71	1.437	Partly Agree	30.0
20	I had difficulty in understanding the style and pronunciation of the instructors in the speaking test	2.59	1.311	Disagree	53.3
24	The questions/tasks were the ones I had never encountered or expected	2.25	1.158	Disagree	66.2

affect their performance negatively during the test. In addition, no matter how much the instructors encouraged them, 50.4% of the students reported that they were more anxious and nervous compared to other skills during the speaking test ($\bar{X}=3.48$, $sd=1.324$). It seems that if a student starts this type of a test as nervous and anxious, s/he cannot alleviate them throughout the test (see Table 2).

About the post-test attitudes and perceptions of the students, most students (61%) pointed out that they were inexperienced as to how to prepare for the speaking test efficiently as they had never had a speaking test in their previous institutions ($\bar{X}=3.77$, $sd=1.236$), and suggested that the institution should better guide and prepare the students regarding the test. Next, 58.1 % of the students reported that the speaking test was the most important test to encourage them to use English, and 53.3% of them believed that speaking tests were necessary to find out their level of English. This shows that they were aware of

the importance of the speaking skill. For that reason, 41.5% of them reported that they had insufficient oral practice in English in their classes, and 58.1% of them suggested that the institution should do more speaking activities regardless of the students' level because 62% of them believed that the speaking skill was the most challenging skill to develop ($\bar{X}=3.58$, $sd=1.115$), (see Table 3). However, 62.7% of the students pointed out that the students were given enough time to carry out the activity/task. Only 20.5% reported time management problems during the test.

Another result was that 55.7% of the students believed that they were assessed objectively by the instructors during the test ($\bar{X}=3.45$, $sd=1.293$). However, 33% of the students emphasized that they felt the least successful in the speaking test compared to the tests on the other skills, and 89% emphasized that the test they felt the least comfortable was the speaking ($\bar{X}=1.95$, $sd=1.071$). Although 62% of them thought that speaking was the most

important skill for them to develop, and 33.8% of them thought that the speaking test should be applied more often so that they would be more experienced with it ($\bar{X}=2.80$, $sd=1.392$), (see Table 3).

It seems that although they know the importance of the speaking skill, some students do not want to have the speaking test more often due to their high anxiety and stress. We believe that they are still in the 'silent period' in B1 level and have not developed their inner criteria (Gattegno, 1976, p.29) yet to be able to carry out the required tasks/activities during the test. For that reason, most of the students (66.1%) reported that they needed more speaking practice in all classes ($\bar{X}=3.90$, $sd=1.081$), and lacked necessary grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation skills.

Students claimed that the speaking test was the most important test to encourage them to use English (58.1%), and that speaking tests were necessary to find out their level of

English (53.3%). They also suggested that the institution should do more speaking activities regardless of the students' level (58.1%). Furthermore, 52% of them stated that their performance during the exam was worse than they thought. Although the speaking test they were exposed to was the most challenging and stressful when compared with other types of tests, they believed that they would perform better in the following speaking tests. We believe that the test has provided a considerable amount of 'backwash effect' (Alderson, Clapham & Wall, 1995; Hughes, 2003) for the students, and they will get ready much better in the following speaking tests, and testing speaking will be an important component in their agenda from now on.

The similarities and differences among the male and female students

Another aspect of the study was to find out whether there were some differences between female and male students'

Table 3. The distribution of students' attitudes towards the speaking test after the test N=210

	Items	Mean	sd	Participation Level	%
43	After that test, I realized that I needed more speaking practice	3.90	1.081	Agree	66.1
35	I believe that speaking is the most important skill to be developed	3.81	1.180	Agree	62.0
25	I was inexperienced about getting prepared for the speaking test	3.77	1.236	Agree	61.0
33	Speaking test was the most important test to encourage me to use English	3.73	1.090	Agree	58.1
28	The institution should do more speaking activities regardless of the students' level	3.58	1.115	Partly Agree	58.1
27	Speaking tests were necessary to find out their level of English	3.54	1.160	Partly Agree	53.3
38	I believe that I was assessed objectively by the teachers	3.45	1.293	Partly Agree	55.7
32	I had insufficient oral practice in English in classes	3.27	1.254	Partly Agree	41.5
26	I felt the least successful in the speaking test compared to the tests on the other skills	3.1	1.278	Partly Agree	33.0
31	Speaking test should be applied more often so that I would be more experienced	2.80	1.392	Partly Agree	33.8
30	The students were not given enough time to carry out the activity/task	2.43	1.277	Disagree	62.7
36	The test I felt the most comfortable with was the speaking	1.95	1.071	Disagree	73.2

perceptions and attitudes towards the speaking test. According to our results, there is no statistically significant difference between them (males: $\bar{X}=3.09$, $sd=.27$, $t=.252$, $p=.801$; and females: $\bar{X}=3.07$, $sd=.32$, $t=.252$, $p=.804$). However, when the items in the questionnaire were computed individually, we can observe statistically significant differences on some items; 2, 4, 8, 10, 11, 14, 19, 22, 24, 32 and 43 (see Table 4). According to our data, compared to the female ones, male students were more anxious and nervous in the speaking test compared to other skills before the speaking test; they thought that they were informed about how to be assessed in the speaking test; they had difficulty in expressing themselves clearly and in an adequate way during the test; they were more anxious and nervous compared to other skills during the speaking test; they were encouraged and motivated by the assessors during the test; they believed

that the speaking activities in classes were insufficient; and after the test, they realized that they needed more speaking practice.

On the other hand, female students were very comfortable before the test; they did not have any idea about the assessment scale; they thought that the speaking test would be more comfortable compared to written tests; and the tasks/activities in the test were the types they had never encountered before (see Table 4). It seems that male students take the exam more serious than the female ones and they have outnumbered the female ones on more issues.

The anxiety level of pre-intermediate students (85%) before the test was much higher than that of the intermediate group (70%) because the students who had high anxiety level had more negative feelings towards the test. Thus, the level of the students leads them to

Table 4. Independent samples t-tests results for gender differences

Items	Gender	N	Mean	sd	t	df	p
2 I was more anxious and nervous compared to other skills before the speaking test	Male	115	4.08	1.148			
	Female	95	3.39	1.378	3.951	208	.000
4 I was informed about how to be assessed in the speaking test	Male	115	3.17	1.192			
	Female	95	2.75	1.360	2.372	208	.019
8 I was very comfortable before the test	Male	115	1.77	1.200			
	Female	95	2.14	1.310	-2.093	208	.038
10 I did not have any idea about the assessment scale	Male	115	2.75	1.310			
	Female	95	3.58	1.357	-4.502	208	.000
11 I thought that the speaking test would be more comfortable compared to written tests	Male	115	2.04	1.180			
	Female	95	2.65	1.253	-3.621	208	.000
14 I had difficulty in expressing myself clearly and in an adequate way during the test	Male	115	4.11	1.098			
	Female	95	3.71	1.202	2.566	208	.011
19 I was more anxious and nervous compared to other skills during the speaking test	Male	115	3.77	1.172			
	Female	95	3.13	1.416	3.577	208	.000
22 I was encouraged and motivated by the assessors during the test	Male	115	3.81	1.083			
	Female	95	3.46	1.262	2.135	208	.034
24 The tasks/activities in the test were types I had never encountered before	Male	115	2.07	1.070			
	Female	95	2.46	1.227	-2.472	207	.014
32 I believe that the speaking activities in classes are insufficient	Male	115	3.43	1.204			
	Female	95	3.07	1.290	2.061	207	.041
43 After that test, I realized that I needed more speaking practice	Male	115	4.04	1.09			
	Female	95	3.74	1.122	2.062	208	.040

be more anxious because their level is not sufficient to be competent in using the skill. The probable reason for this situation may be due to the fact that when the proficiency level decreases, their production level gets lower. Furthermore, the students in the pre-intermediate level have a different syllabus than those in the intermediate level, and this affects the materials used, the activities carried out and the amount of time spent on activities.

The similarities and differences among lower intermediate and intermediate students

When the lower intermediate and intermediate groups were compared, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups (Lower intermediate group: $N=169$, $\bar{X}=3.10$, $sd=.30$, $t= 2.186$, $p=.30$ and Intermediate group: $N=38$, $\bar{X}=2.98$, $sd=.273$, $t=2.186$, $p=.30$). It shows that the lower intermediate group perceives the speaking test as a more stressful issue. When

the items were also computed individually, we can observe statistically significant differences on these items; 2, 4, 8, 10, 11, 14, 19, 22, 24, 32 and 43 (see Table 5). According to our data, lower intermediate students were more anxious and nervous compared to other skills before the speaking test; they prepared for the test with their friends; the assessor whom they hadn't met or studied with before affected their performance negatively; they were more anxious and nervous compared to other skills during the speaking test; they were encouraged and motivated by the assessors during the test; and after that test, they realized that they needed more speaking practice. However, the only significant difference for the intermediate students was that they prepared for the speaking test on their own (see Table 5). It seems that the lower intermediate group must have been affected by the test more than the intermediate group and they reacted to these issues more than the intermediate students.

Table 5. Independent Samples t-tests results for level differences

	Items	Level	N	Mean	sd	t	df	p
2	I was more anxious and nervous compared to other skills before the speaking test	Lower Int.	172	3.90	1.243			
		Int.	38	3.18	1.411	3.113	208	.002
5	I prepared for the speaking test on my own	Lower Int.	172	3.70	1.234			
		Int.	38	4.13	.844	-2.062	208	.040
6	I prepared for the test with my friends	Lower Int.	172	2.67	1.288			
		Int.	38	2.21	1.166	2.042	208	.042
18	The assessor whom I hadn't met or studied with before affected my performance negatively	Lower Int.	172	2.80	1.481			
		Int.	38	2.29	1.137	2.006	208	.046
19	I was more anxious and nervous compared to other skills during the speaking test	Lower Int.	172	3.57	1.294			
		Int.	38	3.05	1.394	2.199	208	.029
22	I was encouraged and motivated by the assessors during the test	Lower Int.	172	3.74	1.168			
		Int.	38	3.26	1.155	2.274	208	.024
43	After that test, I realized that I needed more speaking practice	Lower Int.	172	3.98	1.057			
		Int.	38	3.55	1.132	2.241	208	.026

The instructors' perceptions and attitudes towards the materials and the rubrics used, and the procedures followed

Our data revealed that most of the instructors (87.5%) had a speaking test experience before. Only some newly recruited ones (12.5%) had this experience for the first time ($\bar{X}=4.22$, $sd=.975$). A majority of them (62.5%) reported that they knew all the procedures regarding the test. It seems that the orientation sessions held at least twice before the test were useful. For that reason, a great majority of them (90.6%) claimed that the orientation sessions were effective and useful ($\bar{X}=4.06$, $sd=.619$).

Although 56.2% of them had some concerns related to using the rubric and grading the students' performance before the test, 96.9 % of them believed that the scale was effective and sufficient to assess the performance of the

students during the test. Furthermore, 71.9% of the instructors did some preparations regarding the activities/tasks before the test so that they would go through the test smoothly, and 71.9% claimed that the activities/tasks were appropriate to the level of the students (see Table 6).

Although 40.7% of the instructors pointed out that the speaking test was more difficult to assess compared to other skills, a great majority of them (96.9%) claimed that it was very effective to have an assessor and interlocutor during the test for a reliable assessment ($c=4.50$, $sd=.568$), and the time allocation for each student was sufficient. However, before administering the test, some of them (21.9%) had some concerns related to using the rubric and grading the students' performance. Furthermore, 50% of them had

Table 6. The distribution of instructors' attitudes towards the speaking test N=32

Items	Mean	sd	Participation Level	%
16 It was very effective to have an assessor and interlocutor during the test for a reliable assessment and the time allocation for each student was sufficient	4.50	.568	Completely Agree	96.9
19 I realized that our students had improved their speaking skill the least among all other skills	4.38	.609	Completely Agree	93.8
23 The speaking test encouraged our students to improve their speaking skill	4.22	.608	Completely Agree	90.6
1 I had a speaking test experience before	4.22	.975	Completely Agree	87.5
22 The students were nervous during the exam.	4.12	.660	Agree	84.4
9 The scale was effective and sufficient to assess the performance of the students during the test	4.12	.921	Completely Agree	96.9
5 The orientation sessions were effective and useful	4.06	.619	Completely Agree	90.6
12 The activities/tasks were appropriate to the level of the students	3.81	.592	Agree	71.9
11 I did some preparations regarding the activities/tasks before the test	3.72	.683	Agree	71.9
24 I had difficulty in grading students' performance objectively	3.47	.915	Agree	50.0
3 I knew all the procedures regarding the test	3.44	1.343	Agree	62.5
2 It was a difficult test to administer	3.25	1.136	Partly Agree	46.8
14 The speaking test was more difficult to assess compared to other skills	3.22	1.211	Partly Agree	40.7
21 I believe that the speaking test was assessed objectively in all groups	3.03	.695	Partly Agree	18.8
7 Before administering the test, I had some concerns related to using the rubric and grading the students' performance	2.66	.971	Partly Agree	21.9

difficulty in grading students' performance objectively, and 18.8% of them believed that the assessment was objective in all groups. For that reason, the assessor and the interlocutor collaborated with each other very often throughout the test. We believe that it is an effective strategy to provide a reliable assessment for the students, instructors and the institution. On the other hand, 93.8% of instructors realized that the students had improved their speaking skill the least among all other skills and they were nervous during the test, and however, they (90.6%) reported that the speaking test encouraged the students to improve their speaking skill ($c=4.22$, $sd=.608$). Thus, we can pinpoint the importance of backwash effect as it was a useful and triggering effect on the students attitude towards the skill, and we suggest that it should be part of both achievement and proficiency tests.

When the teachers were asked to range the difficulty of testing four skills, they reported that speaking was the most difficult one to administer and assess, and writing was the second as a productive skill, on the other hand, listening was the third, reading, vocabulary and grammar tests were the easiest because they were mostly tested by recognition type of items such as multiple choice, True/False or matching items. In addition, with regard to testing speaking, they reported some issues that they had difficulty with during the test: these were testing too many students in a day, rating students' oral performance, organizing the test, physical factors, and timing.

Conclusion

The results of the study have significant implications in terms of their methodological and pedagogical aspects. In terms of methodological aspects, first, the students do not have enough speaking test experience in their previous institutions, that is, the language teaching programs in the primary and secondary schools do not focus on speaking skills and testing speaking. Although the language learning process starts in primary schools, the students are not proficient enough to express themselves even at the elementary level in the target language. Although the programs and curriculum of the

Ministry of Education have been reorganized and revised, it is clear that there are still deficiencies in terms of speaking skills and speaking tests. The second is that the students pointed out that they had a high level of anxiety and stress before and throughout the test. Although they have had a foreign language learning program for many years, most of the students consider the speaking test as the most stressful test. The instructors should implement more efficient ways to reduce the anxiety level of the students. They can arrange more pair work and group work or discussion/debate activities in their classes, and thus, students will hopefully get ready for the speaking test. The students' awareness could be raised towards speaking topics so that they can get prepared in advance. The third implication of the study is for the instructors. The number of language institutions has been increasing day by day all over the country for the past twenty years, and a lot of instructors with different backgrounds teach and test the target language. Having no predictable or multiple choice answers, testing speaking as a skill gains great importance. In addition, having a valid and reliable exam is crucial. The participants in this study pointed out that they had some concerns in the assessment of the speaking test. As an implication, it can be said that the institution needs more teacher training programs to have a valid and reliable test in terms of testing speaking.

In terms of pedagogical aspects, this study tried to find out not only the attitudes and perceptions of the students, but also the instructors' perspectives on testing speaking, and also their ideas related to the rubric, materials, and the procedures used during the speaking test. We believe that this study may provide insights for both instructors and students to minimize the negative effects of the speaking tests. Next, it can help the instructors to get awareness about the attitudes and perceptions of their students towards testing speaking, and the instructors may try to find out alternative ways to help the learners. As a guide, the instructors can get information about the students' attitudes and perceptions, and may help them to improve positive attitudes towards the speaking skill and the test. Finally, the speaking classes and

materials may be revised to help the students to develop positive attitudes and perception towards the speaking tests.

This study was conducted with a limited number of students and instructors in the School of Foreign Languages, and it is one of the pioneering studies about testing

speaking in the setting of the School of Foreign Languages. It might help to improve the preparatory class programs in terms of teaching and testing speaking. It would be helpful if a replication of this study could be made with larger and more diverse samples in different settings.

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Appendix 1

Speaking Scale used in The School of Foreign Languages

CONTENT

- 5.VERY GOOD: Ideas expressed fully, covering all content elements with appropriate elaboration and minimal digression. Completely relevant to the assigned task. Interesting and informative.
- 4.GOOD: Ideas expressed covering all content elements with some elaboration. There may be some minor repetition or digression. Relevant to the task and

require minimal effort to listen.

3.ADEQUATE : A simple account with little elaboration or with some repetition and digression from the task. One or two content elements may have been ignored. Content may have been covered, however, not very interesting, but monotonous.

2.INADEQUATE: Not enough information. Student is jumping from one point to the other. Noticeable digression and irrelevance to the task. Requires considerable effort to follow.

1.POOR : Totally irrelevant to the assigned task or information is too little to assess.

ORGANIZATION

5.VERY GOOD : Ideas clearly stated, supported by various examples, facts or details. Well-organized and developed. Fully cohesive.

4.GOOD: Main ideas stand out but loosely organized or somewhat supported by various examples, facts or details. Still cohesive.

3.ADEQUATE : Only topic sentence and some factual information have been expressed. Limited support. Non-fluent. Lack of cohesion.

2.INADEQUATE: Ideas confused or disconnected. No cohesion at all.

1.POOR: Ideas do not communicate. No organization or not enough to assess.

VOCABULARY

5.VERY GOOD : Effective word choice and appropriate usage fully relevant to the task. A wide range of vocabulary has been used and even there may be idiomatic expressions. Mutually intelligible pronunciation.

4.GOOD: Quite precise use of vocabulary but still occasional inappropriate usage without obscuring the meaning. Mutually intelligible pronunciation.

3.ADEQUATE : Adequate usage of vocabulary with some hesitation. Some repetitions and searching for a word. Student may not remember some words but replaces with the ones from L1. Pronunciation requires careful listening.

2.INADEQUATE: Vocabulary is focused on basic objects, places and most common words. Frequent inappropriate usage of words. Pronunciation is mostly not intelligible.

1.POOR: Not enough usage of vocabulary to assess.

FLUENCY

5.VERY GOOD : Effortless and smooth speech covering appropriate intonation, rhythm and stress. Student can initiate, sustain and close a conversation and rarely asks for repetition.

4.GOOD: Some noticeable hesitations, repetitions but still easy to follow. Participates in conversation at a normal speed.

3.ADEQUATE : Frequent hesitation as a result of uncertainties but still at reasonable ease. Sometimes depended on the teachers' prompt question to carry out the task.

2.INADEQUATE: Student is often forced into silence but language limitations and needs help in handling the topic. Totally dependent on teachers' prompt questions to carry out the task.

1.POOR: Communication frequently breaks down. Student needs a lot of encouragement to keep going and requires very slow speech.

ACCURACY

5.VERY GOOD : Good control and confident use of language including complex statements and range of structures. There may be few errors of agreement, tense, number, articles or prepositions.

4.GOOD: Effective but simple constructions including minor problems in complex structures, a few errors of agreement, tense, number, articles or prepositions.

3.ADEQUATE : Major problems in structure and sometimes require careful listening. Meaning is sometimes obscured. Several errors of agreement, tense, number, articles or prepositions.

2.INADEQUATE: Difficult to follow due to frequent grammatical errors. Poor sentence construction or so much translation of syntax from L1.

1.POOR: No mastery of sentence structure or not enough information to assess. (Adapted from Jacobs et al's, (1981) Scoring profile).