**Unit Pelayanan Bahasa
POLITEKNIK PARIWISATA BALI**

Efficient Technique for Assessing Oral Communication Skills in ESP Class: A Case Study at Politeknik Pariwisata Bali

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ABSTRACT

It is generally agreed that oral communication skill is given more priority in teaching ESP for tourism compared with written one, and so is it in Poltekpar Bali (Bali Tourism Polytechnic) that educates and trains students to work or become entrepreneurs in the fields of tourism. Therefore, oral assessment becomes crucial. However, conducting this using the most common technique (i.e. one-by-one interview) takes plenty of time. This study was to find out an efficient technique for assessing oral communication skill in ESP class at Poltekpar Bali. It was an empirical classroom action research that was based on a collection of experiences and observations continuously reviewed and developed by the teachers. It was found that group oral test was an efficient technique, in which a group of students of 4 to 6 was provided with a card containing a situation relevant to their vocational subjects. They had to discuss it for about 10 minutes. Through unobtrusive listening to the discussion, the teacher carried out the assessment. This article shows how to design 'situation cards' and provides several examples of the cards. It also describes the procedures to be followed in handling the test, including the stages before, during, and after the implementation. Furthermore, it suggests some tips when the discussion during the test is stuck or does not work.

Keywords: ELT, ESP, English for tourism, speaking test, oral communication skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Poltekpar Bali, an acronym for Politeknik Pariwisata Bali (Bali Tourism Polytechnic), is one of six state vocational polytechnics under the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia. It runs Diploma 3 and Diploma 4 programs, the task of which is to educate and train students to become professional to work and/or do business in the fields of tourism, hospitality, and travel business. Since the students' future jobs are dealing with not only Indonesian

but also foreign customers, the students should be able to communicate appropriately in foreign languages, especially English which constitutes a compulsory subject in the programs.

Communicating in English as a foreign language is often one of the problems college graduates face when applying for jobs. Ahmad (2016) states that English language communication is the most common problem faced by most students. They are not "industry ready" because they do not have adequate communication skills. A graduate who does not have adequate English communication skills will find it difficult to obtain an appropriate job. Clement & Murugavel (2018) have found that poor English communication skills can hinder efforts to get a good job. Many employers agree that good communication skills can increase workability and career advancement opportunities. Universities need to emphasize communication skills so that their graduates have the necessary skills to perform well in job interviews and their jobs (Ting et al, 2017).

The type of English that is taught in the study programs in Poltekpar Bali is English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which is suitable for the vocational subjects being studied by the students. Diploma 3 Culinary Art Students, for example, learn English for Food Production. Likewise, Diploma 4 Travel Business students study English for Tour and Travel. Since communication between hotel staff or tourist officials and guests/customers/clients is mostly done by oral communication, the teaching of speaking skills (including listening, of course) is given priority in the teaching-learning process compared to reading and writing skills (this does not mean that reading and writing skills are not important).

According to Zhang (2009) cited in Ur (1996, 120), "of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important." Clement & Murugavel (2018) consider that among all the skills, speaking constitutes the most important skill in the workplace. Alam & Bashir Uddin (2013) cited in Staab (1992) states that listening and speaking constitute oral communication skills. Both are integrated skills and support in developing each other. Rahman (2010) further defines this as "an interactive process" where two communication agents i.e. Sender (S) and Receiver (R) are involved in the process.

Oral communication constitutes an exchange of ideas between the speaker and the listener. Alias & Osman (2015) defines oral communication as "the ability to speak verbally with the help of visual aids and non-verbal elements to support the delivery of meaning, and it involves speech, presentation, discussion, and interpersonal communication aspects". According to Ibna Seraj & Habil (2019), students have to be skillful in English oral communication in order to carry out work effectively in their future careers. It is generally agreed that a graduate who has good oral English communication skills has a better opportunity for career advancement and promotion rather than one who does not.

Considering the important role of oral communication skills for the graduates' career development therefore teaching these skills in the classroom must be given serious attention. In order to be able to determine the students' mastery of these skills, so oral assessment must be done. According to
(Joughin, 2010), this assessment plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process. One of the advantages of oral assessment is that students can speak spontaneously so the teacher can find out their English proficiency. Furthermore, Hughes (2020) states that oral tests have several purposes, e.g. to determine language proficiency, to find out the achievement of the objectives of a course, to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses, etc.

The importance of oral assessment in language testing is also mentioned by Sun (2014) that the teachers usually use authentic speaking tasks that are like real-life speaking activities. The conversational nature of speaking skills has encouraged the integration of more authentic and interactive assessment tasks, such as paired or group orals. According to Van Moere (2013), an oral test can involve test takers interacting together to perform a task while one or more testers observe their performances and rate their language proficiency.

There are several ways to assess students' oral skills that allow them to interact with each other resembling real-world oral communication. Sun (2014) provides an example of paired or group orals. Roca-Varela and Palacios (2013) mention several "types of tasks that are commonly used to assess learners' oral performances, ranging from interviews to picture descriptions, topic discussions, and role plays, while the criteria that are most frequently used by test takers are: range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence". Alharbi & Surur (2019) suggest some oral assessment criteria: pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, grammar/accuracy, comprehension, content, turn-taking, speech production rate, audibility, intelligibility, task completion, and timing.
Rahman (2010) mentions several elements of oral communication skills, i.e. "eye contact, body language, style, understanding the audience, adapting to the audience, active and reflexive listening, politeness, precision, conciseness, etc." Alharbi & Surur (2019) furthermore lists some oral assessment techniques: presentation, oral discussion, questions and answers, role play, interview, story-telling, dialogue, oral reports, audio recording, picture description, and simulations.

Attan (2014) recommends group discussion as an alternative to assess oral communication skills because it enables test takers to express their views and to comment on the views of other test takers. They can also respond spontaneously to the task. Moreover, it can assess a number of participants at one time. Thus, it is more efficient, unrehearsed, non-artificial responses from the test takers. Furthermore, Ockey (2014) claims that one of the strengths of group oral assessment is that it enables a tester to measure the interactional competence of a learner in an ESP context, as explicitly stated, "One of the key features of

communicative language testing (CLT) is the use of the pair and group formats to assess language learners' communicative abilities. This is particularly true in the development of ESP testing". Group discussions in an oral group test enable to integrate language skills in which test takers have to engage multiple skill sets to perform the group tasks assigned to them. It is concluded that "through their interaction they demonstrated not just their language skills but also a range of other cognitive and interpersonal skills as well" (Ockey, 2014). So, he states that group oral assessment is also be applicable to ESP situations. In this assessment, test takers often require to discuss tasks taken from the content domain. Thus, it can even assess not only English proficiency but also content topics covered in the course. Gan (2010) concludes that a group oral assessment can authentically resemble social interaction skills. These characteristics of authenticity and contextualization are learning that emphasizes genuine communication and real-world relationships. However, Anggraeni et al (2019) claim that handling group oral is not easy. "The students could experience some stress, nervous, or unconfident when they aware that they become focus of their teacher's or their friends' attention". Therefore, it is also important to reduce the anxiety factor so the students can perform better.

In Poltekpar Bali, on average, the students in each study program receive English courses for 2 semesters. In each semester, they have 2 credits, including 2 lesson hours (i.e., 2 times 50 minutes) per meeting. In accordance with Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Indonesia, in each semester, teachers have to teach the subject for 16 meetings (including Middle and Final Semester Examinations). So the teachers only teach for 14 meetings.

The English language teachers considered that the available time was very limited to deliver learning material in order to achieve the semester learning outcomes of the study program. However, the teachers tried to make use of this limited amount of time to teach and conduct related tests, including the most important one, i.e. oral test.

The teachers agree that oral test is essential because it is more objective and authentic compared with others and therefore the score of which is considered as the biggest weight in both of Middle and Final Semester Examination scores. However, conducting oral test using the technique they commonly used to, i.e. interviewing every student one by one took plenty of time. As an illustration, a class of 30 students spent about 6 to 9 lesson hours (or 3 to 4.5 meetings), when the teacher interviewed a student for 10 to 15 minutes. Therefore, this study was carried out to find out an efficient technique (of course effective one, too) to conduct an oral test.

2. METHOD

This research was a Classroom Action Research (CAR). According to Susilo et al (2022), CAR is a reflective research carried out cyclically by teachers in the classroom. The CAR process starts from the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection to solve problems and try new things to improve the quality of learning. In this study, the researchers were directly involved with 10 other English language teachers at Poltekpar Bali. Data was obtained through Focus Group Discussions and informal sharing of lecturers' reflections on actions and corrective actions to find out an efficient and effective technique for assessing oral communication skills, which was carried out both before the Middle and Final Semester Examinations. Then the data was analyzed qualitatively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1 Position of Oral Tests in the Academic Calendar

Focus Group Discussions attended by all English language teachers of the Poltekpar Bali Language Center decided to carry out group oral tests twice during one semester, i.e. before the Middle and the Final Semester Examinations, with the positions shown in the following table.

Figure 1 Position of Oral Tests in the Academic Calendar

Weeks	Teaching Agenda
1 - 6	Delivering teaching materials
7	**Oral Test 1**
8	Middle Semester Examination
9 - 14	Delivering teaching materials
15	**Oral Test 2**
16	Final Semester Examination

The table above shows that oral tests are carried out in the 7th and 15th weeks. The score obtained from Oral Test 1 is used as one of the components to determine the final grade for the Middle Semester Examination and that from Oral Test 2 constitutes one of the components for final grade of the Final Semester Examination. The Oral Test score is given a higher weight (i.e. 60%) compared to daily scores, assignments, and pencil-and-paper test, the reason of which is that the oral test score is considered more objective and authentic and represents the students' English language competency better than other scores.

3.2 Assessment Tasks

The tasks used to carry out group oral tests are named 'situation cards' by the English language teachers at Poltekpar Bali. This is because the 'card' contains certain situations as material to be discussed in groups during the test.
The teachers are assigned to design a situation card according to the ESP taught in a study program or department in the current semester. The card is shared and

discussed for some input from other teachers. Then it is used in class by not only the teacher who designed it but also other teachers who consider it relevant to their ESP or vocational subjects in a certain study program. Furthermore, after the card is used, the teachers will review it again, so that it becomes better. Then it will be collected at the Language Center to develop the 'situation card bank'.

The topic of the cards can be general or specific. General topics are those related to tourism in general which can be used in every study program, while specific topics are those that are suitable for use in certain study programs. The students' English level in general in a class is also taken into account in choosing a situation card. The students at a lower level will be given relatively easier situations and those at a higher level will be given more difficult situations. Below are some examples of tasks used.

Figure 2 A task in an oral group test ('A Weekend Trip')

ORAL ACTIVITY
INSTRUCTIONS   1. Read the instruction card. You can ask the teacher(s) if there is something you don't understand.   2. You've got 2 or 3 minutes to think about your ideas in preparation of the meeting with your colleagues. You may take brief written notes if you wish.   3. 3. The meeting will last 10 – 15 minutes. You should make sure that everybody takes part in the meeting.
TOPIC: A WEEKEND TRIP   You and your friends have decided to go away for the weekend from Friday night to Sunday night. You are going to have a discussion to decide on your program.   You could discuss such things as: 1. Where you will go,   2. When you will go,   3. How you will travel,   4. Where you will stay,   5. How much money you will take,   6. What you will take,   7. What you will do.

Looking at Figure 2 above, the oral activity on the situation card consists of two parts: Part 1 provides instructions and Part 2 contains the topic with a description of the situation and things that can be discussed as anchoring ideas. The topic above contains general material that can be related to ESP Tourism, so it can be used in all study programs, and is recommended to be used in Oral Test 1 for semester 1 students, although it does not have to. Other topics similar to this include

'Final Semester Holiday', 'Welcome Dinner Party for New Students', 'Handling a Birthday Party', etc.

The topic in the following Oral Activity is an example of a more specific topic which is suitable for students studying Food and Beverage Service (Restaurant) and Culinary Arts (Kitchen). (The following situation cards do not show Part 1, i.e. instructions because this part can be the same on each situation card.)

Figure 3 A task in an oral group test ('Dream Restaurant')

DREAM RESTAURANT

You and your partners have been given as much money as you need to build and run your dream restaurant. You will be joint managers.

You are all going to have a discussion about what kind of restaurant you will build. You could discuss such things as:

1. Where it will be
2. Type of building, furniture, decorations, color scheme
3. Type of food
4. Type of drink
5. Type and number of staff
6. Mood/atmosphere
7. Music, entertainment
8. Business times
9. Any special characteristics.
10. etc.

Another example of a specific topic similar to the one above can be seen in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 A task in an oral group test ('Dream Suite')

DREAM SUITE

You and your partners worked in a five - star hotel as Housekeepers. You have been asked by the manager of your hotel to design a luxury suite. It should contain 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a verandah and a garden. You have an unlimited budget.

You are all going to have a discussion about what kind of suite it would be. You should discuss such things as:

1. size
2. position
3. furniture
4. textiles: curtains, bedcovers, cushions, rugs
5. equipment
6. lighting
7. decorations, ornaments
8. colour scheme
9. cost per night

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10. etc.

The topic shown in Figure 4 above is recommended for students studying Hotel Room Division. Some other topics similar to those in Figures 3 and 4 are 'Dream Hotel', 'Dream Marketing Video' for a hotel/suite/event/tour, etc.

3.3 Assessment Mark Sheet

The teachers used an Oral Assessment Mark Sheet containing 10 skill components with the range of 1 to 10 marks for each component, as can be seen in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 Oral Assessment Mark Sheet

NO	SKILLS	MARKS									
1	Fluency	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Accuracy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Communicative competence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Appropriacy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	Non-verbal skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	Degree of independence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	Vocational English	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	General English	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student's name: …………………………		TOTAL: …………………									

3.4 Procedure

Before going to the classroom, the teacher is ready with:
1) Some situation cards, usually 3 to 6, the topics of which are suitable to the study program and the students' ability in general,
2) Oral Assessment Mark Sheets for a number of students in the classroom,
3) A list of students' names who have been grouped in such a way, usually 4 to 5 students in a group.

In the classroom before the test, the teacher
1) Explains to the students the procedure for carrying out the test from start to finish,
2) Tells them that every student should try to speak and be actively involved in the discussion by giving or asking for opinions, giving or asking for clarification, agreeing or disagreeing for certain reasons, etc.,
3) Tells them that they can bring some paper and a pen/pencil for taking notes,

4) Informs the group number and group members,

5) Asks the group who will take the test (e.g. Group 1) to stay in the classroom and others are asked to wait outside the classroom,

6) Prepares a number of seats (and desks if necessary) enough for the test takers. The seats are arranged in a circle and the teacher's desk is positioned outside the circle in such a way, to be able to observe and listen to them unobtrusively (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Sitting Formation of Students and Teacher in a Group Oral Test
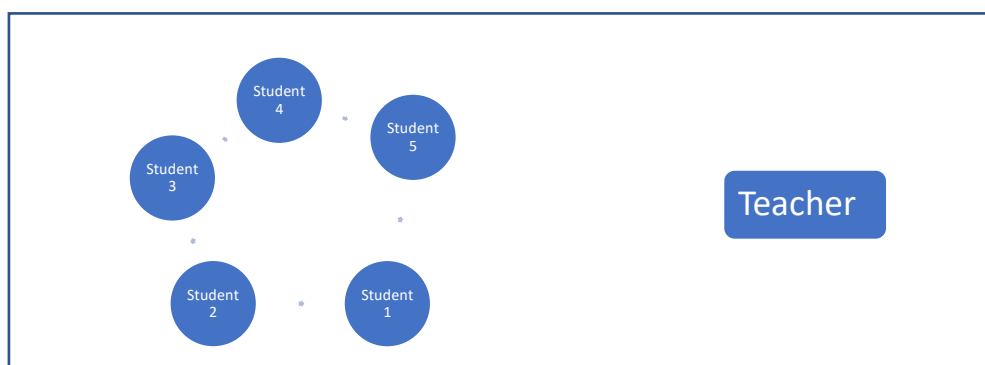
During the test, the teacher

1) Invites the students to sit in such an order so that their marks are not mixed up.

2) Distributes the situation card to each student.

3) Suggests them to read and understand the task for 2 to 3 minutes.

4) Checks students' understanding by inviting them to ask questions about the tasks that are not clear, about either the discussion technique or the situation, until they are ready.

5) Tells them to start the discussion in English for approximately 10 minutes,

6) Listens to their discussion and observes unobtrusively for giving an assessment to each test taker by filling in the Oral Assessment Mark Sheet.

7) Stops the discussion after marking all skill components for all test takers.

8) Collects the situation cards and tells the group to leave the roo.

9) Calls the next group into the classroom and starts from stage 1 again.

After the test is finished for all groups, the teacher adds up the marks to form a total score for each student and copies it into the students' score list. This can be done by the teacher in his office. In the process of implementing group oral tests, the teachers are often faced with several constraints. These constraints are shared and discussed together by the teachers to find solutions. Below are the constraints encountered and suggested tips.

1) Explaining procedures using English may reduce students' understanding and even cause misunderstanding. It is often done repeatedly, so it is not

efficient. Therefore, the teachers have decided to use Bahasa Indonesia instead. Students are also permitted to ask for clarification in Bahasa Indonesia before the test begins.

2) Grouping students can also be tricky. Allowing students to choose their own groups often leads to class chaos and wasting time. Therefore the teacher tends to avoid that first way. The second way to form groups is by appointing the groups with their members randomly based on serial numbers on their attendance list or by drawing the student names. The third way is by selecting groups with their members so that they are heterogeneous in terms of gender and abilities. The second way is usually used for Oral Test 1 and the third one is recommended for Oral Test 2. It is important to note that the group members are not exactly the same in Oral Test 1 and those in Oral Test 2.

3) Selecting the situation cards for a group can also be done in several ways. In the first one, the teacher determines which situation card will be given to which group. Secondly, the teacher can number the situation cards, then the group is offered to choose which number they want. The third way is by drawing the situation cards.

4) Sometimes the discussion is stuck or even does not start at all. In this case, the teacher is advised to sit in the circle and involve himself in the discussion by stimulating the participants with questions or statements which enable them to talk. When the discussion has run, the teacher can withdraw from the group. However, the teacher sometimes has to be involved until the end of the discussion (while assessing) if most or even all the group members have low English abilities.

5) If there are some group members do not speak or are not actively involved in the discussion, so that the teacher cannot be sure of their marks, he can assign them to conclude the results of the discussion or retell what has been discussed.

6) Sometimes in a discussion, some students dominate the conversation because they have higher speaking skills than other group members, so the teacher can quickly determine their marks. In this case, the teacher can tell the dominant students to stop talking and allow the other group members to continue the discussion.

4. CONCLUSION

Teaching oral communication skills which are close to the 'real world' is crucial in a class of ESP, especially in ESP Tourism since communication between hotel staff or tourist officials and their clients is mostly done orally. Objective and authentic assessment of students' mastery of these skills then becomes essential. However, in its implementation, teachers face several obstacles, especially with a

large class and limited teaching time available in one semester. To overcome this, it was found an efficient technique to conduct this, i.e. group oral test.

In this test, a group of 4 to 6 test takers sitting in a circle are provided with a task containing a situation from which they have to discuss. It is by listening and observing this discussion unobtrusively, the teacher assesses their oral communication skills using an Oral Assessment Mark Sheet, including 10 skill components, i.e. fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, communicative competence, appropriacy, non-verbal skills, degree of independence, vocational English, and general English.

For successful implementation of this test, teachers must design 'situation cards' which are suitable to a particular study program and the students' abilities in general. In addition, he has to follow the implementation procedures that have been determined, i.e. before, during, and after the test.

For further classroom action research, it is recommended that the teachers be able to use oral test scores not only to determine students' grades for the middle and final examinations but also to interpret the scores into bands and levels of the students' speaking proficiency.

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