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Oral Assessments at English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

Various types of oral assessments such as interviews, presentations and group discussions have commonly been applied at English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (EED UMY) to measure students' speaking ability. This research aims to identify both advantages and disadvantages found in the oral assessments applied at EED UMY based on students' perspectives. The data were collected using in-depth interviews to six EED UMY students who had taken speaking classes for two semesters. They were interviewed to explore their perception on the advantages and disadvantages of the oral assessments they had taken. The findings of this research show that the participants perceived that the oral assessments motivated the students to speak, provided direct feedback, improved students' speaking ability, developed students' communication skills, increased students' self-confidence, and enabled students to share ideas. On the other hand, in addition to insufficient time allocation, the participants also revealed that increased nervousness frequently occurred during oral assessments.

Keywords: oral assessments, speaking, advantages, disadvantages

INTRODUCTION

An assessment plays an important role in education. Nitko and Brookhart (2011, p.498) define an assessment as "the process for obtaining information that is used to make decisions about students, curricula and programs and educational policy". In the process of teaching and learning, an assessment provides information about student achievement as it is used as a method to evaluate the students' comprehension and understanding. Through the assessment, students demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have learned. In this way, teachers can evaluate the students' progress in learning, observe the students' academic strengths and weaknesses, and evaluate teaching materials and methods imple-

mented. By using assessments, teachers can also check if teaching objectives have been met. Therefore, an assessment provides important information that can be used as a basis for educational decisions.

Of the various types of assessment, oral assessment is frequently used in English language classes. According to Baturay, Tokmak, Dogusoy, and Daloglu (2011),

Oral assessment is often carried out to look for students' ability to produce words and phrases by evaluating students' fulfilment of a variety of tasks such as asking and answering questions about themselves, doing role-plays, making up mini dialogues, defining or talking about some pictures, or talking about given themes. (p.60)

Thus, oral assessment as a tool to measure students' speaking ability can be done in various forms. In addition, oral assessment encourages students to be confident and active to communicate with their peers and their teachers. Huxman, Campbell, and Westwood (2012) state that oral assessment functions as a means to develop students' oral communication skills. Therefore, students may benefit from oral assessment to demonstrate and improve their knowledge and understanding of their communication skills.

English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (EED UMY) has so far applied oral assessments in the process of teaching and learning. The oral assessments such as interviews, presentations and group discussions applied at this department can bring some effects on the student performance. Apart from its positive effects, such as developing communication skills, oral assessment also presents some problems in its implementation. Because stu-

dents are those who are directly affected by the implementation of oral assessment, it is important to see their perspective on the advantages and disadvantages of oral assessment so that the necessary improvements to enable them to perform well in the assessment can be taken. This study aims to investigate the students' points of view on oral assessment carried out in EED UMY in terms of its advantages and disadvantages.

ORAL ASSESSMENT

Oral assessment, also known as oral examination or test, is one of the exams that are fully correlated with students' speaking skills. Thus, it refers to the assessment of student learning done in a way of spoken words (Joughin, 2010). Similarly, Iafc (2011) suggests that oral assessment is used to determine students' verbal response when assessing students' mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Consequently, students must be able to combine their knowledge and production of words; thus, this will result in students' better speaking ability.

Joughin (2003) emphasizes that oral assessment is a method to measure students' knowledge. Furthermore, Joughin (2003) asserts that there are four categories of learning to be assessed in oral assessment, i.e., knowledge and understanding, problem solving and applications, interpersonal competence, and personal attributes. In the category of knowledge and understanding, oral assessment allows teachers to check their students' understanding of facts, concepts, principles and procedures underlying the professional practice by the response. In the category of problem solving and applications, oral assessment allows teachers to not only ask students questions

related to knowledge, but also observe their students to apply the knowledge to real situations.

The next category proposed by Joughin (2003) is interpersonal competence. In this category, generic or transferable skills, including communication and interview skills in the context of professional situations, are suitable for measurements through oral assessment. The last category is personal attributes which are often claimed to be used to measure personal qualities such as alertness, reaction to stress, adaptability, self-awareness and self-confidence. Based on the categories of oral assessment, it can be concluded that during the time of the assessment, students must be able to demonstrate all of the four categories of learning. Therefore, teachers will be able to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each student to improve the quality of student learning.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ORAL ASSESSMENTS

As a way to measure students' abilities, oral assessment has advantages and disadvantages. Briggs, Woodfield, Martin and Swatton (2008) state that oral assessment can increase students' motivation in learning, which in turn, will increase student competence. This view is also supported by Williams and Williams (2011) who suggest that motivation is the most important factor that teachers can aim to improve learning. In this case, when oral assessment is carried out to measure students' ability, it is hoped the students get motivated to study more diligently to prepare their assessments. Therefore, it can be said that oral assessments can increase student

motivation in learning.

The next advantage is that the quality of student learning can be improved. Joughin (2010) explains that students tend to prepare as best as they can to avoid a blank in front of the examiner or their peers. As a result, students will be prepared prior to the assessment. They will practice their ability to speak more and more inside or outside of their classes in order to achieve the required ability to speak well. Students will concentrate on assessment materials and how they will perform in the assessment. As a result, students' knowledge and skills, especially in conversation or communication skill, will get improved. It is in line with Huxham et al. (2012) that oral assessment can develop oral communication skills of students. In addition, Gent, Johnston, and Prosser (1999) find that oral exams are as one of powerful ways to assess understanding and encourage critical thinking.

Another proposition comes from Purwanto (2013) which shows some of the advantages of oral assessment. First, oral assessment is carried out by a direct interaction that allows teachers to assess students' knowledge and understanding. Second, if students do not have a clear understanding of the questions, the teacher can change the question so that students can understand it. Third, teachers can ask students to tell more details about their answers so the teacher will know which part of the material that the students understand or do not understand well. Fourth, the assessment is appropriate to measure students' understanding, including the ability to read and memorization skills on a particular subject. Fifth, oral assessment evaluates certain skills, such as English speaking. With this assess-

ment, teachers can also know the obstacles that the students have when facing the assessment. Finally, after completing the assessment, students know their scores, and simultaneously teachers can tell what area the students need to improve. Therefore, oral assessment allows a detailed and comprehensive investigation to find students' accurate understanding, comprehension, ability, and problems during the assessment.

In addition to its advantages, Wisker (2004) states that the oral assessment may cause some students to feel under pressure because they are required to think quickly. They should be able to organize their ideas in a short period of time. The feeling may get worse when these students have a low level of confidence in their speaking skills. Personal traits, such as social anxiety and shyness, may significantly contribute to the success of students in oral assessment because those who have these personalities would rather do the assessment in different ways, e.g., in writing. In addition to this, Wisker (2004) also shows that when doing oral assessment, some teachers tend to draw conclusions too quickly before students fully answer the questions. For example, some teachers give some students a lower grade because they take a little longer to complete the tasks assigned. Often, some teachers interrupt students that perform oral assessment and give them different tasks.

Last but not least, in terms of the disadvantages, oral assessment is time consuming and quite challenging to manage (Joughin, 2010; Al-Amri & Yanbu, 2010; Purwanto, 2013; Davis & Karunathilake, 2005). Teachers will generally perform oral assessment to the students one by one, which will take a lot of teaching time,

especially in classes with large numbers of students. Teachers should also be able to customize the questions immediately suitable for each student as well as to ensure a comfortable environment to obtain an accurate level of knowledge and ability of the students during the time of the assessment.

Method

This study used a qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative methods explore issues and develop a detailed understanding of the central phenomenon. Six EED UMY students were selected to be the participants based on their availability and willingness to participate in this study. They had learned for six semesters; so, they had experienced a variety of oral assessments. Pseudonyms were used to address the participants' names. To collect data, in-depth interviews were conducted, consisting of open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted using Bahasa Indonesia to make the participants comfortable and to prevent misunderstandings. During the interviews, all conversations were recorded using a voice recorder. To analyse the data, the results of the interview were then transcribed and coded into the open, axial and selective coding. Coding is the process to make out of the text data, divide the data into a text or image segment, and label the segment with codes (Creswell, 2012).

FINDINGS

The advantages of the oral assessment in the class. The data shows that the advantages concerned with strengths, positive perception, and impacts.

Oral assessment increased students' motivation.

The participants stated that the oral assessment motivated them to improve their speaking skills for oral assessment provided an opportunity to talk more in class using English. One participant stated that she and her friends were more motivated to learn to speak correctly and properly so that they could get good grades in the assessment. The other two participants also confirmed that the oral assessment motivated them not only to speak but also to learn English more.

Oral assessment provided direct feedback. The participants stated that they received a direct feedback from their teachers after they performed oral assessment in class and this made them happy. Two of the participants admitted that they got an immediate response from the teachers during oral assessment. One of the participants revealed that feedback was beneficial for students. This could be a reflection in the assessment particularly in identifying errors so that they could revise them. To conclude, the participants perceived that feedback referred to reflection after they did an assessment, and was important to give to the students as it could improve their mistakes.

Oral assessment improved students' speaking ability. The participants answered that the oral assessment could improve their speaking skills. One participant frankly considered oral assessment as a way to practice speaking, which, in turn, would improve her speaking skills and knowledge of English language. All participants said their speaking ability improved when their teachers often gave oral assessment. The participants believed that oral assessment was good and useful because they encouraged students to speak. The students were required to practice

speaking, so their speaking skills increased.

Oral assessment developed students' communication skills. In the interview, the participants said that, because of the oral assessment, they could develop their communication skills, shared knowledge, and received a better understanding of what other people said during class assessments. One participant explained that oral assessment helped her learn how to develop their knowledge and mind-set. Additionally, the other participant stated that she could develop her mind-set and understanding, which caused her better ability to explain the material in the oral assessment.

Oral assessment increased the students' self-confidence. One of the participants said that the oral assessment trained her to be confident. When she was accustomed to oral assessment, her nervous feeling when speaking in public was becoming less. Similarly, another participant also revealed that oral assessment helped boost her confidence.

Oral assessment enabled the students to share ideas. This research also found that the oral assessment done in the classroom gave the students ideas to talk. Most participants felt that the oral assessment could be used to share ideas or opinions, especially during the assessment. Meanwhile, one of the participants said that the oral assessment was a challenge for her because she had to provide answers or ideas in a very short time. Another participant said that her ability in oral assessment was great, seen from her fluency when giving opinions and her good scores in oral assessments. The participants agreed that the oral assessment made the students able to share their ideas. They said that if there was no oral assessment, this condition would cause some students

to be discouraged to speak.

The disadvantages of the oral assessments

The participants perceived that the allocation of time for the oral assessment was limited and they felt nervous when having to speak in front of their teachers and their peers. The students' two negative points of view were then categorized into the disadvantages of the oral assessments in this research.

Oral assessment provided insufficient time allocation. Some participants stated that the time given for the oral assessments was so little that they could not convey their ideas properly. More time allocation, according to participants, would give them opportunities to elaborate their answers and meet the teachers' expectations.

Oral assessment made students feel nervous. The last finding was on the negative side of the oral assessment based on the perceptions of students, ie, to be nervous during the assessment. Most participants said that they felt nervous when performing oral assessment. One participant claimed nervous because she did not have enough preparation, such as vocabulary. She was confused and panicked to answer the questions given by her teacher. Another participant explained that, as she was very nervous during oral assessment, her attention during the assessment was affected.

DISCUSSION

The participants mentioned their perception of the advantages and disadvantages of oral assessment. There were six advantages of oral assessment found in this research. The first finding was that the oral assessment motivated students to speak. The students had been moti-

vated by the presence of oral assessment. It was consistent with Black and William (1998) cited in Briggs et al. (2008) that said that oral assessment provided an understanding of how assessment affected students' motivation. In this research, the assessments made the students become motivated to speak and improve their speaking competence. In addition, some participants felt that motivation was important to help them practice speaking in class. In other words, the oral assessment the students had to face made them study harder and as a result, they would be better prepared. Therefore, teachers can provide support and motivation to their students in the learning process that will improve the quality of learning as suggested by Williams and Williams (2011) that motivation is the most important factor to improve learning.

The second finding was about the feedback from the teachers to the students. Basically, the students hoped that they received feedback from their teachers after they performed an assessment in the classroom. Regarding this research, providing feedback was a good way for teachers after providing oral assessments for feedback could help the students identify their mistakes. From the perspective of the participants, they got feedback when they performed an oral assessment. The feedback at the EED UMY consisted of a reflection of the students when they performed activities in the classroom. Feedback could become an input for the students to be better in oral assessment. Therefore, the students were expected to be able to recognize their mistakes, e.g., the wrong pronunciation, and so on. Thus, in this research, feedback was one of the important elements to consider for communi-

cation between teachers and students to succeed or fail.

The third finding showed that the oral assessments improved the students' speaking ability. Since oral assessment was considered a direct interaction between the teacher and the students, the students were required to be well prepared so that they could answer the questions in the assessments quickly and correctly. The participants experienced that direct interactions required immediate answering; thus, this moment could train them to improve their speaking ability. Therefore, by giving an oral assessment, the teachers had already given their students an opportunity to practice their English speaking skills and simultaneously the students got assessed directly in the class.

The participants perceived that the oral assessment improved their speaking skills. This finding was in line with what Purwanto (2013) had found in which oral assessment was used as a direct assessment of the students' knowledge and comprehension, because the assessment was conducted in direct interactions. The students could improve their ability and it was in accordance with Tomei (1998) who argued that oral assessment helped improve students' participation in the class by examining whether the student failed or passed the assessment determined by conversational skills. In this research, the assessment could improve the students' speaking ability because the teacher trained them to practice speaking in the class. In addition, the oral assessment encouraged the students to be confident to develop their communication skills.

The fourth finding was that the oral assessment developed the students' communication

skills. Communication in the class is important for students to convey messages. Good communication happens when students use their own words, so that it makes the students understand and develop their communication skills. According to Joughin (1998) as cited in Huxmam et al, (2012), the advantage of oral assessment is to prevent plagiarism. In this research, the students had to explain the topics given in their own understanding using their own words, leading them to an improvement in their communication skills. This statement was supported by Huxama et al. (2012) that oral assessment was to develop students' oral communication skills.

The fifth finding revealed that the oral assessment increased the students' self-confidence. This was relevant with the statement stated by Joughin (2003) that oral assessment can be used to measure personal qualities, such as alertness, reaction to stress, adaptability, self-awareness, and self-confidence. According to the findings of this research, the oral assessments could increase the students' self-confidence. As a result, the students were braver to deliver their thoughts and opinions in English and this condition led to an improved English speaking skill as the students dared to practice speaking in English without fear although they had to speak in front of public. In addition, confidence was one of the strengths of the oral assessment in this research.

The last finding was that the oral assessment gave ideas in speaking. The participants said that they could share their ideas when they did an oral assessment in the class. The students could use their mind-set when they communicated with other people. This finding supported Gent, Johnston, and Prosser (1999) that an oral exami-

nation is as a powerful way to measure understanding and encourage critical thinking.

Based on the findings of the research, there were two disadvantages of the oral assessments in this research. The first, the time for the oral assessments was provided less than enough. In the oral assessment, the students had to answer the questions posed by the teacher spontaneously in a short time while the students needed longer time to think before answering the questions. According to Wisker (2004), students feel the pressure to think quickly when managing their idea in a short period of time. The time in the oral assessment in this research was considered too short; thus, it made the students feel difficult to do the assessments. In this research, the students could not manage the time given by the teacher because the time was too short so that they could not concentrate or focus on answering the questions.

The second disadvantage was the oral assessments made the students feel nervous, thus losing concentration to answer the questions given by the teacher. This was also supported by Purwanto (2013) that nervousness might disturb the fluency of the answer when the question was given. Based on the finding, the participants could not answer the questions because they panicked since they did not have enough preparations, such as vocabularies. In addition, the students who disliked the oral assessments would have some problems since they would likely face the assessments nervously. In fact, in general, teachers can actually help students practice speaking in the class to overcome nervousness.

Joughin (2010) classifies the categories of oral assessments into four points, and these were

found in this research, i.e., knowledge and understanding, problem solving and application, interpersonal competence, and personal attributes. The personal attributes included in the oral assessments in this research were that the oral assessments motivated the students, improved the students' self-confidence, provided the students less time when doing them, made the students feel nervous, and enabled the students to get feedback. This was in conformity with Joughin (2003) who stated that personal attributes were often claimed to be used to measure personal qualities such as alertness, reaction to stress, adaptability, self-awareness and self-confidence. Therefore, personal attributes could be said as the condition of the class and person's mood during an assessment. Personal attributes could be positive and negative, according to students' characteristics in the oral assessments, such as confidence, nervousness, and so on.

The category on knowledge and understanding included the oral assessments as a means to improve the students' speaking ability and give ideas in speaking. Joughin (2003) argued that an oral assessment allows for probing students' understanding of facts, concept, principles and procedure that underlie professional practice through response. In this research, the participants said that the teacher used different questions to measure the students' knowledge. This was supported by Purwanto (2013) who stated that questions are not always the same to every person in test, such as the number of questions and the level of difficulty. In the oral assessments in this research, the teachers assessed the students' ability through the students' responses. Usually, the teachers observed the students'

understanding when they explained the material given.

The category about problem and application included the oral assessments to develop the students' communication skills as the assessments also provoked the students to have ideas to speak during the assessments. According to Joughin (2003), an oral assessment enables teachers to ask students questions in which the assessment is not only focused on knowledge itself, but also focused on the application of the knowledge to the real situation. Therefore, oral assessments should not focus merely on students' knowledge, but consider also students' understanding during the oral assessment, whether the students understand the materials given by the teacher or not.

The category of oral assessment about interpersonal skills included the oral assessment to develop the students' communication skills. Generic or transferable skills, including communication and interview skills in the context of professional situations, are well suited to measurement through oral assessment (Joughin, 2003). Therefore, interpersonal skills are used to communicate and interact with others. In this research, the oral assessments involved direct communication so that the students tried their best to speak in the class well.

CONCLUSION

As teachers have the opportunity to decide the most suitable assessment model for their students, teachers can base their choice on the consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of each type of assessments. In terms of advantages and disadvantages, the oral assessment

implemented at English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta brought about a variety of students' perspectives. It was perceived that oral assessment offers several advantages to students, such as improving students' communication skills and confidence. These positive perspectives of the students can be the points to be maintained and developed in implementing oral assessment. Therefore, students can take the maximum benefits from the implementation of oral assessment. Meanwhile, more attention should be paid to the insufficient time allocation to speak and the nervousness the students felt during the assessments as perceived to be negative sides of the oral assessments at EED UMY. These two disadvantages should be minimized, so that the drawbacks during the oral assessments can be anticipated and prevented. Thus, by implementing oral assessment, it is expected that the purpose of using oral assessment as a type of assessments to provide the best result of the measurement of students' ability can be achieved.

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