

Investigating the Appropriateness of Alternative/Authentic Assessment for Speaking Courses at Wollo University: In Terms of Authentic Model

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the use of alternative assessment techniques by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in spoken English courses, highlighting the need for more comprehensive evaluation methods beyond traditional testing. By examining teachers' and students' perspectives, the research emphasizes that alternative assessments provide a better understanding of students' language abilities, particularly in spoken English, which is often inadequately evaluated by conventional assessments. However, implementation challenges persist, including limited teacher training, insufficient resources, and students' unfamiliarity with these methods. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach involving 36 participants: 5 EFL teachers and 8 students engaged in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), while 17 teachers and 19 students completed a validated quantitative questionnaire. The questionnaire featured a Likert scale, open- and closed-ended questions, and was refined through pilot testing to ensure content validity. Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 24), with a high Cronbach's alpha (0.87) confirming statistical reliability. FGDs provided qualitative insights into the experiences and perceptions of alternative assessments. Results showed positive perceptions among both teachers and students regarding alternative assessments. Teachers found these methods offered a more comprehensive evaluation of students' spoken English but reported challenges like increased preparation time and resource requirements. Students appreciated the relevance and variety of alternative assessments, although some initially struggled due to unfamiliarity. Both groups found alternative assessments engaging and motivating. The study recommends providing enhanced teacher training, institutional support, and increased student exposure to alternative assessments for better adaptation and effectiveness.

Keywords: *alternative assessment, assessment techniques, assessment tools, conventional assessment model.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Ethiopia, English is a vital language, serving as the medium of instruction in secondary and higher education, a primary means of international communication, and a functional language in various governmental and non-governmental organizations. Despite its significance, the proficiency of English among Ethiopian students is often lacking ([Bachore, 2015](#)). Contributing factors include outdated teaching methodologies, insufficient teacher training, poor curricular materials, ineffective evaluation methods, and negative attitudes from both teachers and students ([Angelo & Cross, 1993](#)).

Traditional assessment systems, which rely heavily on final exams and standardized tests, have been criticized for not accurately reflecting students' language abilities ([J. D. Brown & Hudson, 1998](#); [Hughes, 1989](#); [Swaie & Algazo, 2023](#)). In response, alternative assessment methods (AAMs) have been proposed. These methods aim to provide more meaningful insights into student learning and progress ([Hedge, 2000](#)). When well-implemented, AAMs can enhance learning, boost student confidence, and help students understand their learning processes better ([Spandel & Stiggins, 1990](#)). The effectiveness of assessment methods depends on the careful selection of appropriate tools, procedures, and accurate interpretation of student performance ([Shaaban, 2001](#); [Tosuncuoglu, 2018](#)). Implementing AAMs faces several challenges. Teachers may lack a clear understanding of assessment purposes, use a limited range of tools, or be burdened by heavy workloads ([S. Brown & Knight, 1994](#)). Additionally, issues such as unfair grading and lack of feedback can undermine the effectiveness of these methods ([Davis et al., 2018](#)).

This study aims to investigate the appropriateness of alternative/ authentic assessments in speaking courses at Wollo University. By examining these assessments within an authentic model, the study seeks to identify both the benefits and challenges associated with their implementation, providing insights that could improve English language teaching and assessment practices in Ethiopia.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Traditional assessment methods have long been criticized for their lack of authenticity and indirect nature ([Bailey, 1998](#); [Law & Eckes, 1995](#)). These assessments are often based on single-event tests that provide no immediate feedback, making it difficult to pinpoint specific areas where students face challenges. They require students to showcase knowledge in rigid, predetermined ways, while ignoring the context of real-world application, which diminishes their ability to accurately assess student learning ([Meylani, 2024](#)). Such limitations in the assessment process compromise their overall effectiveness in enhancing students' educational experiences.

The shortcomings of traditional assessments are further emphasized by [Davis et al. \(2018\)](#), who notes concerns regarding poor implementation of diverse assessment methods, insufficient feedback, and a lack of transparency in grading. The rigid structure of these assessments compounds the issue by limiting flexibility and adaptability. [Oli and Olkaba \(2020\)](#) found that English language teachers in Ethiopia often fail to use feedback from classroom assessments to refine their teaching practices. Although English is vital in numerous sectors in Ethiopia, the quality of education is often inadequate ([Abedi et al., 2000](#); [Wanna et al., 2016](#)). [The Ethiopian Ministry of Education \(2003\)](#) recommended that 75% of students' grades come from continuous assessments. However, the emphasis has shifted to a system where 40% of the grade is based on final exams and 60% on

traditional forms of continuous assessments like paper-pencil tests and mid-term exams, which do not align with modern educational needs.

This study aims to investigate the extent to which EFL teachers at Wollo University use alternative assessment methods, the challenges they face, and the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding these methods. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do English teachers use alternative assessment and Conventional methods at Wollo University?
2. What major problems do students perceive when their teachers use alternative assessment methods?
3. What is the perception of teachers and students while Alternative assessment for spoken courses implemented?

1.2 Justification and Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it will provide insights into the current use of alternative assessment methods in EFL courses at Wollo University and identify areas for improvement. The findings will be beneficial for teachers at Wollo University, other colleges in the region, and potentially other institutions in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the broader understanding of effective assessment practices in EFL education.

1.3 Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited to EFL teachers and third-year EFL students in the degree program at Wollo University. The university was chosen due to the researcher's familiarity with the institution, which will facilitate building rapport with participants and obtaining pertinent data.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The limitations of traditional assessments, especially in evaluating spoken English, have spurred interest in alternative assessment methods (AAMs). These methods aim to provide more authentic and contextually relevant evaluations of language skills, addressing the shortcomings of conventional approaches. This review explores the theoretical and empirical literature on AAMs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly for speaking courses.

2.1 Limitations of Traditional Assessments

Traditional assessments, such as standardized tests and final exams, focus on grammar and vocabulary without reflecting real-world language use. Studies ([Bailey, 1998](#); [Hughes, 1989](#)) emphasize their lack of authenticity and failure to measure communicative competence. In spoken English, these tests often overlook the interactive nature of communication ([Meylani, 2024](#)). Moreover, in Ethiopia, where final exams contribute significantly to course grades ([The Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 2003](#)), the reliance on such assessments is seen as inadequate.

2.2 The Promise of Alternative Assessments

AAMs offer a more effective means of assessing students' spoken English. These methods emphasize ongoing, formative assessment, enabling better feedback and promoting active student engagement ([Hedge, 2000](#); [Spandel & Stiggins, 1990](#)). Tools like portfolios, self-assessments, and performance-based tasks allow for a more comprehensive understanding of students' abilities ([Hancock, 1994](#)). Research by [Shaaban \(2001\)](#) highlights their success in providing deeper insights into student performance.

2.3 Challenges in Implementing Alternative Assessments

Despite their advantages, AAMs face significant challenges in EFL contexts. Teachers often struggle with implementing these methods due to insufficient training, lack of resources, and increased workloads ([S. Brown & Knight, 1994](#)). Resistance to change from both teachers and students can also hinder their adoption ([Davis et al., 2018](#)). In Ethiopia, issues such as outdated teaching methods, inadequate curricular materials, and a lack of support further complicate the integration of AAMs ([Bachore, 2015](#); [Wanna et al., 2016](#)).

2.4 Empirical Evidence on Alternative Assessments

Empirical studies show that AAMs can lead to more accurate assessments of student learning ([J. D. Brown & Hudson, 1998](#); [Swaie & Algazo, 2023](#)). Performance-based tasks and self-assessments have been shown to enhance student engagement ([Tosuncuoglu, 2018](#)). However, research by [Oli and Olkaba \(2020\)](#) also indicates that teachers struggle with AAM implementation due to a lack of clear guidelines, while students gradually appreciate the relevance of alternative assessments to skill development.

2.5 Contextual Considerations for Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, English is the medium of instruction at higher education levels, yet student proficiency remains low ([Bachore, 2015](#)). Integrating AAMs can better address the country's educational needs by promoting active learning and communicative competence. Studies by [Wanna et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Oli and Olkaba \(2020\)](#) suggest that improving teacher training and curricular resources is crucial to the successful adoption of AAMs. Furthermore, educational policies should support continuous assessment practices in line with broader educational goals ([The Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 2003](#)).

2.6 Future Directions

Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term effects of AAMs on student outcomes, particularly in contexts like Ethiopia. Teacher training programs must be enhanced to support the effective implementation of these assessments. Additionally, structural reforms at the policy level are necessary to address the systemic barriers that hinder AAM adoption.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employed methods and approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the use of alternative assessment methods in the EFL courses at Wollo University.

3.2 Participants

The participants will include EFL teachers and third-year EFL students in the degree program at Wollo University. A purposive sampling method use since the number was manageable all 17 teachers and 19 students used and participants who are directly involved in the assessment process.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments include questionnaires, interview and focus group discussions (FGDs). The questionnaires was gathered quantitative data on teachers' and students' challenges, the extent they use and perceptions of alternative assessment methods.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

A self-response quantitative questionnaire was designed and distributed. Seventeen teachers received the questionnaire, with sixteen responding, while all nineteen students returned completed questionnaires. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale and included close and open-ended items. Following Dornyei's guidelines, the questionnaire underwent self-critique, peer-critique, pilot testing, and revision to ensure content and construct validity.

The questionnaire comprised two main parts. Part I gathered demographic information, such as university name and academic year. Part II, the core section, consisted of three thematic subsections with a total of 30 items. These subsections covered assessment methods, use of conventional and alternative assessments, perceptions based on an authentic model, major challenges perceived by teachers and learners, and students' perceptions towards conventional and authentic models. Internal reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, indicating high reliability (0.87), and data analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 24).

3.3.2 Interview

The study utilized in-depth, semi-structured one-to-one interviews to gather rich data from both teachers and learners regarding the assessment of speaking skills. Four teachers and four students, selected randomly and voluntarily, participated in the interview sessions, which were recorded for transcription purposes. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo. The interview protocol consisted of five items exploring various aspects of assessing speaking skills, including assessment methods

used, perceptions of effectiveness, adherence to assessment principles, recommendations for improvement, and challenges faced.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify trends and patterns. Qualitative data from the interview analyzed thematically to identify key themes and issues related to the implementation of alternative assessment methods.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing any potential risks associated with participation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Extent of Use of Alternative Assessment Methods

This section present the findings on the extent to which EFL teachers at Wollo University use alternative assessment methods, based on data collected from questionnaires and interview.

Table 1. The extent to which EFL teachers use conventional and alternative assessments.

<i>No</i>	<i>Conventional and alternative assessments used by EFL teachers</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std</i>
1	I provide scores for each assessment while assessing speaking skills (I focus on correctness of responses in assessing speaking skills.)	4 (25%)	3 (18.8%)	0	5 (31.3%)	4 (25%)	2.4	1.1
2	I provide regular feedback and comments on the assignments, tests when I assess speaking skills.	0	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	2.5	1.2
3	The English speaking skills assessment provides feedback that is useful for learners to improve speaking skills.	5 (31.3%)	5 (31.3%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	3.6	1.3
4	I provide one shot opportunities to assess speaking skills of students	5 (31.3%)	3 (18.8%)	4 (25%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	3.5	1.3

The data in the table above presents the extent to which both authentic assessments and conventional assessment tools are used by English language speaking skills teacher as depicted by their students. The analysis of the data is conducted using descriptive statistics.

As it is indicated in the table, 73.4% of students stated that they frequently receive the marks of their assignments and tests. The teachers provide them only the scores. On the other hand, the students receive feedback on their assignments and tests rarely as 63.2% of the respondent students declared this. The feedback and comments received are perceived as helpful in developing their speaking skills, with 42.1% finding them helpful, followed by 31.6% and 21.1% to some extent.

This result indicates the prevalence of the conventional assessment mechanism as the most commonly used method of assessment by speaking skills teachers to assess the performance of their students.

4.2 Challenges Faced by Teachers

The challenges faced by teachers in implementing alternative assessment methods will be discussed, drawing on data from the questionnaire.

Table 2. Major challenges perceived by EFL teachers based on using authentic method of assessment.

No	Type of Challenges	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std
1	Time consuming	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	2 (12.5%)	3.0	1.3
2	Shortage of time.	5 (31.3%)	5 (31.3%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	2.4	1.3
3	Insufficient resources.	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.3%)	4 (25%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)	2.9	1.3
4	Large number of students in the class.	8 (50%)	4 (25%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1.9	1.2
5	Willingness of students	3 (18.8%)	4 (25%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	3.0	1.5
6	Lack of awareness on different assessment method.	2 (12.5%)	8 (50%)	4 (25%)	2 (12.5%)	0	2.4	0.9
7	High work load.	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	5 (31.3%)	6 (37.5%)	0	2.9	1.1
8	Lack of training on the application of different assessment methods.	3 (18.8%)	4 (25%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	3.0	1.5
9	Student's low achievement level.	6 (37.5%)	6 (37.5%)	1 (6.3%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	2.1	1.3
10	Insufficient experience in teaching	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	3.4	1.3
11	Negative beliefs about the use of different assessment.	0	5 (31.3%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	7 (43.8%)	3.7	1.4

No	Type of Challenges	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std
12	Lack of commitment to use different assessment methods.	3 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)	4 (25%)	5 (31.3%)	1 (6.3%)	2.9	1.3

The analysis of the challenges perceived by EFL teachers in using authentic assessment methods reveals several key issues. Among the 12 different challenges identified, ‘Time consuming’ was the most frequently reported, with 25% of teachers strongly agreeing and another 25% agreeing, resulting in a mean score of 3.0. ‘Shortage of time’ was also significant, with 31.3% of teachers both strongly agreeing and agreeing, yielding a mean score of 2.4. ‘Insufficient resources’ was highlighted by 31.3% strongly agreeing and 24% agreeing, with a mean score of 2.9. Additionally, ‘large number of students’ was a major issue for 50% of teachers who strongly agreed, with a mean score of 1.9. Concerns about the ‘willingness of students’ were noted by 18.8% strongly agreeing and 25% agreeing, with a mean score of 3.0.

Other notable challenges include ‘Lack of awareness on different assessment methods’ (mean score 2.4), ‘High workload’ (mean score 2.9), and ‘Lack of training on the application of different assessment methods’ (mean score 3.0). The overall data suggests EFL teachers face significant challenges, particularly related to time, resources, class size, and student willingness. The mean scores across all challenges ranged from 1.9 to 3.7, indicating varying levels of agreement, while standard deviations ranged from 0.9 to 1.5, showing variability in responses.

Table 3. Perception of teachers towards authentic model assessment based on the five principles of English language assessment.

No	Teacher's perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std
1	I believe that assessing speaking skills is very important.	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	3 (18.8%)	5 (31.3%)	2 (12.5%)	3.1	1.3
2	I let my students know the assessment in advance when I assess speaking skills.	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	6 (37.5%)	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.3%)	3.4	1.4
3	The English speaking skills assessment evaluates the ability to use appropriate grammar and vocabulary	2 (12.5%)	6 (37.5%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	0	2.6	1.0
4	The English language speaking skills assessment evaluates the ability to use appropriate intonation and stressing.	2 (12.5%)	7 (43.8%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)	2.7	1.3
5	The assessment tasks of speaking reflect a real-world or pedagogic rationale.	1 (6.3%)	5 (31.3%)	4 (25%)	5 (31.3%)	1 (6.3%)	3.0	1.1

No	Teacher's perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std
6	The English speaking skills assessment included tasks that are relevant to real life situations (out of the classroom).	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.3%)	8 (50%)	0	1 (6.3%)	3.1	1.3
7	The English language speaking skills assessment evaluates the ability to adapt language to different situations and for various purposes.	3 (18.8%)	8 (50%)	1 (6.3%)	4 (25%)	0	2.4	1.1
8	The assessment tasks of speaking are interesting and motivating to the students.	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.3%)	3 (18.8%)	6 (37.5%)	0	2.8	1.1
9	The inputs in the assessment tasks of speaking are more of authentic (applicable).	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	5 (31.3%)	6 (37.5%)	1 (6.3%)	3.2	1.4
10	Conventional assessments (written exams, true/false, choice, short answers...) are more practical than alternative assessments in evaluating English speaking skills.	4 (25%)	2 (12.5%)	6 (37.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	2.7	1.3
11	Authentic assessment (presentation, role play, debate...) are more practical than conventional assessment (written exams, true/false, choice, short answers...) in our classroom	1 (6.3%)	8 (50%)	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)	2.9	1.3
12	The alternative assessment tools used are appropriate and align with the purpose of learning English speaking skills.	0	8 (50%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	3.1	1.3
13	The English speaking skills assessment evaluate the learner ability to use the language for communication.	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.3%)	3 (18.8%)	6 (37.5%)	0	2.8	1.1

No	Teacher's perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std
14	The English-speaking skills assessment is appropriate to all learners and align with the purpose of the subject.	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)	6 (37.5%)	1 (6.3%)	3.2	1.1

The study examined EFL teachers' perceptions of using authentic assessment methods for assessing students' speaking skills based on five principles. Teachers generally felt that current exams and tests do not accurately measure speaking skills, with 43.8% disagreeing and 31.3% neutral, resulting in a mean score of 3.0 and a standard deviation of 1.0. Regarding reliability, 50% agreed that tests consistently measure speaking skills, but 31.3% were neutral, leading to a mean score of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 0.8. Practicality was also a concern, with 43.8% disagreeing and 37.5% agreeing that tests are practical for assessing speaking skills, resulting in a mean score of 2.9 and a standard deviation of 0.9.

The principle of washback showed mixed feelings, as 43.8% were neutral and 37.5% agreed that exams impact learners' speaking skills, leading to a mean score of 2.8 and a standard deviation of 0.8. Finally, teachers felt that exams do not reflect real-life speaking situations, with 50% disagreeing and 25% agreeing, resulting in a mean score of 3.4 and a standard deviation of 1.0. Overall, these findings suggest that EFL teachers have negative perceptions towards the use of authentic assessment methods in designing and administering speaking skills exams and tests.

Table 4. The extent to which conventional and alternative assessments are used to assess speaking skills.

No	Teacher's perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std
1	How often do you receive scores for each of the assignments and tests of your English speaking skills without feedback?	0 (0.0%)	14 (73.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.3%)	4 (21.1%)	1.9	0.7
2	How often do you receive feedback and comments on your assignments and tests of your English speaking skills?	0	1 (5.3%)	1 (5.3%)	12 (63.2%)	5 (26.3%)	1.9	0.7
3	To what extent do you find the feedback and comments helpful in developing your speaking skills?	0	4 (21.1%)	6 (31.6%)	8 (42.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2.7	0.9
Grand Mean							2.2	

The assessment data provides a detailed look at the frequency and percentage of various methods used by EFL teachers to evaluate speaking skills. About 44% of teachers focus on the correctness of responses, providing scores for this aspect, while 31.3% rarely do so, highlighting a significant emphasis on response accuracy in speaking assessments.

In terms of feedback and comments, half of the teachers do not regularly provide these on assignments and tests, with 25% doing so frequently and another 25% sometimes.

Regarding the perceived usefulness of the feedback and comments provided, 32.6% of teachers believe they are useful, whereas 25% do not find them beneficial, suggesting that even though feedback is limited, it is considered valuable by a portion of the teachers. Additionally, 50.1% of teachers commonly offer one-shot opportunities for assessing students' speaking skills, indicating a preference for single-instance evaluations rather than ongoing assessment practices. This data reflects a mix of conventional and alternative assessment practices, with varying degrees of emphasis on feedback, accuracy, and assessment opportunities.

Table 5. Challenges perceived by learners based on authentic model assessment.

No	Major Challenges	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Std
1	Assessing the speaking skills is time consuming.	1 (5.3%)	2 (10.5%)	1 (5.3%)	10 (52.1%)	5 (26.3%)	2.2	1.1
2	The availability of adequate time affects the assessment of speaking skills.	2 (10.5%)	2 (10.5%)	1 (5.3%)	8 (42.1%)	6 (31.6%)	2.3	1.3
3	The University has sufficient materials (references, English lab class, audio materials) that help to assess the speaking skills of students.	6 (31.6%)	1 (5.3%)	0	7 (36.8%)	5 (26.3%)	2.8	1.7
4	The number of students affects the assessment of students' speaking skills.	1 (5.3%)	13 (68.4%)	1 (5.3%)	0	4 (21.1%)	2.0	0.9
5	I am voluntary to have my speaking skills assessed by my teacher.	0	13 (68.4%)	4 (21.1%)	0	2 (10.5%)	2.1	0.6
6	Teachers' ways of assessing speaking skills may affect the assessment of speaking skills.	0	17 (89.5%)	0	2 (10.5%)	0	1.9	0.3
Grand Mean							2.2	

In analyzing the data provided on the challenges perceived by learners in being assessed using the authentic assessment methods, descriptive statistics were applied to summarize and interpret the responses. The data includes the percentage of responses for each item along with the mean and standard deviation.

The data in the above table illustrates the challenges perceived by learners towards assessment method used by English speaking skills. With regard to whether assessing the speaking skills is time consuming, 78.4% of the students reacted that assessing speaking skills is not time consuming, with a mean of 2.2 and standard deviation of 1.1 while 73.7% of the students revealed that availability of time does not affect the assessment of speaking skills. However, majority of the students (63.1%) declared that the university does not have sufficient materials that help to assess their speaking skills, with a mean of 2.8 and

standard deviation of 1.7. The responses of the students also indicate that the university does not have sufficient materials that help to assess the students' speaking skills. Majority of the students (73.7%, 68.4%) also believe that class size and their willingness to be assessed, respectively, affect the assessment of their speaking skills. The impact of the ways that the teachers use in assessing students speaking skills on assessing speaking skills was also raised. Accordingly, most of the students (89.5%) also stated that the assessment methods that teachers utilize affects the assessment of speaking skills.

Overall, the data indicates that learners perceive various challenges in using the authentic assessment method to assess speaking skills. These findings underscore the importance of add In analyzing the data provided on the challenges perceived by learners in being assessed using the authentic assessment methods, descriptive statistics were applied to summarize and interpret the responses. The data includes the percentage of responses for each item along with the mean and standard deviation. consuming, 78.4% of the students reacted that assessing speaking skills is not time consuming, with a mean of 2.2 and standard deviation of 1.1 while 73.7% of the students revealed that availability of time does not affect the assessment of speaking skills. However, majority of the students (63.1%) declared that the university does not have sufficient materials that help to assess their speaking skills, with a mean of 2.8 and standard deviation of 1.7.

The responses of the students also indicate that the university does not have sufficient materials that help to assess to assess the students' speaking skills. Majority of the students (73.7%, 68.4%) also believe that class size and their willingness to be assessed, respectively, affect the assessment of their speaking skills. Accordingly, most of the students (89.5%) also stated that the assessment methods that teachers utilize affects the assessment of speaking skills.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing these challenges to enhance the effectiveness of assessing speaking skills using authentic assessment methods.

Table 6. Student's Perception based on authentic model and the five principles of English language assessment.

<i>No</i>	<i>Student's Perception</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std</i>
1	The exams and tests used accurately measure you speaking skills (validity)	0	3 (15.8%)	3 (15.8%)	7 (36.8%)	6 (31.6%)	2.2	1.1
2	The English exams and tests consistently measure your speaking skills (reliability)	1 (5.3%)	2 (10.5%)	2 (10.5%)	8 (42.1%)	6 (31.6%)	2.2	1.2
3	The English exams and tests are practical for assessing speaking skills (practically)	0	2 (10.5%)	1 (5.3%)	9 (47.4%)	7 (36.8%)	1.9	0.9
4	The English exams and tests have a positive impact on your speaking skills (wash back)	0	2 (10.5%)	1 (5.3%)	11 (57.9%)	5 (26.3%)	2.0	0.9

No	Student's Perception	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Std
5	The English exams and tests level real life speaking situation (authenticity)	0	3 (15.8%)	0	11 (57.9%)	5 (26.3%)	2.1	1.0
Grand Mean							2.08	

The data analysis provides valuable insights into learners' perceptions of conventional and authentic assessment models in the context of English speaking skills. Using a Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," respondents offered nuanced views on various aspects of assessment.

Firstly, regarding confidence in speaking English, 52.6% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with being confident, suggesting room for improvement in self-assurance concerning language proficiency.

Secondly, opinions on the importance of assessing English speaking skills were mixed. While 68.4% considered it very important, 26.3% remained neutral or disagreed, indicating differing attitudes toward the assessment's significance.

When considering the clarity of assessment objectives, a majority (73.7%) agreed that the objectives were apparent, suggesting effective communication of assessment criteria.

In terms of the aspects of English-speaking skills deemed crucial for assessment, respondents were divided between prioritizing pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (63.2%) versus fluency and clarity of expression (68.4%), indicating differing perspectives on proficiency.

Regarding authenticity in assessment tasks, a substantial majority (78.9%) agreed that tasks reflected real-world or pedagogic rationale, highlighting perceived relevance and applicability.

Furthermore, there was acknowledgment that assessment tasks encouraged learners to apply classroom learning to real-world contexts, with 42.1% strongly agreeing and 21.1% agreeing, indicating a perceived connection between classroom activities and practical language use.

However, opinions varied on the authenticity of inputs, with 57.9% finding tasks interesting and motivating, but only 52.6% considering inputs authentic, suggesting potential discrepancies in material relevance.

Regarding comparison between conventional and authentic assessment methods, preferences were diverse. While 42.1% deemed conventional assessments more practical, 36.8% favored authentic assessments, indicating a variety of preferences.

Finally, the perceived appropriateness of alternative assessment tools aligned with the purpose of learning English speaking skills received positive feedback, with 84.2% indicating appropriateness, suggesting general acceptance of varied assessment approaches.

4.3 Teachers' Interview Analysis

The analysis of teacher interviews reveals a strong preference for alternative assessment methods, particularly for evaluating speaking skills. Three out of four teachers primarily rely on alternative assessments, citing their effectiveness in measuring students' speaking abilities ([Nyborg et al., 2020](#); [Tessema, 1994](#)). However, a significant concern is the Ethiopian curriculum's focus on grammar over speaking skills, limiting students'

opportunities for verbal communication practice ([G. Brown & Yule, 1983](#)). This grammar emphasis is reinforced by the predominant use of written assessments to evaluate correctness, often neglecting oral proficiency ([Hodgson & Harris, 2021](#)).

One teacher stands out for incorporating presentations, debates, and group discussions, recognizing the importance of authentic assessment tools for speaking skills ([H. D. Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010](#)). However, many students prefer group discussions over presentations due to reluctance to speak individually ([Nyborg et al., 2020](#)). Another teacher uses a balanced approach, integrating both conventional and alternative assessments, noting that the latter effectively reflect real-world language use and track student progress over time ([Knight, 1992](#)).

Despite recognizing the benefits of alternative assessments, there is a notable absence of certain methods like portfolios, seminars, self-assessments, and peer-assessment tools in teachers' practices ([Hodgson & Harris, 2021](#)).

A significant challenge highlighted by teachers is the curriculum's lack of emphasis on speaking skills, compounded by resource constraints such as the absence of a language laboratory ([Tessema, 1994](#)). Additionally, student disinterest and anxiety pose hurdles, with many students preferring written assessments over verbal ones ([G. Brown & Yule, 1983](#)). The logistical challenge of assessing a large number of students individually further complicates the evaluation process ([S. Brown & Knight, 1994](#)).

The thematic analysis underscores the urgency for curriculum reform and enhanced teacher training to better support speaking skills assessment. Teachers emphasize the pivotal role of speaking skills in communication and advocate for a curriculum that reflects this importance ([H. D. Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010](#)). By addressing these challenges and aligning assessment methods with educational objectives, educators can effectively nurture students' speaking abilities and better prepare them for real-world communication.

4.4 Students' Interview Analysis

The analysis of student interviews highlights a strong preference for alternative assessment methods such as: debates, presentations, and portfolios over traditional paper-and-pencil tests. Students appreciate these methods for their practicality, engagement, and alignment with real-world communication skills. Debates are seen as crucial for argumentation and critical thinking, presentations for public speaking and organization, and portfolios for tracking progress and self-reflection. These methods align effectively with course objectives and enhance fluency, pronunciation, and communication skills.

Students suggest improvements such as standardized evaluation criteria, integration of real-world scenarios, and detailed feedback mechanisms to ensure fairness and relevancy. They value constructive feedback for growth and believe alternative assessments can foster better learning outcomes and motivation, ultimately enriching classroom dynamics.

Survey data offers additional insights. While a significant portion of students lack confidence in speaking English, they largely recognize the importance of assessing speaking skills. Most agree that assessment objectives are clear, and many find authentic tasks relevant to real-world applications. However, opinions vary on the authenticity of inputs and the emphasis on different language aspects like pronunciation versus fluency.

Preferences between conventional and alternative methods also differ, with a slight favor toward authentic assessments. Overall, alternative tools are widely accepted for

their effectiveness in supporting learning objectives and promoting meaningful language skill development. By addressing areas for improvement, educators can enhance assessment designs, better prepare students for real-world communication, and foster holistic skill development.

4.5 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Analysis

The analysis of the Focus Group Discussion with eight students highlights diverse perceptions of alternative assessment techniques in EFL spoken English courses. A common theme was the enhanced practicality and relevance of methods such as debates, presentations, and role-playing. Students acknowledged these tools as beneficial for improving their fluency, confidence, and ability to engage in real-life communication. Many participants noted that these methods encouraged them to apply classroom knowledge to practical situations, helping them better connect their learning to real-world contexts.

Despite recognizing the benefits, students expressed several challenges. The unfamiliarity with alternative assessments was a significant concern, with some participants feeling anxious or unprepared for tasks like public speaking or group discussions. Class size and resource constraints, such as limited access to language labs or proper feedback mechanisms, further compounded these difficulties. A recurring point in the discussion was the need for clearer guidelines and more support from instructors to help students navigate alternative assessments effectively.

Overall, the students appreciated the motivational aspects of alternative assessment methods, as they found them more engaging and dynamic compared to traditional tests. However, they emphasized the importance of improving structural conditions, such as smaller class sizes, better training, and accessible resources. The discussion also underscored the value of incorporating feedback loops and offering more opportunities to practice alternative assessment techniques, thereby fostering a supportive environment for skill development in spoken English.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve assessment practices in the EFL Department, targeted training programs for teachers are essential. These programs should focus on equipping teachers with practical skills to implement diverse assessment techniques effectively in EFL classrooms. Additionally, fostering greater student engagement in self- and peer-assessments can enhance their understanding of assessment concepts while developing essential skills for meaningful participation in the evaluation process. Structural constraints, such as large class sizes and competing teaching responsibilities, should be addressed to create an environment conducive to the implementation of alternative assessment methods (AAMs).

Clear and transparent assessment criteria are vital for enhancing fairness and minimizing grading-related complaints. Establishing explicit guidelines ensures that students understand the expectations, thereby reducing uncertainties in the evaluation process. Another critical component is providing detailed, constructive feedback—both orally and in writing—that helps students reflect on their performance and improve

continuously. Constructive feedback should be an integral part of the assessment process to foster deeper learning and skill development.

Finally, collaboration among EFL teachers teaching the same course can standardize assessment practices and ensure consistency in grading. Encouraging teamwork and the exchange of best practices can also address disparities and improve overall evaluation standards. By implementing these recommendations, the EFL Department can better support student learning, enhance assessment practices, and prepare students for real-world communication challenges in English.

By addressing these recommendations, the EFL Department can improve the effectiveness of its assessment methods, better support student learning, and prepare students for real-world communication challenges.

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