

INVESTIGATING EFL INSTRUCTORS' PRACTICES IN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING SPEAKING ASSESSMENT RUBRICS

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ABSTRACT

*This study investigates EFL instructors' practices in designing and implementing speaking assessment rubrics, with a particular focus on the criteria employed and the challenges they face. This study was qualitative research design which obtain a comprehensive understanding of EFL instructors' in their teaching practices. The instruments used were questionnaire and interview guide to explore Balinese instructors' experiences, perceptions, and challenges their practices. The findings showed that most instructors employed rubrics derived from institutional standards, teaching materials, or self-developed adaptations. These rubrics typically include indicators such as fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, task achievement, and interactional competence. Despite their frequent use, teachers encounter obstacles in tailoring rubrics to various proficiency levels, ensuring cultural appropriateness, and maintaining a balance between detail and practicality. The study also reveals a strong awareness among instructors of Balinese philosophical values *Tri Hita Karana* and *Tat Twam Asi* which are viewed as essential to context-based language assessment. Nevertheless, teachers struggle to align cultural sensitivity with the global expectations of English communication, resulting in a pedagogical and philosophical tension between local identity and international standards. Therefore, ongoing professional training and collaborative rubric design are recommended to translate cultural concepts into measurable indicators. Embedding local cultural perspectives in assessment practices is expected to foster fairness, inclusivity, and learner confidence in English speaking performance.*

Keywords: *EFL Instructors, Speaking Assessment, Rubrics, and Balinese Cultural Values.*

1. INTRODUCTION

English becomes an International language that should be learned by Indonesian students. It is a compulsory subject that is taught from the lower to the higher education level (Juliari, 2018). In learning English as a foreign language (EFL), students need to recognize and develop four language skills, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One of the most crucial skills in learning English as a foreign language is speaking.

According to Nunan (2003), speaking is one of four language skills that could means as a productive oral skill that consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. It means that speaking is not merely the act of producing words, but it involves the ability to construct meaningful and contextually appropriate sentences, therefore listeners can clearly understand the intended message.

In addition, speaking in English is a complex skill encompassing both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. The linguistic aspects include vocabulary, grammar, structure, and pronunciation, while non-linguistic components involve fluency, accuracy, gestures, and confidence during interaction. These aspects are interconnected to create effective and meaningful communication with the interlocutor (Brown, 2004; Harmer, 2007; Luoma, 2004).

In EFL classroom setting, speaking is often regarded as one of the most essential challenging skills to teach and assess. Based on the preliminary observation, students' participation in English-speaking activities during the learning process remains low. It is mainly caused to their limited of English vocabulary. Several students tend to pause in the middle of their speaking or switch it to their mother tongue (code-switching). Mother tongue interference is a common phenomenon among learners of English as a foreign language. The grammatical structures and patterns of their first language are often transferred into English, thus it caused errors in sentence structure, pronunciation, and intonation.

Furthermore, another reason is that students are afraid of making mistakes in grammar, pronunciation, or word choice, which often makes them reluctant to speak and prefer to remain silent. In addition, the lack of exposure and practice also affects students' frequency of speaking English. The opportunities to use English outside the classroom are very limited, which makes their speaking skills tend to be low.

Lack of assessment awareness is one of the factors that teachers and students need to pay attention to. Some students did not know which aspects are assessed in speaking assessment. This lack of knowledge makes them unfocused in improving certain areas such as content, pronunciation, fluency, or content. Introducing the speaking assessment rubric to students is necessary in order that they can practice and adjust their performance according to the aspects assessed.

In line with this, Mertler (2001) states that rubric are guides for marking learners' assignments by establishing a set of particular performance criteria. Scoring rubrics provide a detailed description of expectations for learners' performance in each category, with the aim that they can use this informative feedback from rubrics to improve their upcoming work (Mat & Par, 2022).

The use of appropriate rubrics plays a crucial role in supporting these objectives. Speaking assessment rubrics provide clear and structured guidelines for teachers to evaluate students' speaking performance objectively and consistently (Brookhart, 2018). Through rubrics, essential aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehensibility can be measured systematically. Moreover, rubrics help students understand the expected standards and enhance their self-awareness in the speaking learning process. However, many EFL teachers encounter difficulties in developing rubrics that are valid, reliable, and contextually appropriate for their classrooms (Sudaryanto & Akbariski, 2021). The effective use of rubrics is frequently challenged by insufficient training, time constraints, and the diverse proficiency levels among students.

As teacher especially teaching English as a foreign language, it is important to design rubrics and implement it in teaching and learning process. Rubric is a tool for teacher that provides clear, structured, and objective guidelines for assessing students' performance. Through rubrics, teachers can clearly communicate what is expected from students at each level of performance, enabling them to understand the learning targets that need to be achieved. Rubrics also help teachers provide more specific and constructive feedback based on the aspects assessed. Moreover, integrating local cultural values such as *Tat Twam Asi* (the awareness of unity and empathy toward others) and *Tri Hita Karana* (the balance among human, nature, and the divine) into the assessment rubric can foster students' character development alongside their linguistic skills. By embedding these values, the rubric not only guides students to improve their English-speaking ability but also nurtures harmony, respect, and mutual understanding values that are deeply rooted in Balinese culture (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive case study approach. The qualitative method is chosen to explore deeply how EFL instructors design and implement speaking assessment rubrics in their teaching practice. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research allows the researcher to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices within their natural settings. Through this approach, the study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of instructors' assessment practices, challenges faced, and strategies used to ensure fairness and validity in speaking assessments. The subject of this study is English teachers who will be given a questionnaire related to how EFL instructors in Bali perceive and integrate local cultural values, specifically Balinese Hindu values, into their rubrics for assessing students' speaking performance.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. The Concept of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

Paul (2003) states that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) refers to the learning of English by students in a country where English is not the native language. Meanwhile, TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) refers to the practice of teaching English to people whose first language is not English, usually in some countries where English is not the primary language spoken. Furthermore, Foreign language teaching (FLT) refer to the teaching of a language to non-native speaker in which the language is commonly used outside of the native environment spoken. Teaching a foreign language may be defined as interaction between the teacher and the students through taking turn of talking in transferring the knowledge and the skills in order to create an environment that respects, encourages, and stimulates the student's learning through experience. A language is considered foreign if it is learned largely in the classroom and is not spoken in the society where the teaching occurs. Study of another language allows the students to communicate effectively and creatively and to participate in real-life situations through the language of the authentic culture itself. It provides access into a perspective other than one's own, increases the ability to see connections across content areas, and promotes an interdisciplinary perspective while gaining intercultural understandings (Syarifudin, 2021).

b. Teaching Speaking in EFL Classroom

Speaking is one of the four and important skills in English. The three other skills are understanding speech, such as listening, reading and writing. By speaking skill, students are able to communicate with others and understand what is being discussed. Speaking and listening are said relate to language expressed through the aural medium. Meanwhile, reading and writing are related to language expressed through visual medium. Therefore, speaking and writing are productive skills whereas listening and reading are receptive skills (Widdowson, 1978) in Syarifudin (2021).

In addition, speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbol, in variety of context. Speaking is the utterance of intelligible speech and also the ability that requires to the process of communicative competence, pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary and grammar improving. Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts (Chaney, 1998).

Moreover, teaching speaking skills requires extensive and continuous practice. In EFL classrooms, students often have limited time to use English during lessons, and once they leave the classroom, they tend to switch back to their mother tongue. Therefore, teachers need to implement effective strategies to enhance students' speaking abilities, such as role plays, simulations, information gap activities, storytelling, picture description, and story completion. These communicative techniques provide learners with authentic opportunities to use English in meaningful contexts. By integrating such activities into speaking lessons, teachers can create a more engaging learning environment that motivates students to participate actively and develop their speaking competence.

c. Assessment in EFL Contexts

Assessment is one of the essential components in the teaching and learning process. It serves as a tool to measure the extent to which learning objectives have been achieved. Tyler (1950, as cited in Arikunto, 2018) defines assessment or evaluation as a process of collecting data to determine to what extent, in what aspects, and in which parts educational goals have been accomplished. In English language learning, assessment holds significant meaning for both students and teachers. For students, assessment provides feedback on how well they have understood and mastered the lessons delivered by the teacher. For teachers, it offers valuable insights into students' mastery of the material, identifies which students have understood or struggled, and evaluates whether the teaching methods used are effective. If deemed ineffective, teachers can modify or update their teaching strategies accordingly. Thus, assessment not only serves as a measurement tool but also as a means of reflection for both teachers and students in achieving optimal learning outcomes.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, assessment functions to measure the extent to which learners have attained the expected language competencies, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. It also assists teachers in evaluating students' mastery of grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, through assessment, teachers can design more effective learning plans based on students' needs. Generally, there are three main types of assessment used in the learning process, namely diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment.

1. Diagnostic Assessment

Diagnostic assessment is conducted before the learning process begins with the purpose of understanding students' prior knowledge, potential, and learning needs. This type of assessment aims to identify students' initial abilities, including their strengths and weaknesses. In this context, teachers may administer a pre-test or conduct brief interviews to evaluate students' proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and other English language skills. The purpose of this assessment is to enable teachers to adjust teaching methods and materials according to students' proficiency levels (Brown, 2004). Moreover, diagnostic assessment assists teachers in designing differentiated instructional strategies. For instance, students who experience difficulties in understanding basic concepts can be provided with additional support and practice, whereas those who have already mastered the basics may be given more advanced materials to further develop their skills.

2. Formative Assessment

This assessment is conducted throughout the learning process to monitor students' progress and provide constructive feedback, a concept known as *assessment for learning*. Formative assessment is a continuous process carried out during instruction with the purpose of tracking learners' development and offering feedback that helps them improve their understanding of the subject matter. It can be implemented through various methods such as quizzes, daily assignments, discussions, classroom observations, peer assessments, or portfolios. Formative assessment is characterized by its responsive nature, the use of multiple sources of evidence, and its integration as an essential component of both teaching and learning processes. Moreover, it involves active participation from both teachers and students (Bell & Cowie, 2001).

3. Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is conducted at the end of a learning process, semester, or academic year to evaluate the extent to which students have achieved the learning objectives (*assessment of learning*). The results of this assessment are used to provide a final evaluation of students' overall ability to comprehend the material that has been taught. Forms of summative assessment may include final examinations, project presentations, portfolios, or comprehensive language proficiency tests. According to Harmer (2007), summative assessment is typically used to assign grades or provide certification of students' achievements. Furthermore, it serves as a reflection of the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching methods implemented by an educational institution. When the results of summative assessments indicate that most students have not reached the expected competencies, it suggests that certain aspects of the curriculum or instructional methods require review and improvement. Therefore, summative assessment is not only essential for measuring students' achievement but also functions as an evaluative tool for teachers and schools to enhance the overall quality of learning in the future.

d. Rubrics for Speaking Assessment

A rubric is an assessment tool used to measure students' competencies or skills in a specific area. According to Brookhart (2018) a rubric is a set of logical criteria for students' work that includes a description of levels of performance quality of the criteria. The main purpose of rubrics is to assess performances. Assessing students' performance examiner can whether observe the process of doing something (for example, oral communication or presentation) or observe the product that is the result of students' work (for example, essay, term paper or project). Three important features in scoring rubrics for performance assessment are evaluative criteria that include the factors for determining the quality of a student's response, description of the quality for all evaluative criteria, an indication of whether a holistic or analytic scoring approach is to be used (Popham, 2017).

In addition, Brown (2004) in Syahidah & Umasugi (2021) explain some components of speaking skill could be used in designing a speaking assessment, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and task. In designing rubric for speaking assessment, the teacher should adapt it to the learning objectives that students are expected to achieve. This ensures that the assessment process is valid, meaning that it measures what it is intended to be measured. In relation with this, rubrics

play a crucial role in ensuring fairness, validity, and reliability in speaking assessment. It helps standardize grading by providing clear benchmarks that minimize subjectivity in evaluating students' speaking performance. Furthermore, the benefits of using rubrics in assessment are multidimensional and directly connected to the purposes they are used for. Using rubrics in teaching and learning has the potential to positively affect the students' attribution of success or failure and providing clear directions for performance that are within the control of the students.

e. Balinese Cultural Values

Bali is known for its diverse customs and cultural values. These values are deeply embedded in the Balinese people daily life, whether within the family, at school, or in the community. They reflect a philosophy of life that emphasizes harmony and balance. There are several fundamental values of Balinese culture, namely Tri Hita Karana, Tri Kaya Parisudha, and Tat Twam Asi.

Tri Hita Karana, which means "the three causes of well-being," serves as the central foundation for maintaining harmonious relationships between humans and God (Parahyangan), among human beings (Pawongan), and between humans and the environment (Palemahan).

Meanwhile, Tri Kaya Parisudha underscores the importance of purity in thought (manacika), speech (wacika), and action (kayika), guiding individuals to live in accordance with goodness and truth.

Tat Twam Asi, which means as "you are me," emphasizes on empathy, humanity, and mutual respect among all living beings. This philosophy embodies the sense of unity between the self, God, and all forms of life, asserting all creation is interconnected. It fosters attitudes of respect, cooperation, and harmony both the social and spiritual aspects of Balinese life.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Awareness of Local Cultural Values among Balinese EFL Instructors

From the findings, it is indicated that Balinese EFL instructors demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding to local culture, such as Tri Hita Karana and Tat Twam Asi. It could be shown from Question 10, which asked about the teachers' knowledge of Balinese cultural values like Tri Hita Karana and Tat Twam Asi, showed a high level of personal and professional awareness. Responses were heavily concentrated in the 'Familiar' to 'Very Familiar' categories suggesting these are neither abstract concepts nor mere vocabulary items but something they experience in life. This means the teachers work from a socio-cultural framework in which harmony with the God, community and nature, acts of compassion and empathy are present and active. To consider how these values can be translated into practices, especially those concerned with the subtleties of language assessment, teachers must already be familiar with its foundational ideas. Moreover, question 11 showed this belief has strong correlation with the awareness level. The data showed a majority thinks it is 'Important' or 'Very Important' to consider such local cultural values to assess student learning and behaviour. It is an important finding which shifts from just being ignorant to an active belief that culture is central and not just putting it on the side of education. According to the teachers, they cannot see the performance and behaviour of a students in class through a universal culture-free interpretation. They say that a respectful understanding of the local Balinese context is necessary in order to create a fair and holistic appraisal of the students' abilities.

b. Perception on Integrating Cultural Values in Speaking Assessment Rubrics

From the Likerts-scale responses, the answers in question 12 provides a more nuanced map of these understandings, showing both clear consensus and a tension. Almost every teacher agrees with Statement (b), which shows that teachers can see the impact of culture on communicating directly, using eye contact and how they use their bodies. There is a strong disagreement with (a) that speaking assessment is merely a question of language accuracy. Teachers reject a view of language assessment divorced from context and which recognizes the foundation of socio-culture. However, a main tension arises when ideas shift from theoretical importance to practical significance. Many teachers agree with

statement (d). It is believed that putting cultural values in the rubric will help Balinese students. This shows an awareness that assessment tools founded entirely on Western standards of communication will disadvantage students from a cultural framework of respect-harmony-indirectness. On the other hand, this good view is balanced by high agreement with Statement (e) which is about a significant barrier. Cultural values are difficult to measure. This shows a professional concern with subjectivity and the validity and reliability of quantifying qualitative terms such as 'harmony' and 'compassion'. The different reactions to Statement (c) further highlight this tension. It is uncertain whether the existing practices take implicit consideration of the Balinese communication style, as there is no clear consensus. It indicates that there is a yawning chasm between theory and practice where teachers are making intuitive adjustments to their marking, but they are not formally equipped or sufficiently confident to do so explicitly. The knowledge is much older than the formal mechanism but we need to transgress it.

c. Instructors' challenges in integrating Balinese Cultural Values into Rubrics.

Teachers face a significant philosophical and pedagogical challenge in balancing cultural sensitivity with the need to prepare students for a globalized communicative context that often values directness, assertiveness, and individualism. This "double bind" positions educators between respecting local cultural identities and equipping learners with internationally recognized English communication competencies. Consequently, the issue extends beyond the technical aspects of rubric design, prompting a re-examination of the fundamental objectives of English language education within culturally specific contexts. It articulated from the finding in reply 18 was the tension perceived between a cultural sensitivity and universality of communication attributes. This phrase expresses a problem teachers face. It is not a logistical challenge, nor is it a matter of will. It is deeper and it is philosophical and pedagogical in nature. On one hand, while teachers understand that Balinese people prefer more indirect communication (showing respect for authority and for the group), they often have good relations in class. If you judge a student badly due to these behaviors, it would be unfair and not culturally sensitive. On the other hand, teachers feel a duty to equip students for a world where communication skills that are 'universal', are frequently praised and required (skills that are tuned to the western way of being direct, assertive, 'I' centred, etc). This creates a double-bind for the teachers. They are torn between the moral obligation to be relevant and culturally appropriate in the local context and the practical necessity of providing students with a set of skills considered necessary for success and mobility beyond the local context. The rubrics design challenge is not only a technical and academic issue. It also questions the very objective of English language education in a particular culture. How can we make a rubric that will not punish a student for being culturally Balinese while preparing them for the international communicative context? The core problem is these shared challenges between different values and identity systems, including creating a culturally representative funnel of development.

The timing of the writing exercise impacted teachers' ability to respond sufficiently to question 19, which directly asked about the necessary support, the findings point towards a path forward. It is important because it suggests a straightforward solution to most of the particulars set out in stage one. Based on the supports requested (workshops and collaborative learning), this suggests teachers do not view this integration as a job they can or should do alone. The urge for workshops signals the need for structured expert-driven professional learning. As much as a theoretical justification teachers want sufficient training. They would value guidance to help them operationalize abstract values like Tri Hita Karana or Tat Twam Asi into descriptors that can be observed and measured on a rubric. An example of showing harmony within required presentations, dialogues and/or classroom exchanges will prove useful. A workshop would offer exemplars and a chance to practice rubric design while providing a means to address the challenge of objectivity highlighted in the earlier findings. Also, one important finding is the value placed on peer collaboration. This means that teachers will need to join together to tackle the problem. Together, colleagues can share things that have worked for them, critique each other's draft rubrics, and brainstorm ways to mediate cultural and universal demands similar to credentialing discussions. The very collaboration used to teach this concept is reflective of the Balinese value of *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), a pedagogical challenge that became a collective mission. This means creating opportunities for teachers to work together, pooling their cultural and professional resources to create assessment tools that are contextually appropriate, would be more effective than imposing new rubrics from the top down.

The comment made in question 20, although quite brief, gives a very telling information into the human side of the issue. Hence, the finding that some students still have low confidence in explicit and implicit communications is a striking one, which links the abstract challenge of rubric design to student outcomes. The knock in confidence will be a manifestation of the tension discussed in Question 18. Students find themselves torn between the communicative norms of their own culture with that of the EFL classroom, leading to the knock. They do not know how to express themselves, worried that their everyday way, informed by their culture, is wrong in English, but not yet strongly committed to alternative styles. Urgent need to solve the problem of integration, this shows. This is not just a theoretical notion. It actually has a real impact on students' belief in themselves and their willingness to join in. An assessment strategy that has cultural values could enable students to validate their cultural identities, which would reduce anxiety and lay the foundations for confidence in language learning. The teachers said they think the current testing system adds to the confidence gap between students. In other words, they want the same kind of support they asked for to avoid this situation.

In conclusion, teachers report that students often experience low confidence due to conflicts between their cultural communication norms and English language expectations. Integrating cultural values into assessment is seen as a strategic measure to validate students' cultural identities, reduce anxiety, and build confidence, ultimately supporting better learning outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that Balinese EFL instructors show strong awareness and appreciation of local cultural values such as *Tri Hita Karana* and *Tat Twam Asi*. These principles are considered vital elements in evaluating students' speaking abilities. The teachers acknowledge that language assessment is inherently tied to its socio-cultural background. Nevertheless, they continue to encounter philosophical and pedagogical dilemmas in balancing cultural sensitivity with the global standards of English proficiency, resulting in a persistent tension between preserving local identity and achieving international communicative competence.

In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of providing teachers with continuous professional development and collaborative opportunities to convert cultural concepts into observable and assessable rubric indicators. Incorporating Balinese cultural values into speaking assessment rubrics should not be seen as a mere technical revision but as a meaningful transformation toward a more inclusive and culturally grounded English language education. This integration has the potential to build students' confidence, lower their anxiety, and promote fairer learning outcomes that reflect both local and global communicative expectations.

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