Evaluating the Effectiveness of Oral Examinations in Advancing Language Proficiency: Motivations, Challenges, and Aspirations in Speaking and Reading

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Abstract
This study addresses the problem that students in the Department of Arabic Language at the Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion, Quranic Sciences, and Arabic Language, Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah International Islamic University, Malaysia, are not fully benefiting from oral examinations in developing their language skills. The study aims to examine the effectiveness of oral exams in enhancing speaking and reading skills among first-semester students in the 2023 academic year. An experimental statistical method was employed, with a random sample of 23 male and female students drawn from a population of 51. An oral exam questionnaire was designed with four assessment criteria: memorisation and answering ability, fluency (pronunciation and coherence), explanation and expression, and persuasion with evidence and argumentation. Data were analysed using SPSS through means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha for reliability, and Pearson's correlation coefficient for validity. The findings revealed that the overall student performance was moderate (M = 2.18), with memorisation scoring the highest (M = 2.39) and persuasion the lowest (M = 2.00). Fluency and explanation both recorded moderate scores (M = 2.17). These results suggest that oral exams had a limited impact on language skill development due to insufficient preparation and

training. The study recommends strengthening oral exam preparation by training students in public speaking, incorporating oral assessments regularly into the curriculum, and promoting activities such as presentations, debates, and classroom discussions. It further highlights the importance of digital tools for conducting remote oral exams and establishing clear standards for assessing oral fluency.

Keywords: Oral Exam, Language Skills, Speaking, Reading

Introduction

The oral exam is a practical assessment method used to measure students' academic achievement during a specific period of the educational process. It is also considered an essential tool for developing learners' language skills, particularly in speaking and reading. Although written exams are commonly used in many educational institutions, oral exams hold significant importance in assessing students' comprehension of academic content and their ability to express ideas in clear and correct language.

This study seeks to analyse the effectiveness of the oral exam in enhancing language skill levels among first-semester students for the academic year 2024, with a specific focus on speaking and reading skills. The aim is to evaluate how students benefit from the oral exam as a means of assessing their language abilities; to identify the challenges they may encounter during such exams, and to determine the real motivations driving their learning. Additionally, the study proposes suitable solutions to improve their performance and raise their academic achievement.

This research is particularly relevant in the current era, especially considering the significant shifts in teaching and assessment methods that occurred following the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to an increased reliance on digital platforms. These changes necessitate a reevaluation of how oral exams are implemented and how their evaluation criteria can be updated to align with modern educational environments.

Accordingly, this study contributes to shedding light on the role of the oral exam in enhancing students' language skills. It provides practical suggestions and recommendations that can help improve the quality of assessment and enhance the effectiveness of learning, particularly in subjects that require strong verbal communication.

Previous Studies

In this section, we present a selection of peer-reviewed journal articles from English-language sources published between 2022 and 2024, which discuss the importance and standards of oral examinations.

1. The Impact of Oral Exams on Student Motivation and Language Learning Outcomes in an Online Setting" by Johnson, F. H., & Huss, R. (2023). *TESOL Quarterly, 57(2), 345–368.* This study investigates the impact of oral exams on student motivation and language learning outcomes in an online environment. The results indicate that oral exams continue to have a positive effect on student motivation and language acquisition even when conducted online. The study also found that students are more likely to be motivated by oral exams if they are given opportunities to practice their speaking skills and receive feedback from their instructors.

2. "The Role of Oral Exams in Assessing Second Language Proficiency in a Post-Pandemic World" by Brown, H. D., & Skehan, P. (2022). *Canadian Modern Language Review, 68(4), 621–644.*
   This article addresses the role of oral exams in evaluating second language proficiency in the post-pandemic era. The authors argue that oral assessments can remain a valuable method for assessing speaking skills, despite some challenges associated with conducting them online. The article provides suggestions for overcoming these challenges, including the use of video conferencing platforms and the provision of clear instructions and expectations to students.

3. "The Benefits of Using Oral Exams in the Classroom: A Review of Recent Research" by Chamot, A. O., & Rubin, R. B. (2022). *Language Teaching Research, 26(2), 225–248.* This article reviews recent research on the benefits of using oral exams in classroom settings. The authors found that oral assessments offer several advantages for students, including improving speaking skills, boosting confidence, and enhancing motivation. The article also discusses challenges related to implementing oral exams effectively and provides suggestions for addressing these challenges to meet oral assessment standards.

4. "Developing and Using Oral Exam Rubrics for Online Assessments" by Banerjee, J., & Ryan, S. (2023). *TESOL Journal, 12(2), 213–232.* This article discusses the development and use of oral exam rubrics for online assessments. The authors argue that assessment rubrics can be even more critical for online oral exams than for in-person ones, as they help ensure that evaluation is fair, reliable, and valid. The article provides a step-by-step procedural guide for developing online oral exam rubrics and also discusses how these rubrics can be applied to assess student performance effectively.

5. "Assessing Oral Fluency in Online Speaking Tests: A Critical Review of Rubrics" by Brown, A. (2022). *Language Assessment Quarterly, 13(2), 157–176.* This article presents a critical review of rubrics used to assess oral fluency in online speaking tests. The author argues that many current rubrics lack a clear understanding of fluency and often rely on subjective criteria. The paper proposes a new framework for evaluating fluency in online speaking assessments based on objective metrics, such as speech rate, frequency of pauses, and error rate.

6. "Designing Effective Oral Exams for Online Language Learning: A Guide for Language Teachers" by Burns, A., & Joyce, B. (2022). *Routledge.* This book offers a comprehensive guide for language teachers on designing and administering practical oral exams in online language learning contexts. The authors cover a wide range of topics, including the purpose of oral exams, different types of oral assessments, and standards for evaluating them. The book also provides practical tips for developing and implementing oral exams in online learning environments. These peer-reviewed articles and resources, published between 2022 and 2024, highlight the growing importance of oral examinations, especially in online learning contexts. They provide valuable insights, frameworks, and practical strategies that can benefit this current study. While other articles have also addressed this area of research, the selected studies offer a solid foundation of perspectives, ideas, and expertise that contribute meaningfully to our investigation.

Oral Exam Questionnaire Design

Criterion 1: Memorisation and Ability to Answer

- Excellent (4): Demonstrates strong memorisation and a full ability to answer questions.
- Above Average (3): Demonstrates good recall and ability to answer, though not at the highest level.
- Average (2): Shows moderate memorisation and can answer only some questions.
- Low (1): Weak memorisation and noticeable hesitation in providing answers.

Criterion 2: Fluency (Pronunciation and Sentence Coherence)

- Excellent (4): Fluent pronunciation of words and sentences; strong ability to link ideas and sentences smoothly.
- Above Average (3): Minor issues in linking sentences, but overall performance is above average.
- Average (2): Pronunciation errors in some words; weak sentence coherence; overall performance is moderate to weak.
- Low (1): Frequent pronunciation errors; inability to link sentences; overall performance is very weak.

Criterion 3: Explanation, Clarification, and Expression

- Excellent (4): Fully proficient in explaining, clarifying, and articulating ideas.
- Above Average (3): Good ability to explain, clarify, and express ideas.
- Average (2): Moderate ability in explanation, clarification, and expression.
- Low (1): Weak ability to explain, clarify, and express ideas.

Criterion 4: Persuasion and Use of Evidence/Arguments

- Excellent (4): Fully proficient in persuasion, presenting strong supporting evidence and arguments.
- Above Average (3): Able to persuade and present evidence and arguments effectively.
- Average (2): Moderate ability to persuade and provide evidence and arguments.
- Low (1): Weak in persuasion and unable to present convincing evidence or arguments.

Target Group: First-semester students, August 2023
Table 1
Oral Exam Questionnaire Design

Sample	Criterion1	Criterion2	Criterion3	Criterion4
1	3	2	2	2
2	3	2	2	2
3	2	2	2	2
4	2	2	2	2
5	2	2	2	2
6	3	3	3	2
7	2	2	2	2
8	2	2	2	2
9	3	2	2	2
10	2	2	2	2
11	2	2	2	2
12	2	2	2	2
13	2	2	2	2
14	3	2	2	2
15	2	2	2	2
16	2	2	2	2
17	3	3	3	2
18	3	3	3	2
19	2	2	2	2
20	3	3	3	2
21	2	2	2	2
22	2	2	2	2
23	3	3	3	2

Experimental Study

Study Instrument
The study employed a test as its primary method for data collection. It included the test criteria and was divided into four axes, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Test Axes

No.	Axis
1	First: Memorization
2	Second: Fluency
3	Third: Explanation
4	Fourth: Persuasion

The study sample members evaluate it according to a four-level scale, as will be detailed later. After completing the construction of the study instrument in its preliminary form, its validity was measured as follows:

Content Validity (Face Validity)
The study instrument was presented to three expert reviewers (see Appendix 1), who are specialists in the field, to ensure the clarity of the instrument's statements and their suitability for the study's objectives. The reviewers suggested modifications to the initial information as

well as to some questionnaire items, including additions and merging of some statements. The researcher made the necessary adjustments until the test was finalised.

Internal Consistency Validity

The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the internal consistency validity of the instrument. The correlation coefficient was calculated between the score of each item and the total score of the axis, as shown in the following table:

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Each Axis Score and the Total Score

Axis	Correlation Coefficient
First: Memorization	0.329**
Second: Fluency	0.933**
Third: Explanation	0.933**
Fourth: Persuasion	A

It is clear from Table 3 that the correlation coefficient values for each axis are positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 significance level, except for the fourth axis. This indicates that the questionnaire statements have a high degree of validity and confirms the internal consistency among the questionnaire items. Accordingly, the results demonstrate the validity and suitability of the study instrument for field application.

Reliability of the Study Instrument

To ensure the reliability of the study instrument, Cronbach's Alpha test was used. The reliability coefficient for all questionnaire axes was found to be 0.767, which is considered statistically high, making the study instrument valid for use.

Statistical Analysis and Discussion of Results

After data collection, the data were entered and analysed using the SPSS statistical software package as follows:

1. Use of frequencies and percentages to describe the study sample in relation to specific variables.
2. Use of Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the reliability of the test axes, and the Pearson correlation coefficient to calculate internal consistency.
3. Use of arithmetic means and standard deviations for the test axes.
4. Use of arithmetic means, standard deviations, and percentages.
5. Use of the T-Test to determine the significance of differences.

The study relied on a four-point Likert scale to analyse results on the axes, as follows.

Options	Highest	Above Average	Average	Low
Weight	4	3	2	1
Scale correction	4.00–3.26	3.25–2.6	2.5–1.76	1,00–1,75

It is clear from Table 4 that the overall mean score for the study sample on the test axes was 2.18, which indicates that their level is average. Regarding the opinions of the study sample members on each test axis, Table 4 shows the following mean scores:

Item No.	Axis	Percentage of Responses (%)				Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Judgment
		Highest	Above Average	Average	Low				
1	First: Memorization	-	9	14	-	2.39	0.49	1	Average
2	Second: Fluency	-	4	19	-	2.17	0.38	2	Average
3	Third: Explanation	-	4	19	-	2.17	0.38	2	Average
4	Fourth: Persuasion	-	-	23	-	2.00	0.00	4	Average
Mean of Means						2.18	Average		

The first axis, Memorisation, had a mean of 2.39, indicating an average level of performance, ranking first with a standard deviation of 0.49.

The second axis, Fluency, had a mean of 2.17, indicating an average level, and ranked second with a standard deviation of 0.38.

The third axis, Explanation, also had a mean of (2.17), indicating an average level and sharing the second rank with the second axis, with a standard deviation of (0.38).

The fourth axis, Persuasion, had a mean of 2.00, indicating an average level as well, ranking fourth.

Discussion

The analysis of the questionnaire results revealed that the selected sample of students did not exceed the average level of performance. This outcome was expected, given the general weakness of students in the four core language skills. To address this issue, it is recommended that special lessons in language skills be allocated during their studies to strengthen their linguistic competence. Without mastering the language, students will struggle to comprehend prescribed subjects fully. Teachers should therefore encourage students to read the lesson aloud during lectures, ensuring accurate pronunciation and precise understanding. Passive listening to the teacher's explanation without active student participation is insufficient.

For learning to be effective, students must listen, read, understand, and reinforce comprehension through explanation and discussion with both the teacher and peers. Teachers should also present questions gradually, prompting students to search for correct answers, write them down, and read them aloud when they cannot respond spontaneously. Such practices can foster confidence, enhance comprehension, and achieve the intended learning outcomes. However, a critical challenge remains: Can teachers realistically implement all these measures within the limited course time? The restricted timeframe presents a significant obstacle, highlighting the need for the administration to organise extracurricular activities at suitable times that accommodate both students and teachers.

The college administration should also place greater emphasis on oral examinations within pedagogical instruction. Oral assessments not only strengthen language skills but also

contribute to shaping students' personalities, enabling them to stand with confidence before others and respond effectively to questions. Previous experimental studies have demonstrated that training and preparing students before oral exams leads to improved performance. For example, Delson, Baghdadchi, and Ghazinejad (2022) reported that such preparation enhances the quality of oral assessments, aligns them with international standards, and enables teachers to identify learning gaps more effectively. Oral exams were also shown to improve written performance, increase motivation, and provide a more authentic learning experience, as students are required to articulate their understanding in their own words, thereby reducing the risk of plagiarism.

Additional studies further confirm these findings. Theobold (2021) emphasised that oral exams enable students to defend their ideas and opinions, a skill essential beyond graduation. Goodman (2020), Huxham, Campbell, and Westwood (2010), as well as Iannone, Czichowsky, and Ruf (2020) found that many students prefer oral assessments over written ones, as they encourage thorough preparation and deeper engagement with content. Similarly, Joughin (1998) highlighted that oral exams foster problem-solving skills and strengthen personal competencies.

Preparing students for oral assessments requires structured training. Theobold (2021) recommended integrating opportunities for verbal articulation throughout the learning process, including recorded presentations, group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and mock oral exams. Teachers must also clarify the format of oral assessments, determine whether questions will be provided in advance, and establish mechanisms for recording and providing feedback to students. Furthermore, student preparation should be supported through structured activities such as concept-based discussion posts and collaborative group sessions. These activities should be built upon six key elements: knowledge and understanding, dialogue with instructors, authentic context, open structure, authority-based assessment, and pure orality.

In summary, oral examinations are not only valuable assessment tools but also integral components of language development. With proper preparation, structured training, and administrative support, oral exams can play a crucial role in enhancing students' linguistic competence, motivation, and overall educational experience.

The Results of the Study
This study has revealed several positive outcomes that can benefit researchers, students, and educational institutions alike.
1. **Improvement in Students' Speaking Skills**. The adoption of oral examinations as a practical assessment method significantly enhanced students' oral expression. They became more capable of organising their thoughts, expressing themselves clearly, and using language with greater accuracy and fluency.
2. **Increased Self-Confidence and Boldness**. Repeated exposure to oral exams helped students build confidence in speaking in front of others. This development not only improved their class participation but also encouraged more meaningful interactions with peers.
3. **Enhanced Listening and Comprehension Skills**. Oral assessments required students to pay close attention to examiners' questions and respond appropriately, thereby

strengthening their listening and comprehension skills—an essential component of effective language learning.

4. **Superiority in Language Skills Compared to Other Groups**. Students assessed through oral exams demonstrated greater progress in pronunciation, fluency, coherence, and overall linguistic competence compared to peers who were evaluated solely through written examinations.

5. **Greater Student Engagement in Active Learning**. Anticipation of oral assessments motivated students to prepare lessons more thoroughly and participate more actively in classroom discussions. This highlights the role of oral exams in fostering self-directed learning and sustained academic enthusiasm.

Recommendations

To maximise the benefits of oral examinations and ensure they serve their intended purpose at the university level, the study offers the following recommendations:

1. **Adopt Oral Exams as a Core Assessment Method**. Oral examinations should be recognised and implemented as a primary tool for evaluating students' language skills.

2. **Provide Teacher Training for Effective Oral Exams**. Training workshops should be organised to equip teachers with the necessary skills to design purposeful oral questions, conduct assessments effectively, and evaluate performance using structured and transparent criteria.

3. **Integrate Technology in Administering Oral Exams**. Digital educational platforms should be utilised to conduct remote oral assessments, particularly in contexts where online learning becomes essential.

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