

# Humanizing Tertiary EFL/ESL Speaking Testing and Evaluation During the Online Open Distance Learning (ODL)

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## Abstract

When the COVID-19 pandemic caused school closures and online teaching, the issue of online testing and evaluation almost took a back seat as many were focusing on the teaching and learning approaches, material preparations and students-teachers-content connectivism first. This has arrived at a scenario where teachers were not equipped with plagiarism-proof testing approaches, methods to curb 'behind the scenes' discussion while taking tests, or even the right number to apply the online testing. A delayed magnitude of measures has been undertaken to solve these issues. The efforts include resorting to online plagiarism software, mark deduction for any answers that seemed similar and mandatory multiple tests. The present paper seeks to discuss these issues and challenges faced by English as a second/foreign language (ESL/FL) teachers and learners in undertaking testing and evaluation during the online open learning period. This exploratory study adopts a non-rigorous PRISMA-SLR method in filtering articles for data selection. The targeted open source was the Google Scholar. Discussion suggests that the issues can be solved by adopting humanising approaches and implementing multiple means to ensure testing and evaluation during the online open learning were handled in a professional manner. The paper suggests more studies to be conducted in relation to the topic.

**Keywords** Humanizing, Speaking, Testing and Evaluation.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the world since mid-March 2020. Social isolation was one of the measures to curb the spread of the corona virus. UNICEF (2021) reported more than half a million early childhood centers, schools and universities were closed. Due to this measure, teaching and learning were conducted using online or open distance learning approaches (ODL).

The transition from direct face to face teaching and learning have generated some issues and challenges. This includes deciding suitable teaching and learning approaches (Alhammadi, 2021), material preparations (Gleason, 2021), and students-teachers-content connectivism (Muzammil, 2020; Aydin, 2021; Abou-Khalil, 2021). Transition from the well-systemized face to face testing and evaluation into online testing and evaluation have also been challenging. This has arrived at a scenario where teachers were not equipped with plagiarism-proof testing approaches, methods to curb behind-the-scenes discussion while taking tests, or even the right number to apply the online testing. A magnitude of measures has been undertaken to solve the issues. The efforts include resorting to online plagiarism software, marks deduction for any answers that looked similar and allowing students to take test multiple times. The present paper seeks to discuss these issues and challenges faced by teachers and English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners in undertaking testing and evaluation during the online open learning.

### **Literature Review**

There are advantages to online learning. Thomes (2019) reported some advantages of online learning with many educational apps that are encouraging students include the use of online quizzes to keep track of students' progress (daily/weekly/monthly), to captivate students' interest, or having diverse applications for expanding their knowledge. Past studies have suggested several measures in handling offline to online learning transitions. Maru et al (2020) studied 26 students of language class 1st grade of Sma, Manado, Sulawesi, Indonesia using videos to enhance students writing skills. They reported the challenges of online learning include the limitation of internet connection and access, students' location, the financial support for internet quota, and surely the digital literacy of teachers and students, online test which does yet not guarantee the absence of cheating and plagiarism. The suggested solutions are that learning should be comprehensively designed and prepared to ensure the learning outcome is achieved.

There are online apps that assist teaching and learning. Hadijah et al (2020) studied students' perspectives on using the interactive game "Kahoot!" As the media of vocabulary test at one of the public senior high schools. Firstly, Kahoot! Appears to be more practical for a vocabulary test. Secondly, the game can attract the students' attention to the test. Thirdly, it helps the students to be more active in the classroom and lastly, the game makes the students more enthusiastic in doing the test. Prayogi and Wulandari (2021) analysed how quizlet, a digital vocabulary learning platform, was implemented in helping students learn vocabulary and how students perceive the diverse activities in the application such as flashcards, learn, write, spell, match, and test.

A comparative study (Balqis et. al., 2022) has shown that evaluation between face-to face and online academic achievement varies. Adopting descriptive statistics, anova, and the post-hoc test to evaluate marks of 150 students from five semesters, Siti Balqis et. al (2022) found face-to-face learning sessions in September - January 2020 session was better than online evaluation while the female students who once scored better in face-to-face learning were defeated by the males in online evaluation. This shows that many variables can impact the change. These may be assessment, teaching methods and students' ability to academically perform have been drastically altered when odl became mandatory amid the covid 19 pandemic.

Applying the common european framework of reference (CEFR) rubrics for esl assessment is also challenging. An open-ended survey with 4 secondary school teachers from 2 different

schools in the northern region of Malaysia showed majority teachers felt that the cefr-aligned syllabus is only partially effective (Lee, et. al., 2022) especially during ODL. This has impacted assessment processes.

Evaluation is one of the issues in mobile learning. Afifah (2022) studied 50 published articles in Sinta 1-3, Scopus and google scholar involving schools and universities in indonesia regarding English as a foreign language (EFL) learning within the year 2020 and 2021 and found testing and evaluation problems include:

1. Lack of suitable evaluation mechanism
2. Cheating and plagiarism raised in online test
3. Difficulty manage assessment with right accuracy
4. Raised of duplicated assignment
5. Learners do not provide productive and effective work solutions

In short, most studies reviewed by Afifah (2022) can be generalized as having challenges in online evaluations particularly through the lack of mechanism/management in test/assessment and raised cheating/plagiarism cases. Among the solutions suggested in the 50 articles are:

1. To modify test/ assessment used various apps (e.g., link),
2. To monitor & provide strict policy,
3. To consider the numbers of test
4. To use freezing features that disables operation of another app at the same time
5. To monitor assignment during the test
6. To use varying modes of assessments
7. To punish students caught cheating
8. To conduct teachers' evaluation
9. To provide link / video for both discussion and exercises
10. To implement evaluation flawlessly

These findings have been insightful on online learning evaluations. Some had addressed the issues and challenges to ODL or ICT applications in education through humanizing approaches. Suzila et. al (2021, 2022) proposed this as a much more cultivating approach to mobile learning. The present study discusses this further.

## Method

This exploratory study adopts a mini PRISMA-SLR method were adopted in filtering articles for data selection. The target open source was the Google Scholar. The keyword 'ES/FL testing and evaluation during ODL' has produced 117 articles on Google Scholar and this is limited to year 2020 onwards only. The justifications are (1) the study is interested to delve on testing and evaluation involving ESL only, (2) limited to publications that studied on the impact of ODL which happened at the beginning of the year of 2020, thus these studies are published 2021 onwards. (3) Google Scholar is deemed adequate as this is an exploratory study aimed at understanding the gist of the matter at hand. This is then screened with added keyword of 'tertiary.' The reason is that this paper is only interested in this level of education. This is the fourth (4) justification. Thus, to this only 26 articles are left. The 'speaking' keyword is then added. Further eligibility phase approved a mere 10 full text articles to be critically reviewed for discussion.

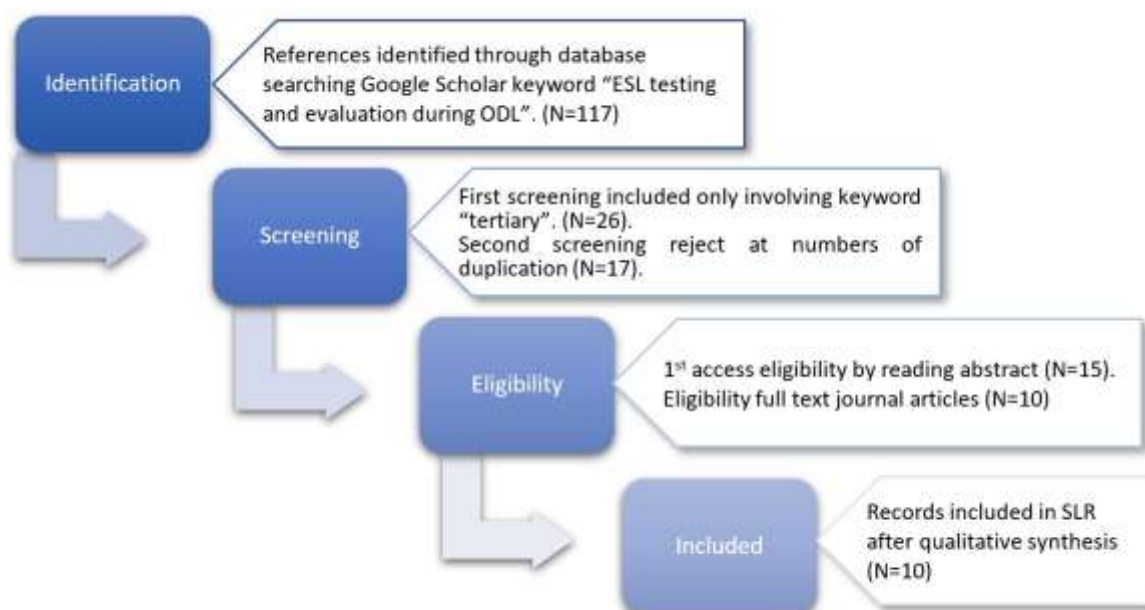


Fig. 1: PRISMA-SLR for 'ES/FL tertiary speaking testing and evaluation during ODL'

### Findings and Discussion

The current paper discusses findings related to ESL testing and evaluation during the online open learning. Some of the reviewed articles are mentioned here and the discussion follows. In the one of the articles, a speaking test was administered where candidates had to tape their expressions for the duration of the task completion. Madadi and Rezvani (2021) transcribed and analyzed to investigate the possible variations between answering and interrogating cognitive activities. Students were observed to be more precise and articulate during answering tasks, making fewer and shorter pauses, and produced more understandable and coherent productions by executing less grammatical errors. It is common for speaking tests to be recorded during the ODL period. Teachers would pair up to ensure interrater reliability and the students' marks are justified. However, due to poor internet connection, teachers are not present online or synchronously, thus presentations are recorded and submitted. There is a high potential that students may have overly practiced, memorized text and some would read from prepared text, edit the recording, and submitted a polished version.

Speaking test during ODL may be affected by several reasons. There are three key aspects as the principal sources of pre-service language teachers' formative evaluation understanding: previous language learning encounters, instructor training, and circumstantial circumstances (Somuncu, 2021). The building process of formative assessment cognition developed through six primary most important changes: "dissonance, exploration of teaching-related beliefs, self-examination, re-examination of alternatives, approval, and integration" (Somuncu, 2021, p. 214). Online speaking test can sometimes fail to project students' actual abilities. Nervous of potential technological challenges during the test, such as delayed sound; even surroundings such as sudden animals' sounds may easily influence the smooth flow of a test. These aspects mould the speaking perceived ability.

Kilinç (2021) found that the result of pronunciation and its segmental and suprasegmental features rely on two distinct speaking assessment assignments: unplanned and planned

genres. Pronunciation has an important consequence on both the test forms and the most prompting characteristic was intonation. The suprasegmental showcases a greater role than segmental features on students' assessment results. Time allocation for preparing suprasegmental features in the classroom is important as students accomplish good quality speaking ability in unplanned assessment commission in relations of pronunciation, managing the orthography interference well, produces limited attention capacity and anxiety on pronunciation performance and possible solutions (Kiliç, 2021). Other significant weighing issues in improving speaking test performances includes employing audio articulation method for long-term pronunciation mistakes, teaching International Phonetic Alphabet in the sessions for phonemes and word stress (Kiliç, 2021). Thus, the speaking test results may go sideways too. The number of conducted synchronous speaking test may or may not produce better results. Fatigue, boredom, and indifferent attitude may interfere to deliver better performances.

Self-confidence in speaking test evaluators is also mandatory. An online semi-structured written interview with 116 second language (L2) teachers suggested educators alleged themselves strong and adequate in guaranteeing the reliability and validity in language assessment, yet they perceived themselves challenged and inadequate in the scoring process of language examinations, building tests and writing substances (Aydın, 2022). This calls for lesser pressure from parents, administration, and students (Aydın, 2022) for teachers to award excellent marks. Apart from that, better curriculum design, and teacher training should be in the pipeline.

Other matters that need to be resolved in assessing speaking test include students need to be made aware of tested rubrics, sufficiency and the efficiency of the materials (Tomak, 2021). This knowledge shall allow students to be better prepared.

Figure 2 below shows some main challenges to ODL testing and evaluation in EFL/ESL. This shows that more needed to be done in perfecting online speaking testing and evaluation. There is a grey area of whether the submitted recordings are authentic or excessively rehearsed.

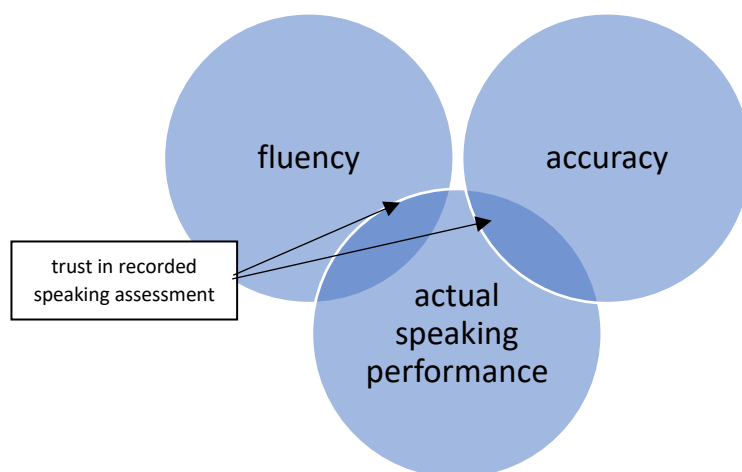


Fig. 2: Main challenges to ODL testing and evaluation in EFL/ESL

Due to globalization, the demands to be communicatively competent in speaking in English has escalated. Thus, one's ability to speak must be improved. The ability to speak in a second language like English need to be near natural and should not be translated from the mother tongue as the two languages may not share similar structure and grammar. Fluency is

expected though some may argue that communicative competence is adequate. Accuracy in grammar during speaking may offer respect and less distractions.

Real-time speaking testing and evaluation may include other challenges too. The candidates' nervousness, specified preparation time, and the present of audience may inject more hurdles for students to excel in a speaking test. Yet overcoming these factors are mandatory to do extremely well in natural ESL/EFL speaking settings.

Applying humanistic approaches in testing and evaluation especially in speaking test is essential. Humanizing the approach here can be defined as implementing consideration on emotions, behavior, and cognition. Emotion management during a speaking test is deemed vital as the nature of a speaking test is a one-to-one approach that could lead to retaliations if left unchecked, or favorable reception if well-addressed. Understanding one's behavioral stance on intimidation is necessary. Acknowledging it may offer a variety of reactions where the negative ones can be avoided. Well-managed thought processes may enable humanizing acts. Cognition can enable most forms and functions of emotions and actions be managed before acting in a nerve-wrecking situation like in a speaking test setting.

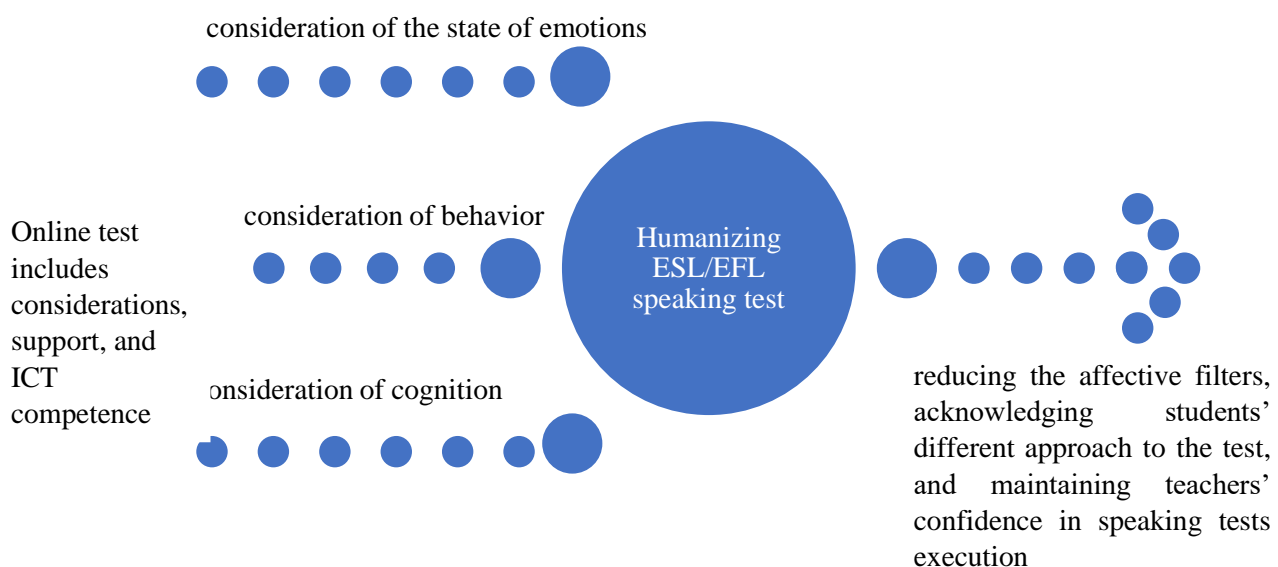


Fig. 3: Humanizing ESL/EFL speaking testing and evaluation.

Humanizing speaking testing and evaluation includes reducing the affective filters, acknowledging students' different approach to the test, and maintaining teachers' confidence in executing the speaking tests. Students' nervousness, if not managed well, could lead to panic. Managing the affective filters are through maintaining a good reputation with the examiners, audience, and educators. Students' approach to speaking test varies as one may behave jester-like to camouflage nerves while others might mute-up. Examiners need to distract them from the test questions through a preliminary conversation. Teachers-cum-examiners' confidence is important as it may project positivity on the test candidates. Confidence can be transferred from examiners to the students. Therefore, it is important to have confidence in evaluating a speaking test. One of the ways for teachers to be confident is to practice self-acknowledgement for passing the initial pre-service training and successes

with earlier students. Occupying oneself with the language setting is also essential. English teachers need to be in English-speaking settings as simple as watching and listening to 90% of English TV series, movies, and songs. This shall enable them to constantly be reminded of the structure of their second language.

Humanizing online speaking test may include a consideration in support and ICT competence. This additional factor has been discussed lengthily (Afifah, 2022) for review of the matter. This consideration, however, may initially be infused with general humanizing aspects as discussed above.

### Conclusion

The issues and challenges in testing and evaluation can be solved by adopting humanising approaches and implementing multiple means to ensure ESL/EFL speaking testing and evaluation during the online open learning operated in a professional manner. The new post COVID19 pandemic hybrid learning sessions approach can also benefit from the understanding of these matters as both online and traditional face to face testing is different. Siti Balqis et. al (2022) findings have seen how online and traditional testing varies in results. Technology in education need to be implemented with humanizing approaches to ensure success.

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