



THE IMPORTANCE OF VALIDATION SYSTEM IN SPEAKING TESTS

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is a fundamental aspect of the education process. When evaluating a student's speaking ability, it is crucial to consider the credibility of the assessment method. This study focuses on verifying the validity of speaking tests. While many educators acknowledge the significance of testing students' speaking proficiency through direct performance-based evaluations, such assessments may also raise concerns regarding their reliability. Consequently, this article explores the validation process of speaking tests.

Speaking is a skill that involves real-time, productive and verbal communication. It is considered real-time because the speaker must respond immediately without the opportunity to revise their response, as they might have in writing. This skill is productive in nature as it is directed outward towards the listener. Additionally, it is aural as it involves processing input received aurally and then responding orally. It is crucial to evaluate the speaking skill periodically as it is a productive skill. Therefore, it is imperative to have an accurate assessment method in place. In this regard, the validation system is an effective tool for evaluating speaking skills in a precise manner.

Establishing the authenticity of a test can solely be achieved through a validation procedure, which should ideally be carried out before utilizing the outcomes for any specific objective. To perform such validation, a validation analysis must be conducted, which will enable us to determine whether the interpretations and uses of the test outcomes are legitimate. Therefore, the aim of this investigation is to examine the process of validating a language test. It is widely recognized that validation is essential due to the significant impact that test outcomes can have on the numerous parties involved. As tests are costly and vital practices for all stakeholders, the validity of any test is a significant issue.

Messick altered his perspective on validity, transitioning from considering it as a characteristic of a test to that of the interpretation of test results. Nowadays, validity is closely linked to the interpretation of test scores. Messick affirms that "(v)alidity is a complete evaluative judgment that assesses the extent to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the sufficiency and suitability of inferences and actions based on test



scores or other methods of evaluation." In contrast to the conventional meaning of validity, Messick offers a consolidated model, highlighting construct validity as a fundamental underlying element, with content and criterion validity being aspects of construct validity [5, 13-103].

Messick has faced criticism for his tendency to associate validity with test score inferences, as it is common to perceive validity as an attribute of a test.

Borsboom, Mellenburg, and Van Heerden have contested this notion by arguing that there is no justification for restricting the application of the term "validity" solely to test score interpretation. They further argue that existing explanations of validity only provide a surface-level understanding of measurement theories [1, 1-20].

Fulcher and Davidson have proposed that the constant repetition of the "validity-as-interpretation" concept may have led to its overuse. They have questioned whether we could consider the validity of a specific test as a characteristic of the test, if it is repeatedly utilized for the same inferential decisions and there is no indication of incorrect use [3, 5-29].

Despite these worries, it is now common to see validity as interpretation. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that the outcomes of a test must only be utilized for its intended purpose. Validity is specific and dependent on the context, relating to a particular application of a test. With repeated use of a test for its designated purpose, it can be argued that validity eventually becomes a characteristic of the test.

When creating test specifications and designing tasks, a crucial aspect of validity was ensuring that the test was appropriate for the targeted young learner population, eliciting their best performances, and that there was harmony between the assessments and classroom practices in the local setting. The principles directing test development were informed by the scrutiny of the literature and suggestions for task design, as well as a thorough examination of local teaching materials, curricula, and speech examples provided by Plan Ceibal [2, 385-405].

The following are the main principles to follow:

- **Activities:** employ narratives, explanations, and simple descriptions, which are common genres in primary classrooms and can induce the best performances from young learners. Use task characteristics and technologies that are inspiring, non-threatening, enjoyable, and game-like, and include amusing/entertaining images wherever feasible to minimize test anxiety and encourage optimal performance.
- **Task sequence:** arrange tasks based on cognitive load and difficulty, beginning with easy tasks that require one-word responses (Pre-A1) and progressing to more challenging tasks that involve producing a brief speech to describe, narrate, and compare/contrast (A2). This approach avoids discouraging lower-level candidates at the start of the exam.
- **Topics:** Select themes that are relevant to young learners' personal lives, such as daily routines, social interactions with friends, emotions, opinions, and experiences, for use in assessment contexts. It is important to use familiar settings for task settings, especially for younger learners who have limited world knowledge and need a comfortable environment to perform at their best.
- **Language Functions:** Incorporate language functions that are pertinent to the local teaching context and align with the curriculum.



- **Support:** Provide ample support through visuals and prompts to help young learners complete tasks and reduce test-related anxiety. For instance, an instructional video in English by a friendly-looking teacher can be used to familiarize candidates with the test platform's different functionalities. Candidates should also be given the option to repeat instructions and questions at least once.
- **Input Language:** Use English Vocabulary Profile and Grammar Profile to ensure that the input language is accessible to learners at the target output level based on teacher evaluations and tools.
- **Timing:** Keep the test duration to a maximum of 13 minutes to accommodate young learners' shorter attention spans.
- **Piloting and Feedback:** Conduct feedback sessions and trials to gather input from stakeholders and refine and modify the test accordingly.

Conclusion. Considering everything, it is evident that evaluating oral proficiency holds significant significance as it encompasses all areas of speaking competency. Consequently, the authentication of speaking skill aids in encompassing all the areas that are necessary to evaluate. Hence, it is imperative to consider the authentication mechanism while assessing speaking skill.

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