



## Article

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# Systematic Literature Review on Speaking Assessment Practices in EFL Contexts

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## Abstract

Speaking assessment is essential for evaluating EFL learners' communicative competence, yet it remains challenging due to issues of validity, reliability, and authenticity. This study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of empirical research on speaking assessment practices in EFL contexts from 2015 to 2025, using the SALSA framework for methodological rigor. Fourteen studies were analysed thematically. The findings show that performance-based and technology-integrated assessments are the most dominant approaches, while rater bias, limited assessment literacy, and learner anxiety remain key challenges. The review highlights the importance of balancing fairness, practicality, and authenticity in evaluating speaking performance. It also emphasizes the potential of formative and technology-supported assessments to enhance feedback and learner engagement. The results also provide valuable insights for EFL teachers and policymakers in developing more effective and equitable speaking assessment practices. Pedagogically, the review underscores the need to strengthen teachers' assessment literacy so that they can design and apply rubrics, provide formative feedback, and interpret speaking scores accurately. Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of how various assessment practices interact within the broader EFL teaching-learning process. Future studies are encouraged to explore longitudinal evidence of how integrated assessment frameworks influence EFL learners sustained speaking improvement, motivation, and classroom participation.

## Keywords

Speaking Assessment, EFL Learners, Performance Based Assessment, Language Assessment Literacy.

## Introduction

Speaking is a crucial skill for effective communication and interaction. In EFL contexts, it plays a vital role in helping learner to express ideas and engage with speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Akhter, 2021). Despite its importance, many EFL learners face persistent difficulties such as limited vocabulary, fluency problems, and speaking anxiety (Abrar et al., 2024). Confidence and psychological readiness have also been shown to strongly influence students' oral performance (Ulpa, Tahir, & Hidayahni Amin, 2025).

Despite its pedagogical importance, research on speaking assessment has often examined these forms separately, focusing either on classroom-based rubrics (Phan & Phuong, 2017), authentic performance tasks (Inayah, Komariah, & Nasir, 2019), or technology-assisted (feedback) scoring systems (Zou, 2023). This fragmented focus has limited a holistic understanding of how different assessment practices collectively influence EFL speaking development. Furthermore, challenges remain in ensuring validity, fairness, and practicality across diverse classroom and testing contexts, where teachers must balance linguistic precision with communicative authenticity. Given these challenges, a comprehensive understanding of current speaking assessment practices is essential to inform effective teaching and testing approaches in EFL settings.

In this context, speaking assessment does not only function as a tool to measure learners' performance, but also plays a significant role in shaping how speaking is taught and practiced in the classroom. The way speaking is assessed often influences what teachers emphasize and how students engage with speaking activities. For this reason, assessment should be viewed as an integral part of the learning process rather than merely a final evaluation. When designed carefully, speaking assessment can provide a more complete picture of learners' communicative ability, including how they express ideas, maintain interaction, and use language meaningfully in different situations (Inayah, Komariah, & Nasir, 2019).

Moreover, speaking assessment can support learners' development by encouraging reflection and continuous improvement (Kumar et al., 2023; Hunter, 2024). Through ongoing assessment and feedback, students are able to recognize their own progress as well as the areas they still need to improve. This becomes especially important in EFL contexts, where opportunities for real-life communication are often limited. In such cases, assessment can serve as a space for practice as well as evaluation, helping learners gradually build their confidence in speaking (Phan & Phuong, 2017).

In addition, speaking assessment is closely related to issues of fairness and accuracy in evaluating learners' abilities (Liu, Wang & Zou, 2025). When assessment criteria are unclear or inconsistently applied, the results may not fully represent students' actual performance. This can lead to unfair judgments and affect learners' motivation. Therefore, it is important for teachers to apply clear and consistent criteria, supported by sufficient understanding of assessment principles, so that the evaluation process remains fair and meaningful for all learners (Ginther, 2013).

Furthermore, the increasing use of technology in language learning has also influenced how speaking assessment is conducted. Digital tools offer new possibilities, such as more flexible assessment formats and quicker feedback. These tools can make the assessment process more engaging and accessible for students. However, their use also requires careful consideration, particularly in terms of accessibility, reliability, and the role of teachers in interpreting students' performance (Liu et al., 2022; Sun, 2023).

Given these considerations, examining how speaking assessment practices are applied across different EFL contexts becomes essential. A deeper understanding of these practices can help identify not only their strengths, but also the challenges that may affect their effectiveness in supporting learners' speaking development.

To address this gap, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on speaking assessment practices in EFL contexts from 2015 to 2025. The study aims to identify dominant approaches, commonly used tools, and recurring challenges in assessing speaking performance.

Accordingly, this review seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What speaking assessment practices have been applied in EFL contexts?
2. What methods or tools are commonly used to evaluate speaking performance?
3. What challenges and pedagogical implications emerge from previous studies?

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

This research used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the research design to explore speaking assessment practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Abdullah et al., 2022). The review process followed the SALSA framework, which consists of five stages: protocol, search, appraisal, synthesis, and analysis. In the protocol stage, the scope of the study was determined using the PICOC framework, which defined the population as EFL teachers and learners, the intervention as various speaking assessment techniques, the comparison across different educational levels, the outcomes related to students' performance and assessment practices, and the context of EFL settings published between 2015 and 2025. This design allowed the review to be conducted in a structured and transparent manner from the beginning of the study to the final interpretation of findings.

### ***Participants of the Study***

This study did not involve direct participants because it was based on a review of published research. The data sources consisted of journal articles obtained through a systematic search process. The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar and ResearchGate as the main databases. Several search strings were applied, including "speaking assessment" AND "EFL", "oral performance test" AND "EFL learners", and "formative assessment" AND "speaking skill". Only articles published between 2015 and 2025 were considered. The initial search identified 45 articles, which were then screened using inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed, written in English, focused on speaking assessment in EFL or ESL contexts, and reported empirical data involving teachers or learners. Articles that were non-peer-reviewed, irrelevant, duplicated, inaccessible, or purely conceptual were excluded. After this process, 16 empirical studies were selected as the final sources for analysis.

### ***Instruments***

The instrument used in this study was a structured data extraction tool developed to organize information from the selected articles. This instrument was used to record key aspects of each study, such as the source database, type of speaking assessment, assessment purpose, implementation setting, learner outcomes, and teacher perspectives. During the synthesis stage, the extracted data were grouped using a thematic approach to identify common patterns and trends across studies. To support coding, comparison, and analysis, all data were compiled and managed using Microsoft Excel, which facilitated manual analysis and interpretation in the final stage of the review.

## **Findings & Discussion**

### **Findings**

The findings of this systematic literature review indicate that speaking assessment practices in EFL contexts have undergone a significant shift toward communicative and performance-oriented approaches. A total of sixteen studies published between 2015 and 2025 were reviewed to address the research questions of this study. Most of the selected studies were conducted in Asian EFL contexts, such as Indonesia, China, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, with a strong emphasis on tertiary-level learners. Only a limited number of studies focused

explicitly on secondary-level education, suggesting a research gap in speaking assessment practices at lower educational levels.

An overview of the contexts, assessment practices, instruments, and key findings of the selected studies is presented in Table I.

**Table I.** Summary of Selected Studies on Speaking Assessment Practices in EFL Context (N =16)

No.	Author(s) (Year)	Context /Level	Assessment Practice	Assessment Tools	Key Findings/ Challenges
1	Liu, Liu & Yang (2022)	Chinese EFL university students using AI and ASR tools for oral English	Learner reflections, perception surveys, and motivation analysis	Questionnaires, reflective journals, ASR data, and teacher feedback	Positive learner attitudes; ASR improved autonomy and confidence. Challenges: noise interference and limited sample variety
2	Sun (2023)	EFL/ESL college learners improving pronunciation through ASR	Mixed methods combining self-reports and expert reviews	ASR apps, peer feedback, surveys, and expert evaluation	ASR raised motivation and accuracy; subjectivity and prior knowledge differences limited objectivity
3	Machmud & Abdulah (2018)	Grade 7 EFL learners at SMP Negeri 1 Anggrek	Speaking tests and anxiety questionnaires	Foreign Language Anxiety Scale and oral speaking rubric	Mobile apps enhanced speaking scores; anxiety management remained difficult
4	Omar (2023)	EFL speaking classes at Knowledge University, Iraq	Semi-structured interviews on speaking barriers	Thematic coding of qualitative data	Barriers: fear, shyness, low vocabulary, large classes; limited participation hindered improvement
5	Vuogan & Li (2023)	Meta-analyses in L2 learning across educational and linguistic settings	Reviewed methodological quality, including moderator and heterogeneity testing	Applied Q-tests, I <sup>2</sup> , meta-regression, and quality rating instruments	Found weak methodological rigor and transparency; publication bias and limited quality control remain major issues
6	Uberti et al. (2019)	Speech articulation assessment in children and adolescents	Reviewed standardized tests and oral motor evaluation methods	Instruments included CAI, GFTA, DEAP, BBTOP, STI-CH, and nonword repetition tasks	Most tools are reliable and valid, but more cultural and linguistic validation is needed; tech-based tools show promise
7	Prasittichok & Smithsarakarn (2024)	EFL university students developing speaking proficiency	Conducted pre-post speaking performance assessments	Speaking tests, video tasks, social media activities, and self-report measures	Microlearning improved fluency and accuracy; limited consistency across studies noted
8	Liew & Aziz (2022)	ESL/EFL classrooms before and during COVID-19	Reviewed teaching-based assessments using task and role-play activities	Activity-based evaluations like information gap and role play	Task-based methods effectively enhanced speaking; pandemic required adaptation of techniques

No.	Author(s) (Year)	Context /Level	Assessment Practice	Assessment Tools	Key Findings/ Challenges
9	Abu Al-Majd (2023)	Online speaking assessment for Saudi university EFL learners	Applied online tools (e.g., LOBELA) for evaluating skills and engagement	Pretests, posttests, public online exams, and SAES scale	High-stakes testing caused demotivation; negative washback hindered learning outcomes
10	Suzuki & Révész (2023)	Experimental research on L2 speaking and writing fluency	Emphasized task-based fluency analysis using spontaneous production	Speech tasks, Praat, and CLAN software for fluency indices	Task design influences fluency outcomes; validity depends on measure choice
11	Ginther (2013)	General L2 speaking assessment contexts	Focused on elicitation techniques, rating scales, and rater training	Interviews, oral tasks, and performance-based rubrics	Ensuring reliability and minimizing rater bias remain key challenges
12	Moreno et al. (2022)	University interventions developing oral and public speaking skills	Applied pre- and post tests, questionnaires, and formative classroom evaluations	Used group effort sheets, STROBE checklist, and Downs scale for quality review	Some programs reduced anxiety and improved speaking; others showed minimal gains; small samples limited generalization
13	Li (2023)	Studies on L2 speaking performance across different proficiency and task complexity levels	Reviewed links between working memory capacity and L2 oral performance	Used digit span, reading span, and operation span tasks with speaking fluency tests	Stronger working memory improves fluency and lexical range, though results vary due to methodological differences and task simplicity
14	Wong & Hashim (2023)	EFL learning with focus on online and tech-based speaking development	Reviewed cognitive and metacognitive strategies in speaking improvement	Combined questionnaires, interviews, and observations for strategy evaluation	Strategies boosted confidence and accuracy; anxiety and limited exposure remained barriers, especially online
15	Seraj & Habil (2021)	Colombia, tertiary level	Summative tests (interviews)	Teacher rubrics/judgment	Challenge: Teachers state flexible intentions, but actual practice is dominated by summative assessment and focus on accuracy. Implication: LAL training is necessary
16	Duque-Aguilar (2021)	Global (SLR, tertiary level)	Technology-based, task-based	Various (video, portfolios, TBA)	Challenge: Environmental factors (lack of practice, large classes) are the main cause of poor performance. Anxiety is a major issue

Based on the synthesis of the selected studies, several dominant speaking assessment practices were identified. The most frequently applied approach was performance-based or task-based assessment, which emphasizes authentic speaking tasks such as oral presentations, interviews, role plays, and spontaneous speech production. These assessment types were reported to be effective in measuring learners' communicative competence and real-life language use.

In addition, a growing number of studies highlighted the integration of technology in speaking assessment. Digital tools such as automatic speech recognition (ASR), mobile applications, voice notes, and microlearning platforms were increasingly used to support assessment delivery and feedback. These practices were particularly valued for their flexibility, accessibility, and potential to increase learner motivation.

Furthermore, several studies also revealed that formative assessment practices played an important role in supporting learners' speaking development. Unlike summative assessment, which mainly focuses on final performance, formative approaches provide continuous feedback through peer evaluation, self-assessment, and teacher guidance. This allowed learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses more clearly and make gradual improvements over time. In many cases, students became more aware of their own learning process, which contributed to increased confidence and autonomy in speaking activities.

Another notable trend was the use of mixed assessment methods, combining both traditional and innovative approaches. For instance, some studies integrated classroom-based speaking tests with digital tools or reflective activities, creating a more comprehensive evaluation system. This combination was considered beneficial because its balanced objectivity and practicality while still addressing different aspects of speaking performance, such as fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation.

However, despite these advancements, several challenges were still evident across the studies. Issues such as learners' anxiety, limited participation, and differences in assessment criteria often affected the effectiveness of speaking assessment practices. In addition, technological integration, although promising, sometimes faced practical constraints, including technical problems and unequal access to digital resources. These findings suggest that while speaking assessment practices in EFL contexts have become more diverse and innovative, careful consideration is still needed to ensure their consistency, fairness, and overall effectiveness.

The distribution of dominant speaking assessment practices identified in the reviewed studies is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Dominant Speaking Assessment Practices (RQ1)

Practice Type	Number of Studies	Percentage
Performance-Based/Task-Based Assessment	7	43.75%
Technology-Integrated Assessment	5	31.25%

As shown in Table 2, performance-based and task-based assessments were the most dominant practices, accounting for 42.75% of the reviewed studies. This finding reflects a strong preference for authentic assessment methods that prioritize interaction and meaningful language use over discrete-point testing. Technology-integrated assessment practices accounted for 31.25% of the studies, indicating an emerging trend toward digitalized assessment environments in EFL speaking instruction.

Despite the increasing adoption of communicative and technology-supported assessment practices, the reviewed studies consistently reported several challenges in their implementation. The most frequently identified issues were affective factors, such as speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and learner shyness, which negatively influenced speaking performance. In addition, systemic challenges related to assessment validity and reliability were evident, particularly issues of rater bias, inconsistent scoring, and limited language assessment literacy (LAL) among teachers.

Furthermore, the dominance of performance-based assessment suggests that educators are increasingly aware of the importance of evaluating speaking skills in more realistic and contextualized

situations. These approaches allow learners to demonstrate their ability to use language in communicative contexts rather than simply recalling linguistic forms. As a result, learners are more likely to engage actively in the assessment process and develop their confidence in expressing ideas. However, the implementation of such assessments is not without challenges, as it often requires careful planning, detailed rubrics, and sufficient classroom time, especially in large or heterogeneous classes.

In addition, the rise of technology-integrated assessment reflects the growing role of digital tools in language learning. Tools such as ASR, mobile applications, and online platforms offer immediate feedback and flexible learning opportunities, which can support both teachers and students in the assessment process. These tools can also promote learner autonomy by allowing students to practice and evaluate their speaking skills independently. Nevertheless, their effectiveness may vary depending on factors such as digital literacy, internet access, and familiarity with the technology being used.

Moreover, the relatively high percentage of both assessment types indicates that there is no single dominant approach that can address all aspects of speaking assessment. Instead, teachers tend to adopt multiple strategies depending on their teaching context, learning objectives, and available resources. This suggests that a balanced and adaptable assessment approach is necessary to accommodate diverse learner needs and classroom conditions.

Overall, the findings imply that while performance-based and technology-integrated assessments are widely recognized for their potential benefits, their successful implementation depends on addressing both pedagogical and practical challenges. Continuous teacher training, clear assessment criteria, and equitable access to resources are essential to ensure that these assessment practices can effectively support learners' speaking development.

The distribution of key challenges reported in the reviewed studies is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Key Challenges in Speaking Assessment (RQ3)

Challenge Category	Number of Studies	Percentage
Affective Factors (Anxiety, Fear, Shyness)	5	31.25%
Systemic Issues (Rater Bias, LAL, Inconsistency)	6	37.50%
Washback Effect	1	6.25%

Table 3 shows that systemic challenges, including rater bias and limited assessment literacy, were the most frequently reported issues, followed by affective barriers such as anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Although fewer studies explicitly discussed negative washback effects, high-stakes assessment environments were found to reduce learner motivation and engagement. These findings highlight the complexity of implementing fair, valid, and learner-friendly speaking assessment practices in EFL contexts.

## Discussion

### Interpretation of Findings: Validity and Implementation Issues

The findings of this review reveal a central tension in EFL speaking assessment between communicative assessment principles and classroom implementation realities. While performance-based and task-based assessments are widely recognized as valid approaches for evaluating speaking ability, their effectiveness is often undermined by affective and systemic constraints. Learner anxiety and fear of making mistakes may consume cognitive resources needed for effective speaking, thereby threatening the construct validity of assessment results.

Furthermore, issues of rater bias and limited language assessment literacy among teachers reduce scoring consistency and fairness. These findings suggest that the successful implementation of communicative speaking assessment requires not only appropriate task design but also adequate teacher training and institutional support.

In addition to these concerns, the gap between theoretical assessment principles and actual classroom practices becomes increasingly apparent. Although many assessment frameworks emphasize authenticity and interaction, teachers often face practical limitations such as time constraints, large class sizes, and curriculum demands. As a result, they may rely on simplified or more manageable assessment formats, which can reduce the depth and authenticity of speaking evaluation. This indicates that validity is not only a matter of assessment design, but also closely related to how assessments are implemented in real classroom contexts.

Moreover, the role of feedback in speaking assessment cannot be overlooked. Effective feedback is essential for supporting learners' improvement; however, inconsistent or unclear feedback practices may limit its impact. In some cases, teachers may focus more on scoring outcomes rather than providing meaningful guidance, which reduces the formative value of assessment. This situation further highlights the importance of strengthening teachers' assessment literacy, particularly in delivering constructive and actionable feedback.

Another important issue concerns the balance between reliability and authenticity. While highly structured rubrics may improve scoring consistency, they can sometimes constrain natural language use and interaction. On the other hand, more flexible assessment tasks may better reflect real communication but introduce subjectivity in scoring. Therefore, achieving an appropriate balance between these two aspects remains a critical challenge in EFL speaking assessment.

Overall, these findings suggest that improving the quality of speaking assessment requires a holistic approach that considers not only assessment methods, but also contextual factors such as classroom conditions, teacher competence, and institutional policies. Without addressing these interconnected elements, efforts to enhance validity and fairness in speaking assessment may not be fully effective.

## Pedagogical Implications

The results of this review offer several important pedagogical implications. First, continuous professional development in language assessment literacy is essential to ensure that teachers are able to design, implement, and evaluate speaking assessments in a valid and reliable manner. Second, assessment systems should prioritize low-stakes, formative assessment to minimize negative washback and support sustained speaking practice (Muntasir et al., 2022). Finally, the integration of technology such as mobile applications and automatic speech recognition tools shows strong potential for reducing learner anxiety and promoting self-assessment (Gong, 2023). However, technology should be used as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for teacher feedback, as human judgment remains crucial for evaluating interactional and pragmatic aspects of speaking performance.

## Conclusion

This systematic literature review examined recent developments in speaking assessment practices in EFL contexts from 2015 to 2025. The findings reveal that speaking assessment has evolved from traditional oral testing toward more performance-based and technology-enhanced approaches. Performance tasks and authentic speaking activities allow learners to demonstrate their communicative competence more naturally, whereas the integration of digital tools such as automated speech recognition (ASR), mobile applications, and online scoring platforms has increased assessment efficiency and learner engagement. However, challenges remain in ensuring rater reliability, addressing affective factors such as anxiety and confidence, and maintaining fairness and validity across diverse classroom settings.

Pedagogically, the review underscores the need to strengthen teachers' assessment literacy so that they can design and apply rubrics, provide formative feedback, and interpret speaking scores accurately. Encouraging reflective and low stakes assessment can reduce learners' anxiety and promote a growth-

oriented learning culture. Moreover, combining human judgment with technology-based scoring can balance authenticity with objectivity, ensuring that assessment outcomes truly reflect learners' communicative ability rather than isolated linguistic accuracy.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of how various assessment practices interact within the broader EFL teaching-learning process. By viewing assessment as an ongoing feedback cycle rather than a single event, educators can better align evaluation with instruction and learner development. Future studies are encouraged to explore longitudinal evidence of how integrated assessment frameworks influence EFL learners' sustained speaking improvement, motivation, and classroom participation.

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