

Mini-seminar project: An authentic assessment practice in speaking class for advanced students

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Apr 18, 2020

Revised Aug 14, 2020

Accepted Sep 26, 2020

Keywords:

Assessment for learning

Authentic assessment

Formative assessment

Mini-seminar project

Speaking test

ABSTRACT

This paper reports one best-practice in assessing the public speaking performance of advanced students at an Indonesian public university. The study involves an English course for an advanced class which was primarily related to public speaking skills. Considering that speaking is a productive skill that should be assessed through authentic assessment principles, the lecturers decided to assign the students with a mini-seminar project as part of their final examination. This project required the students to conduct a real-life contextualised seminar in which the organisers, speakers, and audience are composed of the students themselves. This paper discusses the rationale behind the planning and implementation of this successful project which involved a synthesis of assessment *of*, *for*, and *as* learning and critically evaluates the procedures of the assessment, the rubric developed therein, and the challenges experienced by the lecturers within the classroom. After the implementation, it can be concluded that this mini-seminar project as a doable alternative authentic assessment model that is applicable in a speaking class which focuses on the development of students' public speaking skills. This mini-seminar project is recommended not only because it can be used as an alternative assessment model, but also it encourages students to work together in teams, and encourage them to work creatively, create something new in order to perform better.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the core components of education, assessment can be generally understood as a systematic and continuous process or activity to collect, analyze, and interpret information about the process as well as the results of students' learning. Put simply, students' learning is assessed to identify whether (and often, to what extent) they have achieved the learning goals stated by the curriculum. The results are further used by the teachers to make instructional decisions based on certain criteria and considerations [1]. Assessment can also function as a tool to collect information related to the development of students. Assessment serves to measure the level of students' achievement in subjects learned, including mapping the learning problems they experience. In addition, assessment can serve as a tool through which teachers receive feedback on the quality of their own teaching [2]. The assessment has indeed played a crucial role for students' learning as research shows that it has influenced the quality of student learning and enhanced deeper learning [3].

Assessment can be done at various stages and in multiple ways. In general, it can be done at the end of the learning process (summative evaluation, or assessment *of* learning) and during the learning process takes place (formative evaluation, or assessment *for* learning). Assessment can also be conducted as a metacognitive tool whereby the assessment task itself becomes a process of learning (assessment *as* learning) [4]. Assessment can be conducted in the form of tests which and non-tests. Assessment in the form of tests usually appears in the form of objective tests, written tests, and oral tests, while assessment in the form of non-tests can be done in more various forms, such as observation, performance, assignments, presentations, seminars, and other authentic forms.

Assessment is considered *authentic* when the tasks are *real-to-life* or have real-life value [3-5]. Varela et al. [6] describe authentic assessment as the multiple forms of assessment reflecting students' learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes toward classroom instructional activities. They then mention three types of authentic assessment: performance assessment, portfolios, and students-self assessment. Performance assessment consists of oral reports, writing samples, individual or group projects, exhibitions, as well as demonstrations in which students respond orally.

In the last ten years, the Indonesian government has campaigned for the practice of authentic assessment since the 2006 curriculum along with an emphasis on the use of school-based curricula in primary and secondary schools in Indonesia [7]. This can be seen in Article 2 of paragraph 2 of Government Regulation number 14 of 2014 emphasising the use of authentic assessment in the process of evaluating learning outcomes by teachers. The forms of authentic assessment suggested by the government are observations, assignments to the field, portfolios, projects, products, journals, laboratory work, and performance, as well as self-assessment and peer evaluations. As mentioned by Azhar [8], this authentic assessment is expected to serve as a solution to problems of assessment in Indonesian schools.

In the context of higher education, assessment of learning should also be carried out comprehensively, covering all domains of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Assessment should also emphasize learning processes and results. Just like learning at the elementary and secondary levels, instruments that can be used in assessments can be tests and non-tests. The application of authentic assessments is more likely to be the practical choice in higher education because student assignments, in general, tend to be directed more at solving problems in the real-world context. Students are not only introduced to theories/concepts in the scientific field but are also encouraged to deal with relevant issues around them.

Some projects have been conducted by other researchers to develop authentic assessment both in the Indonesian higher education and secondary schools context. These projects include a problem-based learning model through an authentic assessment based practicum to improve students' science process skills conducted by Duda and Susilo [9] in STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang, West Borneo, Indonesia. Another project was done by Rohmad [10] who developed documents of authentic assessment in assessing affective domain in Islamic Education and character education. Other studies have also developed some models of authentic assessment in assessing students' speaking performance [11-12].

However, studies by Ermawati and Hidayat [13] and Rukmini and Saputri [14] indicate that both lecturers and school teachers face several problems in the assessment process. First, the obstacle in carrying out a comprehensive and consistent assessment; and difficulties in passing improvisation/ developing research instruments. Time constraint has also been identified as a major challenge for some teachers to conduct an authentic assessment [15]. Another study [16] also shows that teachers have encountered similar problems in conducting the authentic assessment. This includes time and effort consuming issues, validity issues, reliability issues, resource administration, evidence transformation, and subjectivity.

Keeping such complexities in mind, this paper discusses the implementation of a *mini-drama project* as a form of authentic assessment in a speaking course at a university in Indonesia. It also shows how this task involved the principles of assessment *of*, *for* and *as* learning and synthesized them into one single activity. This project has been successfully implemented several times in the last two years with its effectiveness demonstrated through both anecdotal evidence of students' impressions, their positive feedback upon the completion of the project as well as through their performances in subsequent summative tasks for speaking. This paper will further discuss how the procedures were implemented, the rationale behind the model of the assessment carried out, and how students responded to this authentic assessment.

2. TEACHING CONTEXT

The mini-seminar project was held as the final assignment in a Speaking 3 course for second-year students at Universitas Riau. Speaking 3 is a pre-requisite course with three credit hours as a continuation of Speaking 1 and 2 subjects. Thus this class is an advanced level class consisting of students who have passed previous speaking courses.

As typical lecture classes in many universities in Indonesia, this class is considered as a large class consisting of 35 students. The teaching material in this class is more directed on how to prepare students to have good public speaking skills. Therefore the course syllabus contains materials related to public speaking, such as how to deliver speeches, deliver presentations, debate, become a master of ceremony, become a moderator, impromptu speech, become a newsreader, and report news as a journalist.

a. Assessment procedures

For both teachers and students, coming to the assessment stage of a speaking course is always challenging. Speaking is an intricate skill involving many elements of both linguistic and non-linguistic factors [17]. It does not only deal with testees' linguistic competency, but also their state of being when the test is conducted, such as mood and fatigue, or even practicality issues such as bad quality of the recording. This challenge is particularly obvious in a speaking course where public speaking skills development is the main objective of the course, as is the case of this study. This is because a successful public speaking performance is distributed across multiple modalities, e.g., the speech content, voice and intonation, facial expressions, head poses, hand gestures, and body postures [18] and all of these need to be taken into account for a fair and complete assessment. In addition, because the assessment of such as task is synchronous, i.e., taking place at the same time as the delivery of the presentations, there are additional challenges in conducting it, often requiring a lot of experience from the teachers.

Considering the purpose and content of the course, we decided to do an authentic assessment at the end of the course. It is believed that an authentic assessment has the potential to enhance students' learning [6]. Ontologically, this assessment was developed following the principle of authenticity proposed by Vu and Dall'Aliba [5] arguing that authenticity need not be an attribute of tasks but, rather, is a quality of educational processes that engage students in becoming more fully human. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), this authentic assessment enables teachers or lecturers to put emphasis on the ability to function effectively through language in particular contexts of situation, rather than on linguistic accuracy [19].

The assessment of this speaking class was then carried out in the form of conducting seminars on certain topics organized by students with speakers and all other seminar 'implementers' made up students themselves. We call this activity a 'mini-seminar project'. The procedures for this mini-seminar project, in which everyone from the class participates, are as follows:

- a. Students were divided into two large groups, each consisting of around 16-17 people. Group division was done in the 12th week, or one month before the semester ended. Details of task instructions were submitted in writing through Google Classroom, the application where all students collaboratively engaged in, as seen in Figure 1.

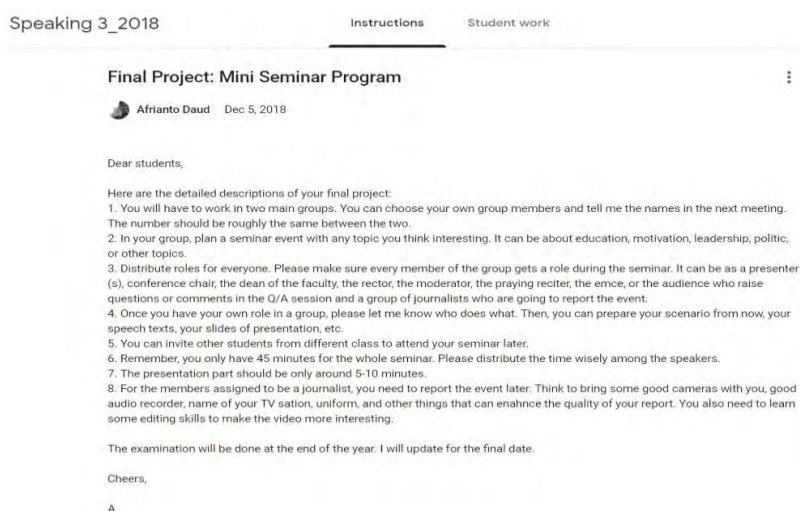


Figure 1. Instructions on Google Classroom

- b. Each group was required to prepare a mini-seminar about the topic they set themselves. Each group was responsible for planning the seminar, including determining the role of each group member during the seminar.

- c. Among the roles that must be prepared by each of the groups were: master of ceremonies, seminar speakers, moderators, chair of the event committee, campus officials (who will give speeches), and the audience, who would ask questions and comment on the seminar session.
- d. In addition to the above roles, several other students acted as journalists who would report live seminar sessions on their social media, including interviewing seminar speakers and several audiences at the end of the event. After the seminar was completed, this group was also tasked with reporting on seminar activities on social media, such as on Youtube and other social media.
- e. During the seminar, the lecturer sit at one corner in the seminar room as a non-participating observer to make an assessment. The assessment was done by paying attention to individual performance and overall group performance. Individual performance gets 70% of the total rating. The rest was group performance-based assessment.
- f. Before the seminar, we first developed the assessment rubric. The contents of the rubric were adopted from the rubric developed by Schreiber, Paul, and Shibley [20] and Rubric by Ohio State University [21] as described in the next section.

b. Assessment rubric

There are several things that we considered in developing an assessment rubric. First of all, the authenticity aspect of the assessment-the assessment must be done within a real-life atmosphere to enable the students to perform their authentic public speaking skills. Our decision to make an assessment with this mini-seminar model was part of the implementation of the aspect of authenticity in the assessment. This seminar allows students to perform in a real-life like situation [3].

Second, the aspect of public speaking. This is the core of the assessment in the rubric developed because this class is a speaking course with advanced students with the main purpose of the learning process to develop their public speaking skills in a number of situations, as discussed above. Some public speaking skills are included here to be assessed, including topic delivered, presentation structure (organisation), engagement with the audience, non-verbal behavior, voice/tone clarity, and language quality.

Third, the aspect of teamwork or collaboration. The principle of collaboration and or cooperation is an important part to be developed in our education today. UNESCO, for example, has long included the principle of cooperation in their 21st -century education vision [22], with collaboration included in the principle of learning how to live together which UNESCO has emphasized, in addition to other principles such as learning how to be, learning how to learn, and learning how to do.

Bernhardt [23] points out that in the context of the 21st-century education paradigm, collaboration has emerged as an important competency that must be developed by teachers in schools, including in universities. He further reminds, “schools need to ensure students work collaboratively, base learning on authentic experience, incorporate multiple forms of representation, and stress fluency in multiple medias” (p.1).

Fourth is the aspect of creativity. The ability to create is also an important competency that teachers must develop. This is not only relevant to 21st-century competencies but also relevant to Bloom's revised edition taxonomic theory [24], which is now often being used as a reference in Indonesia in sequencing classroom tasks and activities based on cognitive load increment. One form of revision is in the cognitive domain, where the thinking ability of analysis and synthesis is integrated into analysis only. The number of the six categories in the previous concept did not change because Anderson included a new category, namely creating, which did not exist before. This is where creativity becomes very important to be developed in the learning process and this formed an important part of the assessment rubric. The final form of the rubric that was developed can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment rubric of mini seminar project for speaking 3 course at Universitas Riau

No	Aspect	Descriptors			
		Excellent (86-100)	Very Good (76-85)	Good (66-75)	Fair (<66)
	Public Speaking (70%)	Topic engages the audience; the topic is worthwhile. The speaker uses excellent attention getters. The points are well organised and presented using exceptionally clear language. Excellent use of vocal variation. The speaker also uses visual aids and non-verbal behavior very successfully.	Topic is appropriate to the audience and provides some useful information. The speaker uses good attention getters. The points are organised quite well and presented using clear language. Good vocal variation and pace. The speaker also uses visual aids and non-verbal behavior successfully.	Topic is untimely or lacks originality. The speaker uses some good-attention getters. The points are not really well organised. Language selection adequate; some errors in grammar; language at times misused. Demonstrates some vocal variation. Visual aids and non-verbal behavior are used but often not successfully.	Topic is trivial, too complex, or inappropriate for audience. Irrelevant opening; little attempt to build credibility; abrupt jump into body of speech. The points did not flow well. Lots of errors in grammar. The syntax needs to be improved. Often uses fillers. Speaker relies heavily on notes; nonverbal expression stiff and unnatural.
2	Collaboration/ Team Work (15%)	The project has been carried out exceptionally well. The workload and variety on each member seem fair. Every group member has contributed and done their own role effectively. Leadership role being assumed by each member for different tasks is evident	The project has been well carried out. The workload and variety on each member seem quite fair. Every group member has contributed and done their own role quite effectively. Leadership role being assumed by each member for different tasks is not clearly apparent.	The project has been carried out, but some improvements are needed. The workload and variety on each member seem to be unfair. Not every group member has contributed and done their own role quite effectively. Leadership role being assumed by each member for different tasks is not evident.	The project has been poorly done. The workload distribution and variety on each member seem to be unfair. Many group members have made negligible contribution to group performance. Evidence of leadership role being assumed by each member for different tasks is almost completely absent
3	Creativity (15%)	Exceptionally original and unique in demonstrating deep understanding	Thoughtfully and uniquely presented; clever at times in showing understanding of the material	A few original touches enhance the project to show some understanding of the material	Shows little creativity, originality and/or effort in understanding the material

3. IMPLEMENTATION

The mini-seminar was held in the sixteenth week, which was the last session of the course in the current semester. However, students were given three weeks to prepare. This preparation included the time to design the seminar program, determine the theme of the seminar, divide roles, prepare presentation slides, speech concepts, and the time to do the rehearsals. Preparations were also done in technical aspects, such as preparing the room, making invitations to potential audiences, making banners, and other technical matters.

Overall, during the seminar day, both groups performed very well. They prepared the event enthusiastically and in harmony, following the guidelines as expected. One group presented a seminar with the theme 'anti-bullying campaign' as displayed in Figure 2, while the other group presented a talk-show inviting a young figure who was successful in entrepreneurship. Each speaker delivered the topic of the seminar / talk show for about ten minutes.

The seminar was lead by two masters of ceremonies who guided the event with clear instructions on the proceedings. This was followed a speech from the project leader, from the study program coordinator, and finally from the 'dean' of the faculty. The event was then officially opened by the University of Riau's 'Chancellor'. As mentioned above, all these roles were play-acted by students themselves.

After the presentation, the activity was then followed by a question and answer session and discussion with attendees who were all students from the Speaking class 3 as well as some students from other classes. The event was closed by giving souvenirs to the speaker(s) and photos session, as seen in Figure 3.



Figure 2. Seminar on anti-bullying campaign
* all images shown here have got consent from all people seen in the images



Figure 3. Token presentation to the speaker(s)

All seminar processes were carried out completely in English. In addition, the media team worked on the program, interviewed speakers and seminar/talk show participants. The audiences were asked on their impressions about the event and also the general messages they wanted to convey, including feedback on the performances. Interviews and the coverage of this event were then published on social media such as YouTube as shown in Figure 4. This coverage was part of the exam assessment, especially related to how to be a journalist (news report), one of the skills taught in the Speaking 3 course.



Figure 4. News report on Youtube

4. POST ASSESSMENT REFLECTIONS

In terms of setting up and explaining the task, distribution and assignment of roles, and conducting the task, the assessment project was overall well received and implemented. As intended as an assessment tool, the seminar was successfully conducted as a tool to assess students' speaking performance in a real setting, involving the participation of all students in the class. As previously discussed, the students used their English public speaking skills through enacting the various assigned roles during the seminar. They did so through the performance of certain aspects of public speaking, such as speech and presentation skills during the seminar, in line with the assessment rubric, as seen in Table 1. The project served the public speaking scenario in keeping it real and contextual as authentic assessment tasks are expected to do [25].

In addition to assessing students' public speaking performance, this project also integrated a number of soft skills into the assessment process. These soft skills include students' skills in collaboration and creativity - 21st-century essential skills. The assessment task facilitated the conditions under which they learned how to work in team planning and making a scenario of their seminar project. The task challenged them into exercising the higher-order cognitive skills of creative activities. They also learnt the content while doing the task.

The project not only served as a tool for testing (assessment *of* learning) in the sense that students received grades, but also as a medium of learning (assessment *for* learning) [26, 27], in the sense that this involves self- and peer assessment. In addition, the mini seminars themselves acted as a space where all

students from the class improved their speaking skills through their participation in the various assigned roles, thereby making the task an assessment *as* a learning task (Earl, 2003). The latter two types of assessment were evident in the students' social media posts where they wrote about the enjoyable and collaborative ways in which they fulfilled the activity. They did not seem to feel the typical psychological problems such as anxiety and nervousness as often experienced by test takers in other kinds of assessment (see Chapell et al., 2005; Nelson, 2016). This exam experience would probably last in their memory as a enjoyable and engaging learning experience.

Despite the positive feedback and encouraging scores, we realised that this assessment model has room for further improvement. One of them is probably in the rubric descriptors. This needs more comprehensive indicators for assessing students' *individual* performances. This is especially important as every student plays a different role during the seminar. To address the issue of fairness, for instance, the parameter should be made different for each role. The fact that the students were given quite a long time for rehearsal would probably affect the 'originality' of their real speaking skills. Their speaking performance might be different if, for instance, they were asked to speak in an impromptu or extempore situation.

5. CONCLUSION

Apart from several weaknesses outlined above, we found this mini-seminar project as a doable alternative authentic assessment model that can be applied in a speaking class which focuses on, among other issues, the development of students' public speaking skills. This mini-seminar project is recommended not only because it can be used as an alternative assessment model, but also it encourages students to work together in teams, and encourage them to work creatively, create something new in order to perform better. These two competencies: collaboration and creativity are among the competencies that teachers and lecturers must develop in the classroom so that students can have 21st-century skills to successfully respond to the challenges of today's life.

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