

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322851423>

# Performance-Based Tasks as a Mean to Assess the Speaking Skills of Learners of English as a Foreign Language

Conference Paper · December 2017

CITATIONS

0

READS

549

7 authors, including:



**Sandy T. Soto**

Universidad Técnica de Machala

19 PUBLICATIONS 17 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



**Ligia Fernanda Espinosa Cevallos**

Universidad Regional Amazónica IKIAM

10 PUBLICATIONS 10 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



**María Antonieta Morales**

Universidad de Guayaquil (UG)

8 PUBLICATIONS 3 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



**Yolanda Molineros**

Universidad de Guayaquil (UG)

1 PUBLICATION 0 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Literature Circles in EFL Classrooms: The Impact on College Students in the Amazon Region. [View project](#)



Anglicism [View project](#)



**THE  
TURKISH ONLINE  
JOURNAL  
OF  
EDUCATIONAL  
TECHNOLOGY**

**December, 2017**  
Special Issue for ITEC 2017

**Prof. Dr. Aytekin İşman**  
Editor-in-Chief

Editors

**Prof. Dr. Jerry Willis**  
**Prof. Dr. J. Ana Donaldson**

Associate Editor

**Assist. Prof. Dr. Fahme Dabaj**

Assistant Editor

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eric Zhi - Feng Liu**

**ISSN: 2146 - 7242**

**Indexed by**

Education Resources Information Center – **ERIC**  
**SCOPUS - ELSEVIER**

## **Performance-Based Tasks as a Mean to Assess the Speaking Skills of Learners of English as a Foreign Language**

**Sandy T. SOTO**

*ELT Innovators Research Group  
Universidad Técnica de Machala, Ecuador  
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2314-654X>  
[stsoto@utmachala.edu.ec](mailto:stsoto@utmachala.edu.ec)*

**Ligia Fernanda ESPINOSA**

*ELT Innovators Research Group  
IKIAM Regional University, Ecuador  
[ligia.espinosa@ikiam.edu.ec](mailto:ligia.espinosa@ikiam.edu.ec)*

**María Antonieta MORALES**

*Universidad de Guayaquil, Ecuador  
[antonieta.moralesj@ug.edu.ec](mailto:antonieta.moralesj@ug.edu.ec)*

**Yolanda MOLINEROS**

*Universidad de Guayaquil, Ecuador  
[yolandamolineros@hotmail.com](mailto:yolandamolineros@hotmail.com)*

**Maria Asunción ROJAS**

*ELT Innovators Research Group  
Universidad Técnica de Machala, Ecuador  
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2526-1883>  
[marojas@utmachala.edu.ec](mailto:marojas@utmachala.edu.ec)*

**Wendy MOREIRA**

*ELT Innovators Research Group  
Unidad Educativa Alfg. Víctor Naranjo Fiallo, Ecuador  
[wenmathdome@gmail.com](mailto:wenmathdome@gmail.com)*

**Eder INTRIAGO**

*ELT Innovators Research Group  
Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí, Ecuador  
[eder.intriago@gmail.com](mailto:eder.intriago@gmail.com)*

### **ABSTRACT**

Performance-based tasks enable students' to demonstrate their learning progress in authentic ways. They also provide foreign language teachers with opportunities to challenge their students to use the language and therefore, assess the development of their skills. Acknowledging the advantages that these activities provide, this work aims at suggesting a set of performance-based tasks to evaluate the speaking skills of students of English as a Foreign Language.

Examples of performance-based tasks that have been implemented with Spanish speakers learning English illustrate how these tasks can be put into practice. For the development of the work, the authors conducted a review and analysis of articles, texts and other sources that included relevant information to the subject, including theoretical foundations, educational policies on evaluation, and examples of performance-based tasks. Suggested performance-based tasks include oral presentations, discussions, debates, demonstrations, among others. Both literature and the authors' experience indicate that performance-based tasks boost students' confidence and motivation towards speaking. Most performance-based tasks for assessing students' oral skills are collaborative in nature. Nonetheless, they can be also adjusted to individual assessments.

**Keywords:** Student evaluation, speaking skills, language teaching, EFL, Ecuador.

## INTRODUCTION

The goal of making changes within the public educational system in most parts of the world demands among other transformations, the adoption of teaching-learning approaches that incorporate suitable strategies aimed at stimulating students' linguistic and cognitive development as well as knowledge construction in real-life-like situations. This intention also requires the adoption of other forms of assessment to appraise students' performance throughout their learning process. Said forms of assessment are different to the traditional paper-based tests applied at the end of a course.

For example, the Ley Organica de Educación Intercultural (Law of Education of Ecuador, mostly referred as LOEI) (LOEI, 2011a) defines students' assessment as an ongoing process that includes a set of steps such as observing, valuing, and registering data from the teaching-learning process. This data is expected to reflect the students' achievement. It should provide a guide for giving students the necessary feedback they need to help them improve their academic performance at the appropriate time. Likewise, students' evaluations should include evaluation tools in different formats and not only the traditional written exams (LOEI, 2011b).

When assessing the language knowledge/skills development of individuals who have to learn a foreign language as a requirement of their school curriculum, teachers have to consider several factors. For instance, most learners do not feel motivated to learn the language and even less to be evaluated by means of traditional tests. The only place where the majority of students have access to practicing and using the language, as well as receiving feedback on their language skills improvement is in the classroom. With this in mind, foreign language teachers should seek for alternatives to evaluate their students in a way that they have the possibility of demonstrating their skills development in-use. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to suggest a set of performance-based tasks to evaluate the speaking skills of students of English as a Foreign Language. Examples of some of the strategies in-use accompany the activities proposed.

## ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

### Overview

Assessment is referred to as a process that entails obtaining information which is of interest to a person through the application of a series of continuous and considerable methods (Bachman, 2004). In a scholastic environment, teachers are to make decisions about their instructional practices as well as how students' achievement should be graded or reported. These decisions have to be grounded on the results obtained from evaluations to the level of progress students' have gained within a study period with respect to the learning goals set by the teacher (Cheng, Rogers, & Hu, 2004). Consequently, students should be assessed consecutively enabling teachers to reflect upon the assessment outcomes and to use them as a filter to improve the teaching-learning process (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007).

Many forms of assessments have been proposed throughout the years. To give an example, besides the classification of types of assessment by its purpose—instructional, predictive, diagnostic, and evaluative— that Caffrey (2009) establishes, he also points out two other types of assessment: formative and summative assessments. Caffrey defines formative assessments as “those that are used during the learning process in order to improve the curriculum and instruction” (p.7). On the other hand, “summative assessments are those that are used at the end of the learning process to “sum up” what students have learned” (Caffrey, 2009, p.7). The Ley Organica de Educacion Intercultural (LOEI, 2011c) states that formative assessment should be conducted in every class. It should have the purpose of determining the learning progress of the students so that teachers can reflect upon their teaching practice and adjust it to focus on promoting students’ achievement. The data collected from formative assessments should reflect the students’ level of achievement as well as provide a guide for feedback related to the students’ needs to help them improve their academic performance at the appropriate time.

### **Performance-Based Assessment**

Teachers from different parts of the globe have been concerned about the actual applicability of summative assessments when it comes to deciding whether or not the results obtained from them reflect the students’ true learning. This concern has encouraged teachers to search for alternative forms of assessment. As a result, performance-based assessment, which is a type of authentic assessment that focuses on student’s potential- has gained a place in foreign language classrooms (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). This type of assessment enhances students’ performance by using challenging and meaningful in-class-activities which promote the connection of students’ previous knowledge of a topic with new content information (Herrera & Morales & Murry, 2013; O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

Some of the specifics related to performance-based tasks are the construction of responses within a task, the promotion of higher order thinking, authenticity within the tasks, integration of language and cognitive skills, the evaluation of the process applied to get a product, and the in-depth demonstration of students’ content learning (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Herrera & Morales & Murry (2013) also highlight that performance-based assessment are grounded in constructivist processes and enhance the real performance of a task, contributing to students’ discover knowledge by themselves and the scaffolding of their learning in a natural and continuous pattern. Students’ performance of hands-on activities or the use of realia to do an activity is a common means to complete performance-based tasks (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

### **Performance-based tasks for assessing students’ speaking skills.**

Countless are the activities that teachers can adapt for promoting and assessing students’ speaking skills individually and cooperatively. Ellen (2002) suggests a set of assessment tasks that can be adapted for this purpose. These activities include:

- Constructed response: open-ended statement with which learner is asked to agree (listing example to justify the answer) or disagree (explaining what an alternative answer is and why it was chosen)
- Cooperative–group work: group project only is assessed; contributions by individuals are assessed as well as the group’s’ result; bonus points are given when certain members or when all members achieve; or individual points are added to form a total group score.
- Demonstration: illustration of a procedure with the performance of necessary steps and explanation of results.
- Display: poster, photo, chart, graph, etc., about a project, accompanied by verbal explanations.
- Draw and tell test: picture or diagram drawn as a model to represent a concept [...]
- Problem-solving: staging of the hands-on problem to solve, accompanied by a verbal explanation. [...]
- Student conference/oral interview: discussion about activities, interests or experiences between students and teacher and/or other adults. [...]
- Exhibitions: ... real-world demonstrations not only of what students know but also of what they are able to do with their knowledge ...

- the student must exhibit the products of his learning...what may be required of students: demonstration, use of information, research skills, descriptive skills, communication skills, imaginative skills, verbal explanation, defense of work, convincing arguments, fielding of questions, explanations of how and why [...] (p. 80-83)
- Class presentation: select different tasks for class production. [...]
- Debate team: select, research, and present opposing viewpoints. [...]
- Group investigation: take on a specific role within a group and prepare projects, research or report to share with the class.
- Interviewing: form questions, interview someone, record answers and organize a report; paired interview [...]
- List of concerns: generate a personal list of concerns, questions, and ideas about a topic and share/compare with another learner. [...]
- Panel discussion: select a moderator and present a topic for the class; panel of experts: develop a set of questions and answers about a topic, they assume roles of moderator, quizzer, judge and recorder for their group [...]
- Personal picture: respond, with a personal solution to an open-ended problem by role-playing.
- Tell/retell: tell ideas to a partner, then tell another pair each other's idea, then join another four and retell only the ideas not previously told, ending with a group recap of all eight ideas. (p. 114-116)

Furthermore, Herrera (2010) also provides a handful set of hands-on activities and manipulatives that teachers can take advantage of to enhance and assess the students' written and spoken skills. Hands-on activities based on Herrera's Biography Driven Instruction method include:

Hearts Activity	Cultural Quilts
Word Walls	Dots Chart
Vocabulary Quilt	Linking Language
Multidimensional Square	U-C-ME
Mind Maps	Pic – Tac – Tell
Reflection wheel	IDEA

The activities proposed by Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995) as alternatives to tests can also be adapted to enhance and evaluate the speaking skills of English language learners. These alternatives involve:

Performing a movie script	Report current events as a news show
Developing a music video [...]	Developing an audiotape [...]
Explaining an advertisement [...]	Inventing song lyrics [...]
Performing a play script [...]	Directing a videotape

The activities suggested here can provide teachers with a canvas of opportunities to promote and assess the development of language learners' oral skills. First, teachers can encourage students to work cooperatively or individually on performing the tasks in a written form so that they can have some time for preparation and then motivating them to produce the outcome orally.

### Performance-based tasks in practice

In this section, we provide examples of performance-based tasks in practice. These tasks were developed with A1 proficiency level students enrolled in a government-funded university in Ecuador. The learners of the examples were taking level-one ESP classes, according to their majors - Business Management and Hotel and Tourism. The main purpose of their ESP courses is the development of learners' speaking skills. Therefore, throughout the course, students worked in a variety of performance-based tasks that allowed the accomplishment of this aim in an authentic way. Even though the performance-based tasks described in the next paragraphs were developed with ESP students, they could certainly be developed individual taking regular EFL classes (we should keep in mind that the learners of these examples held an A1 proficiency level of English).

#### *Role-plays*



Role-play is a communicative activity in which students apply vocabulary and expressions related to a specific field in a real-life context. On the picture above, we see an example of a role-play developed by students from the career of Hotel and Tourism in a public university. In this activity, learners are practicing how to order, take orders, and serve food in the target language. Before participating in the dialogues, they familiarized themselves with words and expressions related to the restaurant context by reading a passage, doing some vocabulary exercises, listening to a dialogue or watching a video, and writing. While role-playing, the teacher observes and evaluates their performance with a rubric. At the end of the activity, students receive feedback. The feedback promotes the improvement of students' oral production each time they participate in this activity.





In this other picture, we can see a group of students performing a Business Talk Show. The core concept of the Talk Show was associated with the content students had learned in one curricular unit - Customer Care. Students were expected to show what they had grasped along the unit (key vocabulary and key concepts), enabling their teacher to assess not only how much the students had learned in four weeks but their speaking skills as well. The assessment of students' content knowledge and speaking skills by means of this performance-based task provides a clear example of a summative evaluation in which the teacher did not resort to traditional paper-and-pencil tests.

### *Group investigations*



In these two pictures, we observe the outcome of a group investigation. The performance-based task presented here was the end-of-semester task assigned to students majoring in Business Management. The task consisted in students' creation of a digital newspaper with eight news. The news was based on the results reported in scientific articles about Human Resources. Students selected the papers themselves, allowing freedom of choice. They recreated the scenario of the news considering key points such as the people who were part of the investigation, place, year, data collection methods, results, and other aspects contemplated by the students. Their products were then reported to the class.

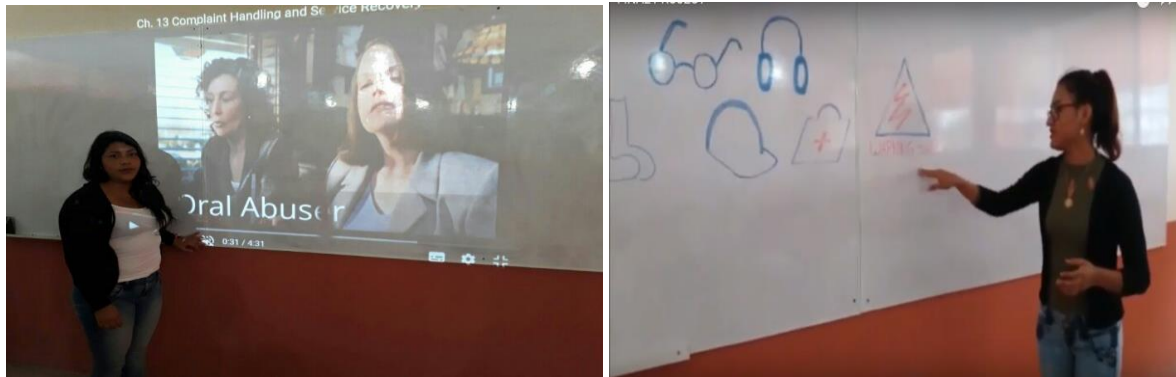
### *Interviewing*



In this case, we have two scenes of English language learners participating in interviews. In the first picture, the students are performing a job interview. This scene did not require any other resources but the students themselves. One of the students pretended to be the human resources manager of a company and the other one the applicant for a job position. The students asked and answered questions to each other, completing the task successfully. In the second picture, we see a more elaborated scene. Students showed their creativity by producing a piece of news report interview in which the interviewee answered questions about employment laws.

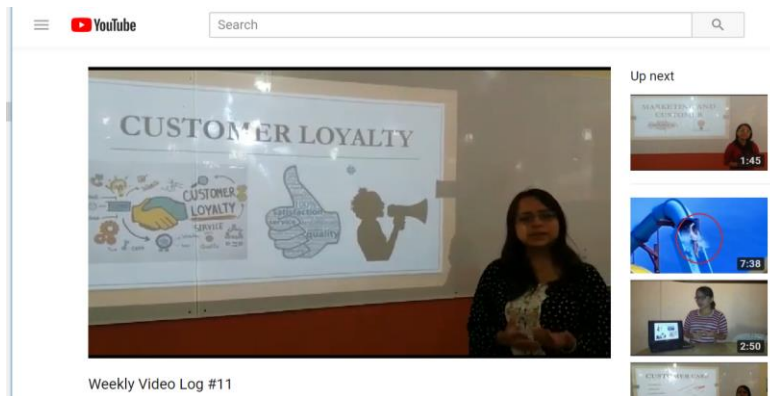


### Oral presentations



Oral presentations provide teachers with a canvas of opportunities to promote and assess their students' speaking skills. In the first picture, a student performed an oral presentation in which she explained the situation presented in a video. The student had to do her presentation based on what they saw in the video, even though she did not understand much of it because of her English proficiency level. What was important here was how she managed to explain what she saw throughout the video. In the second picture, the student is performing an oral presentation about safety equipment. She described and talked about the importance of each safety equipment piece seen in the picture.

### Video-based oral presentations



Technology open doors to the development and assessment of students' speaking skills out of the classroom walls. The production of video-based oral presentations such as the weekly video log presented here is one example of it. In this performance-based task, the student recorded herself explaining the content learned in the previous week classes. In the weekly video log, the student defined key concepts, key vocabulary, and illustrated them with examples or the description of pictures associated with them. Students developed one video-based oral presentation per week, allowing the ongoing evaluation of students' language knowledge and speaking skills.

In all the activities presented in this section, the oral production of students was assessed by using either a rubric or a checklist.

## CONCLUSIONS

Getting EFL learners utter or write their first words in English is gratifying but hearing them expressing their thoughts about a topic more fluently is definitely rewarding, especially when one achieves this with students whose biggest source for English immersion and practice is their classroom environment. This work intended to give EFL teachers an opportunity to review different strategies to achieve and assess oral production in their students. Learning how performance-based tasks can help them to assess and promote their students' oral skills in an authentic and meaningful form will help EFL teachers to improve their teaching practice, therefore, benefiting their students day to day.

Performance-based tasks assist EFL teachers to meet their students' needs as they apply their knowledge working on authentic tasks and consequently demonstrate their progress. In addition, applying performance-based tasks, as a form of assessment give EFL teachers the opportunity to engage their students in cooperative activities so that they can feel more confident and motivated when being assessed in this language. Most performance-based tasks as collaborative in nature. Finally, by completing activities aimed at language usage in real life situations as well as activities adaptable to their sociocultural context, this type of assessment enables EFL teachers to challenge their students to use the language skills they have acquired throughout the teaching-learning process while at the same time evaluate their students creatively.

## REFERENCES

- Bachman, L. (2004). *Statistical analysis for language assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Caffrey, E. D. (2009, April 9). Assessment in elementary and secondary education: a primer. CRS Report for Congress. Congressional Research Service.
- Cheng, L., Rogers, T., & Hu, H. (2004). ESL/EFL instructors' classroom assessment practices: purposes, methods, and procedures. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 360-389.
- Ellen, L. (2002). *Creative Planning Resource for Interconnected Teaching and Learning*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Fulcher, G., & Davidson, F. (2007). *Language testing and assessment: an advanced resource book*. New York: Routledge.
- Herrera, S. (2010). *Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Herrera, S. G., Morales Cabral, R., & Murry, K. G. (2013). *Assessment accommodations for classroom teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students* (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- LOEI (2011a). Capitulo I. De la Evaluacion de los Apredizajes. Art. 184.
- LOEI (2011b). Capitulo I. De la Evaluacion de los Apredizajes. Art. 147.
- LOEI (2011c). Capitulo I. De la Evaluacion de los Apredizajes. Art. 186.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Valdez Pierce, L. (1996). *Authentic assessment for English language learners*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Wlodkowski, R. J., & Ginsberg, M. B. (1995). *Diversity & Motivation Culturally Responsive Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.