



Colloquium A

School-based Oral Testing: Issues and Challenges

Panellists

Ms Jaya Pushani Ponnudurai

English Language Teaching Centre, Malaysia (ELTC)

Dr Christine Coombe

Dubai Men's College

Higher Colleges of Technology

Ms Roxane Vigneault

International Baccalaureate Organization, Cardiff, Wales

Puan Azalina @ Azlina bt Mohd Yusoff

State Education Department, Kelantan

Moderator

Dr Chan Yue Weng

English Language Teaching Centre, Malaysia (ELTC)

Abstract

School-based oral testing was introduced for students sitting the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (roughly corresponding to the British O-level) examination in 2003. This mode of assessment spotlights a number of interrelated issues for all stakeholders in the education system, such as test validity and reliability, weighting, role of criterion-referenced testing in language assessment, washback effect, and examiner competence/training. For language teachers, school-based testing poses manifold conceptual, procedural and logistical challenges. This colloquium provides a forum for practitioners to share their experiences in addressing these issues and challenges.

Summary of Panellists' Presentation

Panellist 1: Pn Jaya Pushani

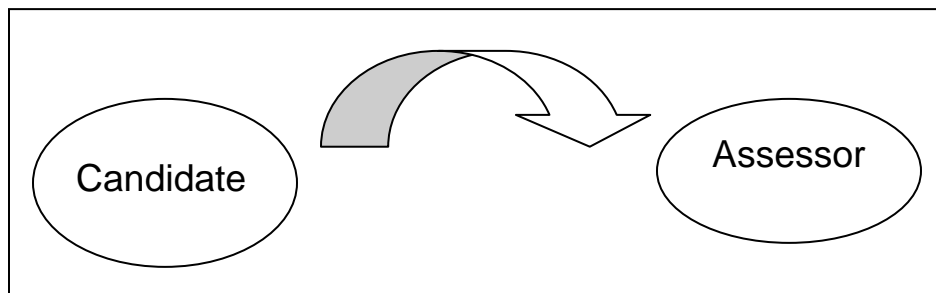
By introducing the SPM school-based assessment for the Oral English Test, the Malaysian Examination Board, Ministry of Education, Malaysia has decentralized examination and teachers are now empowered to be assessors. A total of 450, 000 candidates are to be assessed over duration of 2 years with the ratio of 40 students per class to one assessor.

The Oral English Test assesses the candidate's ability to:

- i. converse on a topic effectively
- ii. speak fluently
- iii. speak coherently
- iv. give appropriate responses
- v. speak using the language appropriately within context
- vi. speak using correct and acceptable pronunciation
- vii. speak using correct grammar
- viii. speak using a wide range of appropriate vocabulary

There are 4 models and procedures for the Oral English Test.

Model 1: Individual



In this model, there is only one sole presenter, i.e., the candidate. It involves one-way communication. The candidate must complete a task within the stated time, preferably 3-5 minutes.

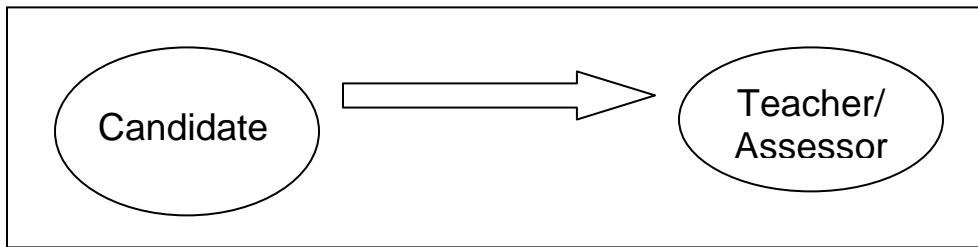
Some of the suggested activities in this model are as follows:

1. Presenting information from non-linear forms
2. Giving descriptions
3. Narrating
4. Presenting reports
5. Giving opinions
6. Processes and procedures

The procedures are:

1. In consultation with the teacher, the candidate:
 - a) chooses an activity from the given list (e.g. Presenting information from non-linear forms)
 - b) chooses a topic (e.g. Hobbies of Form 4 students)
 - c) decides on a task (e.g. Giving a talk based on a bar chart about hobbies of Form 4 students)
 - d) prepares the task
2. The candidate presents the task. The teacher assesses the candidate.
3. If deemed necessary, the candidate is allowed to be assessed again.

Model 2: Teacher – Candidate



In this model, the candidate's roles are presenting, responding to task and actively participating in the task. The teacher's role are prompting and giving minimal guidance during candidate's presentation

The suggested activities include:

1. Asking for and giving instructions
2. Talking and sharing information
3. Giving descriptions
4. Interviewing

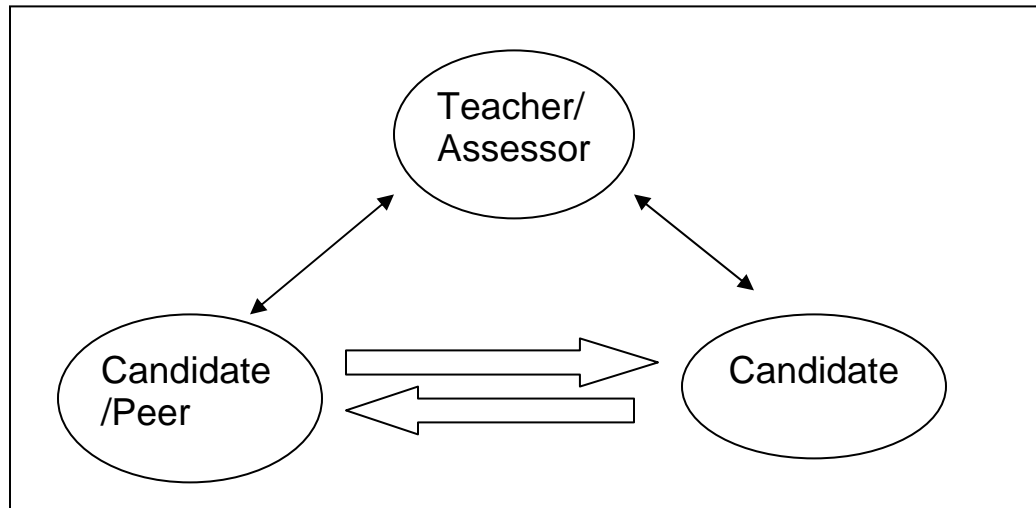
The procedures are:

1. In consultation with the teacher, the candidate:
 - a) chooses an activity from the given list (e.g. Asking for and giving instructions)
 - b) chooses a topic (e.g. Asking for and giving instructions)
 - c) decides on a task (e.g. Asking and giving directions on how to get to the post office from the school)
 - d) prepares the task

The candidate presents the task. The teacher prompts (if necessary) and assesses the candidate.

If deemed necessary, the candidate is allowed to be assessed again.

Model 3: Pair work



This model is interactive as it involves two candidates. The candidate may choose their own partner. The teacher acts as a facilitator and assesses one or both candidates.

Some suggested activities are:

1. Talking and sharing information
2. Solving problems
3. Making enquiries and ordering goods and services
4. Making and responding to complaints
5. Interviewing
6. Asking and giving instructions
7. Role-playing

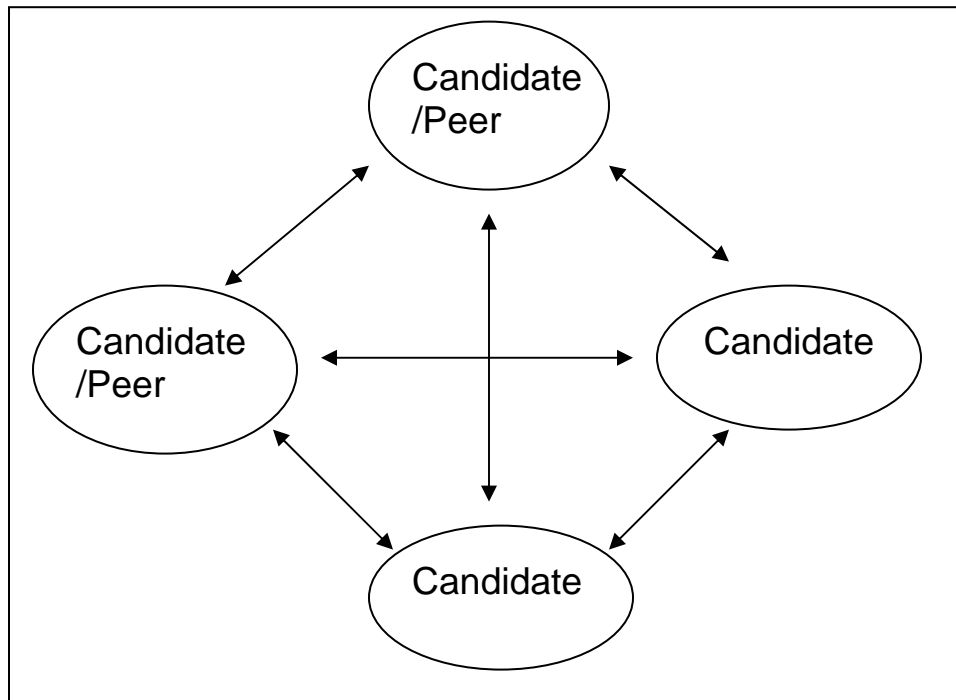
The procedures are:

1. Candidates work in pairs. They may choose their partners.
2. In consultation with the teacher, the candidates:
 - a) choose an activity from the given list (e.g. Role-playing)
 - b) choose a topic (e.g. Occupations)
 - c) decide on a task (e.g. Attending a job interview)

d) prepare the task

3. The candidates present the task.
4. During the presentation, the candidates are allowed to prompt one another.
5. The teacher assesses the candidate. (He/She is not allowed to prompt the candidates while they are presenting).
6. If deemed necessary, the candidate is allowed to be assessed again.

Model 4: Group Work



This model is also interactive in nature. It consists of three to four candidates. The candidates may choose their group members. The teacher will assess all the candidates.

Some of the suggested activities are:

1. Talking and sharing information
2. Solving problems
3. Giving opinions
4. Role-playing

The procedures are as follows:

1. In consultation with the teacher, the candidates:
 - a) choose group members
 - b) choose an activity from the given list (e.g. Problem-solving)
 - c) choose a topic (e.g. Deciding on four people to sent to safe planet)
 - d) Decide on a task (e.g. The earth is about to be destroyed. You have to choose four out of the following seven people: a teacher, as astronaut, a scientist, an artist, a businessman, a politician and an imam / a priest; to take to a safe planet. Discuss and decide on the people you will send to the planet.)
2. The candidates decide on the roles to be played by each group member.
3. The candidates prepare the task.
4. The candidates carry out the task. The teacher assesses the candidates. One or more candidates can be assessed while the task is being carried out.
5. If deemed necessary, the candidate is allowed to be assessed again.

The Similarities and differences between old and new assessment modes

The similarities between the old and the new assessment modes are that both have tasks, informational and interactional routines.

The differences between the old and the new assessment models are the element of anxiety is reduced and the elicitation of more natural response from candidates in the new mode of assessment.

The Challenges

- The functional role of interlocutor - rehearsed role-play, element of reciprocity, spontaneity and authenticity reduced.
- Would it allow the candidate to translate performance when he/she leaves the classroom
- How much time is allowed for candidates?
- Are candidates rewarded at each point of assessment?
- Individual performances - to what extent are we assessing the candidate's own language
- How does the teacher as a facilitator and guide ensure validity and reliability?

Panellist 2: Dr Christine Coombe

A very high stake testing culture is evident in Oman and the UEA. A state-of-the-art testing procedure employing *Multiple Measures Assessment* is used. This procedure is practised on the grounds that no one single measure or test can give us all the information we need to know.

The two kinds of oral assessment practised are:

- in-class oral assessment using a variety of methods and



- formal oral tests

Candidates are tested over a period of five days in a semester. Students' presentations and projects are assessed and given grades. Students are allowed to have a "pass" when they are not up to par.

Formalised oral examinations are held at mid-term and for the final.

Five major challenges posed in conducting oral testing:

- (i) *logistic* – practicality of administering wide-scale oral assessment due to busy time schedules, teaching load etc.
- (ii) *reliability of scores* – problem of standardization over 11 colleges and problem of assessors crossing over from urban to rural areas for assessment.
- (iii) *Expertise* - training of graders and recertification of teachers
– international ratings are used e.g. PET and IELTS.
- (iv) *accountability* - control measures include the use of two assessors, one to assess and the other to collaborate on the scores.
- (v) *reliability* – inter- and intra-rater reliability
 - a mixture of proficiency and achievement tests
 - use of a banding system

The continuing challenges are:

- Anything which is not tested is not really taught – the washback effect
- Multiple Measures Assessment – the cornerstone of good testing
- Not to neglect formal testing totally.

Panellist 3: Ms Roxanne Vigneault

The oral component in the internal assessment of the International Baccalaureate Organization carries 30% of the total assessment. The oral component allows candidates to demonstrate their listening and speaking skills in an integrated manner and in different contexts. Depending on the nature of the activity, candidates are expected to select the register and style appropriate to a particular text or context; show understanding of language, texts and culture; and communicate clearly and effectively in different situations.

The internal assessment is based on oral work only. It takes into account teacher assessment in the candidate's overall score, and allows for the inclusion of act that is difficult to assess externally. Assessment must be conducted in the target language.

The internal assessment component consists of two activities:

- The individual oral – this activity is compulsory, and is taped and sent to the IBO for moderation purposes
- An interactive oral activity chosen by the teacher – this activity is compulsory, and it is not taped or sent to the IBO for moderation purposes.

(i) *Requirements of the Individual oral activity*

- Based on a text taken from a cultural or literary option studied
- Length : 15 mins
- Preparation time: 20 mins
- Date: fixed by teacher
- Recorded for the purposes of external moderation

(ii) *Interactive oral activity*

- One activity based on a cultural or literary option studied
- Examples: structured groups discussion, role play, dramatic presentation

The three criteria for internal assessment oral component are:

1. Criterion A: Quality of Ideas (10 marks)
2. Criterion B: Presentation (10 marks)
3. Criterion C: Language (10 marks)

1. Criterion A: Quality of Ideas

- How well does the candidate know and understand the subject matter?
- To what extent are the candidate's ideas relevant and focused?
- Is there evidence of critical thinking?
- Has the candidate shown an appreciation of language and style?
- Are the ideas supported by relevant examples and illustrations?

Achievement level

0 Level 1 is not achieved.

1-2 The candidate has little awareness of the subject matter.

- Ideas are frequently irrelevant and/or repetitive.
- There is little analysis of the subject matter.
- Little awareness of language and style is shown.
- Ideas are not supported by examples and illustrations.

3-4 The candidate has a superficial awareness of the subject matter.

- Some ideas are relevant.
- There is some analysis of the subject matter.
- Some awareness of language and style is shown.
- Ideas are occasionally supported by examples and illustrations.

- 5-6 The candidate has an adequate understanding of the subject matter.
- Some ideas are generally relevant and focused.
 - There is evidence of critical thinking.
 - An adequate awareness of language and style is shown.
 - Ideas are generally supported by examples and illustrations.
- 7-8 The candidate has a good understanding of the subject matter.
- Ideas are mostly relevant and focused.
 - A good degree of critical thinking is shown.
 - A good appreciation of language and style is shown.
 - Ideas are mostly supported by well-chosen examples and illustrations.
- 9-10 The candidate has an excellent understanding of the subject matter.
- Ideas are relevant and focused.
 - A high degree of critical thinking is shown.
 - An excellent appreciation of language and style is shown.
 - Ideas are fully supported by well-chosen examples and illustrations.
2. Criterion B: Presentation
- How effective is the organization of the oral task?
 - How coherent is the structure?
 - Are examples and illustrations well integrated into oral task?

Achievement level

0 Little is achieved.

1-2 Little organisation is apparent.

- The oral task has little structure.
- Supporting examples and illustrations are not integrated into the oral task.

3-4 Some organisation is apparent.

- The oral task has some structure.
- Supporting examples and illustrations are sometimes integrated into the oral task.

5-6 The oral task is organized.

- The structure of the oral task is mostly coherent.
- Supporting examples and illustrations are generally integrated into the oral task.

7-8 The oral task is well organized.

- The structure of the oral task is mostly coherent and effective.
- Supporting examples and illustrations are mostly well integrated into the oral task.

9-10 The oral task is effectively organized.

- The structure of the oral task is coherent and effective.
- Supporting examples and illustrations are well integrated into the oral task

3. Criterion C: Language

- How fluent, varied and accurate is the language used by the candidate?

- How appropriate to the oral task is the candidate's choice of register and style?
- To what extent does the exchange flow?

Achievement level

0 Level 1 is not achieved.

1-2 The language lacks fluency and appropriateness.

- There are many basic errors in grammar and sentence construction.
- There is little sense of register and style.
- There is little variety in vocabulary and idiom.
- Frequent hesitations impede the flow of the exchange.

3-4 The language sometimes lacks fluency and appropriateness.

- Grammar and sentence construction are sometimes accurate, although errors and inconsistencies are apparent.
- The register and style are to some extent appropriate to the task.
- The range of vocabulary and idiom is fairly limited.
- The exchange flows but there are some hesitations.

5-6 The language is mostly fluent and appropriate.

- There is an adequate degree of accuracy in grammar and sentence construction, although some errors and inconsistencies are apparent.
- The register and style are to mostly appropriate to the task.
- Vocabulary and idiom are mostly varied and largely appropriate to the task.
- The exchange generally flows freely.

7-8 The language is fluent and appropriate.

- There is a good degree of accuracy in grammar and sentence construction, although the oral task is not necessarily free from errors.
- The register and style are effective and appropriate to the task.
- Vocabulary and idiom are varied and appropriate to the task.
- The exchange mostly flows freely.

9-10 The language is fluent and entirely appropriate.

- There is a high degree of accuracy in grammar and sentence construction, although the oral task is not necessarily free from errors.
- The register and style are consistently effective and appropriate to the task.
- Vocabulary and idiom are varied and highly appropriate to the task.
- The exchange flows freely.

Some of the issues and challenges include:

- The role of the teacher
- Time limit
- Choice of extract
- Focus on both content and style
- Use of appropriate register
- Quality of recording
- Despatch of support material



The training of teachers is done through:

- workshops
- on-line curriculum centres (OCC)
- teacher support materials
- internal assessment feedback forms
 - subject reports
- internal assessment moderation reports

The moderation process is done by:

- schools
- assistant moderators
- team leaders
- principal moderators

Grade Awarding

- setting good boundaries
- pre-set for internally assessed oral work
- available in subject/reports

Panellist 4: Pn Azalena bt Mohd Yusof

School teachers are directly involved in the oral-based assessment at school level. These school assessors are appointed by a school association committee set up by the school principal. The time frame schedule to conduct the oral test is usually between January and March. Candidates are to be assessed twice in Form Four and once in Form Five. Assessment in Forms 4 and 5 is conducted by different teachers.



Issues and challenges

- As teachers conduct the tests at different times, the tests lack reliability and standardization.
- Teacher constraints - e.g. heavy workload of teachers and conducting the oral test is seemed an additional burden. Here, teachers are not paid for conducting oral exams.
- Are teachers spoon-feeding their students?
- Lack of creativity on part of teachers
- Weak students memorize or read their scripts
- How many percent of the marks does oral testing contribute to the overall marks?

Issues/concerns raised by participants and responses from the presenters/panellists

No.	<i>Issues/Concerns raised by participants</i>	<i>Presenter's/Panellists' responses</i>
1.	<p>Ms. Lee King Siong (UKM)</p> <p>Were teachers prepared for the oral assessment for SPM? Was there training for teaching so that teaching matches with testing?</p>	<p>Pn Azalena said that teachers did not receive any training. They were however briefed on the new format of assessment. She feels that teachers should be given workshops on how to conduct the assessment.</p> <p>Pn Jaya Pushani commented that there was no need for training to teach as there was nothing new in the new format for testing. The recent change was a response to new theories, requests to rethink oral assessment. She believes this new format gives students a better chance of performing orally.</p>
2.	<p>Marcia Fisk Ong (ELTC)</p> <p>Is there a certain amount of pressure to increase pass rates and students' scores?</p>	<p>Pn Azalena commented that there was pressure from the principal and as a result some schools and states create magic marks. She said that state level assessors play an important role in monitoring which is supposed to be done in June. However she feels that monitoring should be done during the period when the oral assessment is conducted in school. She feels strongly that there should be a second assessor to collaborate on the marking scores together with the first assessor</p>