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KNOWING YOUR ROOTS: ENHANCING ORAL PROFICIENCY OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS IN KURDISTAN USING ORAL PRESENTATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE 'FAMILY TREE' TASK

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at presenting the specifics of designing oral presentations as an alternative assessment for elementary students in Kurdistan. Being non-native speakers of English, oral proficiency is an increasingly significant aspect of language teaching among young Kurdish learners. Thus, the purpose of oral presentation in the 'Family Tree' task is to build students' confidence in speaking a foreign language (English language) among young non-native speakers in a creative and comfortable learning environment. It

also increases communication among students and the teacher by encouraging students to easily share what they have learned in class. However, previous research has criticized oral examinations for lack of reliability and validity. Consequently, the current research seeks to design a reliable and valid alternative assessment by incorporating the Family Tree task into an oral presentation. To measure students' oral communication skills, a "Task-Specific" scoring rubric was designed to evaluate students' performances with four essential dimensions; (1) Vocabulary, (2) Pronunciation, (3) Task, and (4) Fluency. Data were obtained from two elementary classes of a public school located in Dohuk in Kurdistan among 13 boys and 14 girls. The student consists of fourth and fifth-grade students within the range of 9 to 10 years old. The result shows that assessing students using the oral presentation as an alternative assessment escalates students' confidence and motivation to speak publicly as the examination setting becomes less threatening and that oral presentation using a rubric allows detailed identification of students' areas of improvement for elementary school students.

Keywords: Oral Presentations, Family-Tree Task, Rubrics, Communication Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Oral presentations are just one example of performances that may be assessed using scoring rubrics to evaluate group activities, extended projects, and writing samples (Moskal, 2000). They are equally appropriate to the English, Mathematics, and Science classrooms. According to Moskal (2000). Easily put, an oral presentation is defined as "an activity of sharing ideas and clarifying understanding verbally" (Fan &Yeo, 2007, p. 83). They are equally appropriate to the English, Mathematics, and Science classrooms

The oral presentation is even more helpful for young learners at the elementary level, especially among non-native speakers with tasks related to their self or experiences. This is because they can communicate in a non-formal and non-threatening learning environment. Within the context of this study, to develop their skills and the ability to speak in a foreign language (English), students

perform tasks that are equivalent to the ones in their native language (Kurdish). In this way, by applying oral presentation students practice their generic skills as well as their higher-order thinking skills to the link between what they are being taught in the class and what they have in real life. Consequently, since these students are elementary school students, the rationale for adopting oral presentations is to increase communication among students and the teacher by encouraging students to share what they have learned in class. The oral presentation will give the chance to elementary students to hear their pronunciation and how others pronounce the same words. By doing so, the oral presentation will help students to engage their skills and increase their interactions with others. for pre-college and college, teachers use scoring rubrics for classroom evaluation purposes.

Family Tree as an Oral Presentation

The purpose of the oral presentation in the 'Family Tree' task is to build students' confidence in speaking a Foreign language (English language) among young non-native speakers of English using their family's lineage to develop vocabulary related to people, family members, and relationships. This kind of activity will help elementary students connect new terms, ideas, and concepts to that student's experience and knowledge base. Connecting current concepts to a young learner's experience can help anchor the concept in a relevant context that the student can access. The tasks emerging from this learning also help students to learn the necessary linguistic elements to communicate appropriately and transform the results obtained from the learning itself or the tasks completed as their way of communicating in a foreign language effectively. Thus, as an educator, the devotion to encouraging students to perform tasks using their daily life routines or personal experiences is overwhelming and boosts their confidence.

Being an educator at an elementary school teaching young learners aged between 7 to 10 years old, the formidable task is to motivate them to invoke their curiosity and interest in self-exploration to take place and present their findings in a meaningful way. Thus, the Family Tree task encourages them to formulate and investigate questions through observation. Meanwhile, because of the issue of shyness to speak in a foreign language in front of others, this kind of assessment will provide them the opportunities to practice their oral skills through

classroom activities from drawing their family members on paper, and then presenting orally what they have described on the paper. The assessment will help the student to bring what has been taught in class about the family tree. By doing so, they will be able to communicate what they think and share a description of their family names. The assessment also will help the teacher to evaluate vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and student comprehension of the task given in the classroom.

The Context

In primary schools in Kurdistan, oral presentations have become an increasingly significant aspect of language teaching. Three main essential issues drove the need to conduct an oral presentation as an alternative assessment by asking students to draw a family tree. Firstly, it is possible that teaching students to explain orally what was previously taught in class about the family tree (father, mother, brother, sister, etc.), which is part of the English syllabus, may help students to perform better in a class by increasing their vocabulary and confidence. Mainly, because using oral presentation in a language classroom is an effective tool to improve students' communicative competence.

Secondly, to prepare students for the examination, most of the English language teachers in public schools in Kurdistan or anywhere else in the world are under intense stress to meet the examination deadlines and achievement rate by only focusing on written grammar and vocabulary skills, leaving a vital skill away which is the oral communication of the English language inside the classroom. Thirdly, another critical issue is students' shyness and nervousness when they tend to use new vocabulary that is taught in the classroom. On a personal note, this anxiety is the result of a lack of familiarity with English language pronunciation. Most students in the elementary stage feel uncomfortable speaking in the English language in front of other students since there is a lack of opportunities to practice oral presentations in English as a foreign language in classrooms. This is perhaps due to the large numbers of students in each class, and not all the students got the experience to practice the foreign language and enhance their ability to speak inside the class or in their homes.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many authors have criticized oral examinations for lack of reliability (Bhati, 2012). In an oral examination, the examiner actively engages in the examination process, inducing bias (Joughin, 2010). According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), reliability is often demarcated as the consistency of measurement. In other words, the regularity of scoring and the reliability of the administrative processes of an assessment are both crucial factors in determining the reliability of an assessment (Chiedu & Omenogor, 2014). In addition, it is also possible that inconsistent examiner assessment may emerge as a result of the fact that teacher assessment will change in different contexts at different times (Bhati, 2012). Therefore, in a special assessment, all examiners should evaluate the same skills in the same manner, and they should all be in general agreement on their evaluation of the specific assignment (Bhati, 2012).

In certain situations, an examiner may encourage a student by repeating a question or giving an explanation, although this does not always happen. For instance, the examiner may be prejudiced toward a student's looks, race, or culture (Davis & Karunathilake, 2005). Oral examinations might also put students at risk of low-performance levels due to the pressure that comes with the assessment (Jolly & Grant, 1997). In this case, it has been generally acknowledged as a major source of unreliability comes from the scoring used in the assessment (Bhati, 2012).

The validity of an assessment is primarily concerned with the design of the assessment. For an evaluation to be effective, it must achieve the goal for which it was created. According to Bhati (2012), the purpose of the assessment is to help students exhibit their knowledge, abilities, and values concerning the topic being evaluated. Validity establishes a connection between the assessment and the construct being measured. For instance, if an assessment is designed to measure less, it is considered underrepresented. While in other cases, if the assessment measures more than what students are taught, then it is not relevant to the subject objectives. In both scenarios, the validity of the assessment is jeopardized since it was not developed to fulfill the subject objectives (Memon, Joughin, & Memon, 2010). However, the oral presentation could be seen as a great alternative assessment method to assess students as

In a study conducted about students' oral presentations, Salehi and Daryabar (2014) stated that there are numerous advantages of alternative assessments, in which students often make the assumption that evaluations made by teachers are more accurate, which may not always be true (Salehi & Daryabar, 2014). However, teacher assessment cannot always be viewed as the most valid method; as a result, it can be triangulated with varied sources of assessments (Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 1996). However, in this assessment, we only incorporate teacher assessment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Designing a valid alternative assessment is not an easy feat as planning and conducting a reliable oral assessment requires the educator's insight to map a pathway that bridges the learning outcomes, students' learning needs, and limitations. Therefore, in incorporating the Family Tree task into the oral presentation, four essential elements formed the basis. They are (1) task description, (2) scale, (3) dimension, and (4) description of dimension). The first element is task description which describes the performance and expected behavior from the assignment given, such as in the form of paper, posters, performances, or observations (Stevens & Levi, 2013). The second element is scale; this rubric is a scale rating question with selected-response items (Haladyna & Rogriguez, 2013). However, a good efficient rubric might contain three to five criteria (Popham, 1997) or at least three scales criteria for a rubric (Stevens & Levi, 2013). In this assignment, I used four scale criteria which are (Excellent, Good, Fair, and Needs Improvement). The third element is dimension, which can be seen in this assignment in the form of assessments for oral presentation in four critical dimensions that consist of (1) Vocabulary, (2) Pronunciation, (3) Task, and (4) Fluency. Finally, the fourth element is the description of each dimension, which refers to the explanations of dimensions or assessment criteria to identify the dimension descriptions (Montgomery, 2000). It is vital to describe each given dimension, as it is recommended that the description should be expressed in plain and unambiguous language (Stevens & Levi, 2013).

Instrument

Moskal (2000) who advocates oral presentation as being suitable for pre-college and college teachers, emphasizes the need to assist students by the use of scoring rubrics for classroom evaluation purposes, especially so for elementary students. Scoring rubrics provide at least two benefits in the evaluation process. First, they support the examination of the extent to which the specified criteria have been reached. Second, they provide feedback to students concerning how to improve their performances. If these benefits are consistent with the purpose of the assessment, then a scoring rubric is likely to be an appropriate evaluation technique.

The nature of the assignment and the purpose of using the rubric as a tool will determine which rubric is the most suitable one to use (Riddle & Smith, 2008). There are four types of rubrics; analytic rubric, holistic rubric, task-specific and generic models (Haladyna & Rogriguez, 2013; Moskal, 2000). Firstly, an analytic rubric is a set of performance scores for several different evaluation criteria that is independent of each other (Haladyna & Rogriguez, 2013). Secondly, a holistic rubric combines all analytical features into one single score (Haladyna & Rogriguez, 2013). Thirdly, the task-specific model refers to a rubric that is specific to an assignment. Finally, the generic model refers to a rubric that is used for a non-specific assignment but has similar criteria to a specific assignment. However, Haladyna and Rogriguez (2013) suggest that a task-specific model is best used for classroom learning. Therefore, in this study, to measure a student's oral communication skills, a "Task-Specific" scoring rubric was designed to evaluate students' performances. Therefore, the oral presentation of Family Tree as a task-specific model was focused.

The study was conducted in two elementary classes of public schools located in Dohuk in Kurdistan among 13 boys and 14 girls aged. The student consists of fourth and fifth-grade students within the range of ages of 9 to 10 years old. The implementation consists of three phases. In the first phase, students were asked to identify the critical vocabulary to describe their family members in English. In the second phase, an example of family tree hierarchy was discussed. A verbal instruction was given to the students to draw the family tree; the reason for giving such instructions is to help students familiarize themselves by drawing

a family tree poster and then how to conduct the oral presentation. In the last phase, each student was asked to draw a family tree on a piece of paper in the third-class lesson. After finishing the required task of drawing, all student presented their family tree posters. The figure shows the classroom activities that were implemented.

Figure 1

Classroom Activities
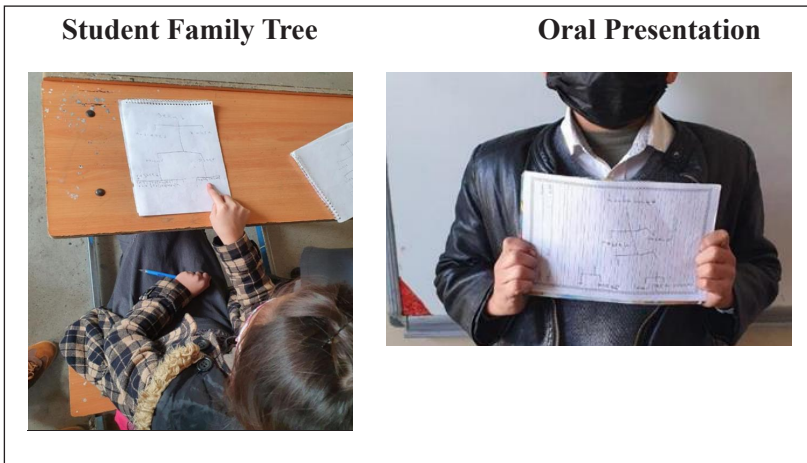
Data Analysis

Based on the developed rubric, the teacher assessed students' performance in each of the four aspects, and a simple descriptive result was used to analyze the percentage of students who were at each achievement level. Greater emphasis was placed on the qualitative findings based on teacher observation and critical reflection.

FINDINGS

There were four dimensions designed to evaluate the oral performance of students. The four dimensions consist of (a) Vocabulary, (b) Pronunciation, (c) Task, (d) Fluency. Moreover, the rubric consisted of four scales (1) Excellent, (2) Good, (3) Fair, and (4) Needs Improvements. Excel was used to analyze the rubric.

Table 1

Student Performance

Dimension	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
Vocabulary	15%	37%	25%	23%
Pronunciation	15%	35%	15%	35%
Task	10%	52%	5%	33%
Fluency	15%	35%	27%	23%

The results in Table 1 reveal that oral presentation using the Family Tree task has enhanced their oral skills since an estimated range of 50% -62% are in the categories of excellent and good. Only 23% - 35% require more support to improve their oral skills.

Specifically, as displayed in Figure 2, the "Excellent" scale frequency was 15% for using family vocabulary correctly and appropriately. The "Good" scale was 37% for students using family vocabulary but with few mistakes to describe them in the context. Moreover, the "Fair" scale shows that 25% of students use vocabulary related to a family with limitations. The last scale on this dimension was "Needs improvement", which suggests that 23% of students have a poor vocabulary.

Figure 2

Students' Performance in Vocabulary
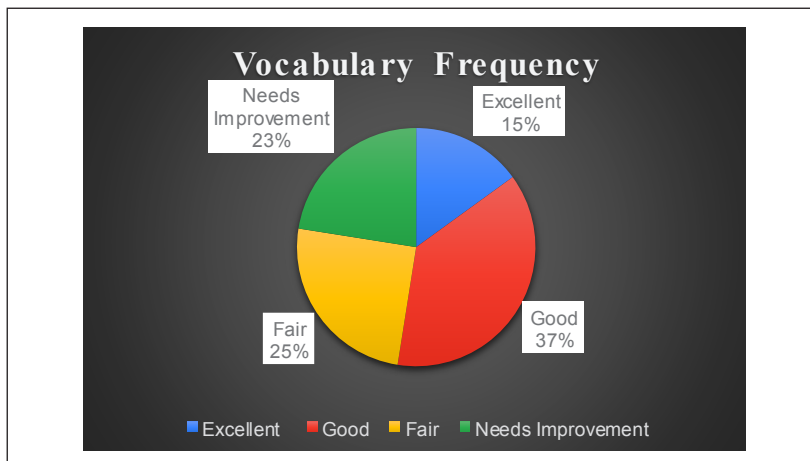
Regarding the second dimension (pronunciation), a total of 15% recorded "Excellent" for pronunciation, suggesting clear and appropriate communication was used. The second scale is "Good", with a total of 35% of students who have few pronunciation mistakes but still good communication. However, the "Fair" scale was 15% for students with few pronunciation and communication mistakes. Lastly, 35% of students have poor pronunciation and misunderstand the meaning of the words as displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Students' Performance in Pronunciation
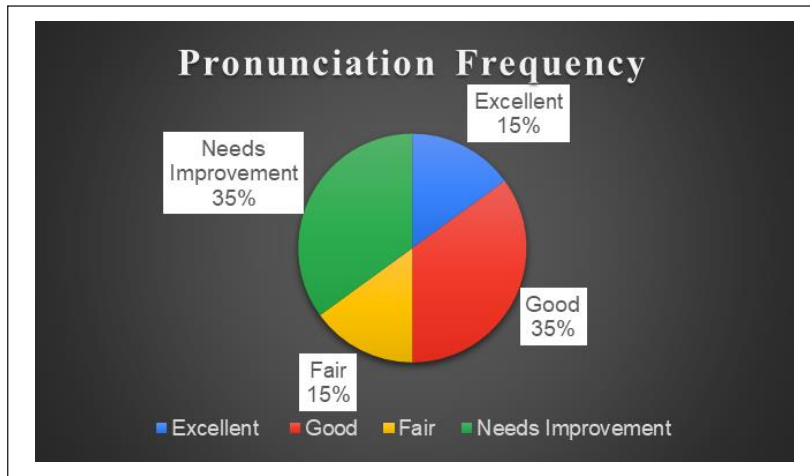
The third dimension was the "Task" as displayed in Figure 4. On the "Excellent" scale, a total of 10% of students fully understood the task and completed it perfectly. On the second scale, "Good", a total of 52% of students understood the task and completed it well. The third scale in this dimension was "Fair", with a total of 5% of students making an effort to complete the task. However, on the last scale a total of 33% of students did not complete the task, and therefore, they "Need Improvement".

The fourth dimension was "Fluency". As exhibited in Figure 4, in the "Excellent" scale a total of 15% of students demonstrated a remarkable degree of fluency by having a clear idea in presenting their thoughts without hesitation or minimal insignificant abrupt pauses. The second scale, "Good", had 35% of students who demonstrated a reasonable degree of fluency by having a clear idea with a bit of

hesitation to speak. Whereas in the "Fair" scale, a total of 27% of students demonstrated the ability to speak but with confusion, while the last scale shows that 23% of students demonstrated poor ability to speak, and therefore, they "Need Improvement."

Figure 4

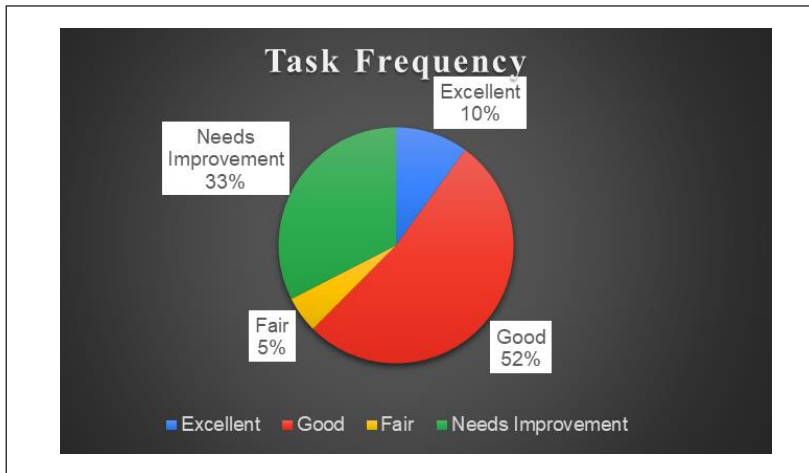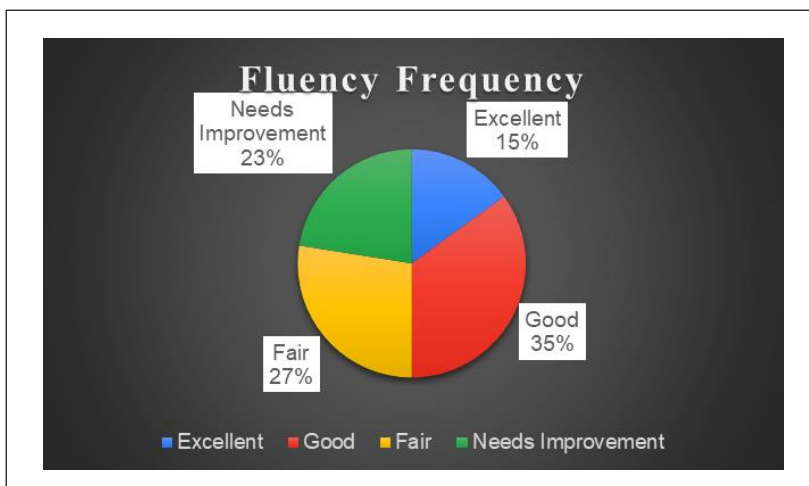*Students' Performance in Family Tree Task*


Figure 5

Students' Performance in Fluency

The overall score indicated that only a total of 6 students scored (9-10) marks with a frequency rate of 15%. Secondly, students who score (3-5) marks were only 4 students with a rate of 10%. Thirdly, students, who score (6-8) marks were 15 students with 38%. Lastly, a total of 15 students scored (0-2) marks with a rate of 37%.

Figure 6

Students' Overall Performance
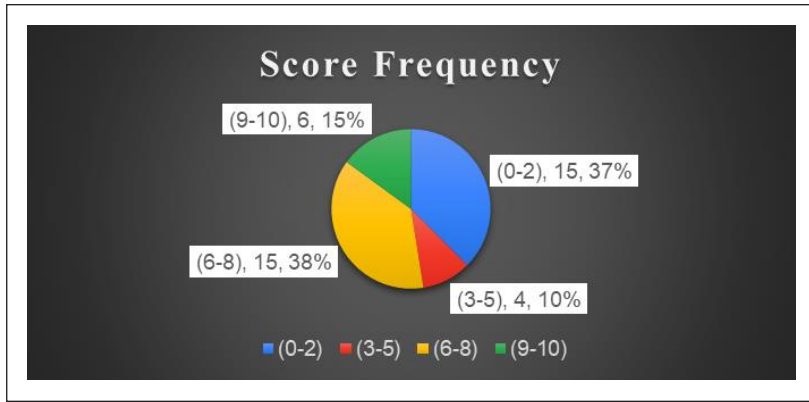
Through observing students' performance in the classroom, and reflecting in retrospect on their behaviour and attitude while participating in this oral presentation, it can be concluded that this alternative assessment was more formative as feedback was constantly given while doing the tasks. The guidance was more visual and verbal and that supported these beginner learners as compared to manual or mechanical guidance.

To conduct an oral presentation for elementary school students is challenging, especially when presenting in a foreign language such as the English language and some have difficulties in confidence talking in public, even in their mother tongue language. For some of these students, it was the first time they stand up from their chairs and speak in front of other students, and thus, is quite challenging.

DISCUSSION

In using the oral presentation as an alternative assessment, educators can measure students' oral communication skills regarding the

learning outcomes. This ensures they are validly assessed on their oral abilities rather. While memorizing what has been taught in the classroom is undoubtedly an effective but flawed 21st-century teaching practice, it does not equate to developing transferable skills. As an educator, we need to understand the issues of validity in implementing oral presentation assessments, mainly to help students to understand the key concepts and develop their skills by applying these concepts in various settings. However, there is also a need to acknowledge the challenges faced by students in this classroom who are impaired linguistically in learning English as a foreign language since the learning is confined to and occurs in the English language class. As a result of the language barrier, other issues emerge. For example, it makes it difficult for them to speak confidently and in the long run, produces timid students unless educators take adequate and immediate interventions that inject fun into the assessment tasks. The alternative assessment will benefit even more if it is designed to relate to their personal experience. When they are unaware that they are being assessed in a casual 'non-examination' setting environment, anxiety is reduced and confidence is enhanced as well.

However, based on the result obtained, the overall implementation of this oral presentation as an alternative assessment was positive. I can see that students were excited to draw or even to experience presenting in front of others, despite their shyness. Perhaps that is due to the reason that they have never done such formative activities in their classrooms before. Meanwhile, the oral presentation allows us to identify and observe students with poor understanding, which makes 23% to 35% of students under the category of needing improvement. The oral presentation based on the Family Tree task has indirectly helped to overcome the barriers of learning English as a foreign language, thus enhancing their oral skills

REFLECTION

There are several strengths that oral presentation provides that are more helpful for educators to follow in their evaluation of their students in the classroom. First of all, the dimension criteria helped assess the actual weakness of the learning process. Secondly, these oral presentation assessments provide a level of objectivity by evaluating

students at an individual level and a group level. In addition, the scoring rate was an essential tool to assess the student's performance by showing individual and overall weaknesses and strengths.

I believe that English language lessons should also focus more on speaking and communication skills than on grammar and writing. Accordingly, students should be given a chance to conduct an oral presentation, not only in English language class but also in other subjects. Unfortunately, this kind of alternative assessment and student activities are not practiced widely in public schools as traditional assessments are more observed. Students should be encouraged to do posters and present oral presentations. Such classroom practices that involve drawing and colouring are very suitable for young learners. When done especially at a young age, it also taps and accelerates the offset of their creativity and higher-order thinking skills. This kind of assessment encourages students to speak English as a foreign language inside the classroom and will also improve their communication outside the real world. Given these students are only able to practice the English language only during the English lessons and not at home, another imperative issue revealed from analyzing the scores is that a maximum of 35% of the students need improvements and thus, require more attention and support from the English teacher. Therefore, oral presentation as an assessment activity will raise their confidence in communication and improve oral performance.

Furthermore, by conducting this alternative assessment, a customized task-specific rubric was designed and this rubric allowed the educator to identify validly and exactly which students need improvement in each of the four components of the oral skills. This is vital information on student learning needs that were masked by traditional assessments that were conducted before. Therefore, by revisiting the literature on alternative assessment, as educators, we understand that teachers' traditionally implemented classroom assessment alone is not enough.

Alternative assessment when carefully crafted to be aligned to the learning outcome and learning activities scaffolds students' critical learning needs. It is also recommended that when developing a rubric to validly evaluate a student's learning process, the educator should prioritize validity and beyond that reflect on the feedback provided by the students (Andrade, 2000; Mustafa & Raisha, 2021). In a nutshell, to increase communication and improve young learners' foreign

language skills, and understand the strengths and weaknesses in their learning process, it will be more beneficial to include students' perspectives about what exactly they need to improve and learn in their oral presentation. Incorporating their 'voice' into the teaching and learning process will augment the assessment practices as well, making student feedback vital as well. Future studies can study this aspect of feedback in oral presentation as an alternative assessment among second language young learners.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Oral Presentation Rubric

Student name: **Class:** **Date:** **Time:**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement		Mark
Vocabulary	Family vocabulary used in a correct and appropriate way	Family vocabulary is used but not few mistakes to describe them in the context	Family vocabulary used with limitation	Family vocabulary is Poor	**Excellent** **Good** **Fair** **Needs Improvement**	9-10 1 6-8 2 3-5 3 0-2 4
Pronunciation	Student' pronunciation is clear with appropriate communication	Student have few pronunciation mistakes with good communication	Student have few pronunciation and communication mistakes	Student have poor pronunciation and misunderstand of the meaning of the words	**Excellent** **Good** **Fair** **Needs Improvement**	9-10 1 6-8 2 3-5 3 0-2 4
Task	Student is fully understanding the task and complete it perfectly	Student is understanding the task and complete it in a good way	Student makes an effort to complete the task	Student does not complete the task	**Excellent** **Good** **Fair** **Needs Improvement**	9-10 1 6-8 2 3-5 3 0-2 4
Fluency	Student demonstrate excellent degree of fluency by having clear idea that is not difficult to follow	Student demonstrate good degree of fluency by have clear idea with a little hesitation to speak	Student demonstrate ability to speak but with confusion	Student demonstrate poor ability to speak	**Excellent** **Good** **Fair** **Needs Improvement**	9-10 1 6-8 2 3-5 3 0-2 4