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Rethinking Evaluation: A Case for Speaking Tests in Engineering Classrooms in Bangladesh

Abdulla-All-Mijan[1*], Saila Ahmed[2], Md Rabiul Hasan[3], Mehedi Hasan[4]

[1,2]*Department of Humanities, Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology, Bangladesh*
[3,4]*Department of Building Engineering & Construction Management, Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology, Bangladesh*

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the necessity of integrating speaking tests into the evaluation framework of engineering education in Bangladesh, where English is primarily taught as an elective subject. The current reliance on outdated evaluation methodologies, coupled with inadequate infrastructural support, significantly hampers engineering students' ability to cultivate essential speaking skills, thereby affecting their academic trajectory and career readiness. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from 500 students, 50 faculty members, and 10 departments across leading engineering universities and some engineering departments of private universities, the findings reveal that the absence of formal speaking tests suppresses student engagement in communicative activities. Furthermore, the study highlights systemic shortcomings, particularly in pedagogical practices and institutional support. This research advocates for a comprehensive reform of existing evaluation strategies, emphasizing the inclusion of speaking tests as a core component of the curriculum. Such reforms would address critical gaps in students' oral proficiency and enhance their capacity to navigate real-world communication challenges.

1. Introduction

English is a required subject in engineering classrooms from the very first-grade level up, yet speaking is undervalued in the contexts of teaching and learning. When learning a language is solely for exam preparation, pupils are inclined to concentrate mainly on the subjects that may be included in the tests or evaluations. According to McEwan [1], the phenomenon of valuing things that are mostly appraised occurs when what is evaluated turns into what is valued, which turns into what is taught. So, we discover a quick technique to get excellent results on the evaluation and get rid of subjects that were not typically tested. Subjects are more likely to be graded according to their likelihood of appearing on the test. The following curriculum offers a different perspective on this grade [2]. The development of pupils' English communication abilities is given a lot of attention in our present educational system. Although speaking is a popular form of communication, education

* Corresponding author: Department of Humanities, Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology, Bangladesh
E-mail addresses: mijan@hum.ruet.ac.bd (Abdulla-All-Mijan)

planners at the undergraduate level place less emphasis on this ability. A rising understanding of the value of diversity and inclusion in educational settings has emerged in recent years. The inclusion of speech in the evaluation process, especially in courses with an engineering focus, is one facet of this [3].

This is especially relevant in Bangladesh, where engineering education is highly valued. Strong technical skills are frequently required of engineering students, but it is uncommon for assessments to be made of their ability to successfully communicate these talents, particularly in English. The absence of speaking evaluations in engineering courses might make it more difficult for students to interact with classmates, communicate professionally, and explain how they comprehend difficult subjects. Since many colleges use English as their primary language of instruction, speaking ability improvement should take precedence over technical knowledge acquisition.

The purpose of this case study is to examine the function of speaking evaluations in Bangladeshi undergraduate engineering courses. It specifically looks at how much speech is taken into account throughout the evaluation process, the difficulties teachers and students have, and the possible advantages of including speaking tests into engineering education. Through examining these problems, the research hopes to provide useful advice to teachers who want to use speech evaluations in their classrooms, promoting a more impartial approach to language acquisition and assessment.

Finding the place of spoken assessments in the larger scheme of Bangladeshi undergraduate engineering education is the main goal of this study. Furthermore, the study intends to pinpoint the difficulties instructors encounter when evaluating their students' speaking skills and offer workable solutions to these issues. The ultimate goal of this research is to advance a more fair and inclusive educational setting where all students can thrive in both technical courses and critical communication abilities.

The study will add to the growing body of knowledge regarding the value of speaking assessments in higher education, especially in schools with an engineering focus.

2. Literature review

According to Richards [4], the speaking ability was not prioritized in the schools using traditional techniques, with the focus instead placed on reading and writing abilities. For instance, speaking and listening abilities were not given the same importance as reading and writing in The Grammar-Translation technique. According to Penny, speaking is the most significant of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing [5], and its inclusion in assessments is crucial for effective communication. Haque & Zarin [6] identify the elements that influence students' speaking abilities, such as drive, self-assurance, anxiety, time, and planning. Support, performance standards, Listening skills, and feedback during speaking Activities. The easiest method to modify students' learning is to change the assessment system, according to Biggs [7]. Assessments are what lead to institutional learning.

Speaking ability, therefore, continues to be a lofty ideal or an ill-defined concept that is presumed to be challenging for kids to attain. Speaking does not receive the same amount of time or attention while teaching English to first-year secondary school pupils as reading and writing do. This may be because the examination methodology used only looks at reading and writing abilities and ignores speaking and listening abilities. Pupils worry about making errors, feel bashful, or are afraid of being judged. Due to huge courses and the tendency of certain students to dominate, while others say very little or not at all, they are unmotivated to express themselves. One participant can speak once. Students who speak the same mother tongue frequently do so because it is simpler and they feel less exposed if they do so [8]. It is about time we understood how important speaking skills, more so than English language skills, are. The required three hours of English each week are insufficient to effectively build conversational abilities. Teachers' jobs are extremely challenging due to a lack of time, an outrageous teacher-student ratio, and the various English proficiency levels in each class.

There are a few explanations given by Harmer [9] as to why students employ their native tongue in speaking sessions. The first is that students will attempt to utilize their language when professors ask them to speak on a subject about which they are not sufficiently knowledgeable. The second reason is that using one's mother tongue in a practical setting comes extremely naturally to students. If teachers do not encourage their students to communicate in English, students will inevitably utilize their native tongue when explaining anything to their classmates. Another justification is that if professors consistently communicate with their students in their native tongue, the students would feel at ease doing the same in their speaking lessons. The unique aspects of spoken languages, such as their sound system, stress patterns, intonation patterns, turn-taking techniques, and sociolinguistic norms, are not taught to pupils by teachers. They assert that if students' speaking abilities are not assessed through the official written examination system, such instruction would be useless.

Teaching speaking and listening skills: a scenario of young Bangladeshi learners was the topic of a study conducted by Haque & Zarin [6]. The researcher's methods for data collection included a questionnaire survey, classroom observations, and interviews as they investigated the situation of teaching as "speaking and listening to young learners."

Fernandez [10] discovered that adding speaking quizzes to an engineering course aided students in improving their communication abilities and grasp of the subject matter. In a similar vein, Shantha & Mekala's [11] study discovered that speaking evaluations encouraged student involvement and teamwork in an engineering course. "If we want to establish inclusive engineering classrooms and laboratories, we need to develop evaluations that represent the variety of our students' backgrounds and skills," written by Agoki et al. [12]. With this in mind, further study and experimentation are required to determine the best ways to integrate spoken evaluations into engineering-focused classes in Bangladesh and to create plans for helping students from various language backgrounds participate in this process.

According to Korhonen and Räisänen's research from 2017, pupils who got feedback on their speaking abilities did better on subsequent exams and had a better grasp of the course material. Speaking evaluations added to a language learning curriculum, according to Wahyudi [13], increased students' fluency, accuracy, and overall language competency. For speech assessments to be fair and valid, Requena et al. [14] contend that clear and impartial assessment standards are necessary. The possibility of subjectivity and prejudice in speaking competence evaluations is another difficulty. For instance, studies show that teachers' biases and expectations might affect how well they rate students' speaking abilities [15]. A rising number of people are also interested in using technology to support speaking evaluations, for instance by using automated voice recognition techniques [16].

This study explores the necessity of the speaking tests for engineering students in Bangladesh. It attempts to find out the potential benefits of incorporating speaking assessments into inclusive and equitable learning environments, based on the findings of previous research. The research will additionally tackle the particular obstacles that educators and learners encounter in the Bangladeshi setting and put forth workable ideas to improve the efficacy of oral evaluations in engineering education. In order to guarantee that speaking abilities receive the consideration they merit during the evaluation process, this research attempts to close the gap between theory and practice.

3. Research Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of the inclusion of speaking assessments in engineering-centric classrooms. The quantitative aspect involves surveying a large sample of students and faculty members, while the qualitative aspect focuses on in-depth interviews to explore attitudes and challenges related to speaking assessments. The questionnaires were converted into Likert's scale which were analysed by a statistically analysing software named IBM SPSS 25. This design allows for a broad understanding of the current practices and a deeper insight into underlying issues.

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was used to represent various departments and classroom settings of Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology (RUET), Khulna University of Engineering & Technology (KUET), European University of Bangladesh (EUB), Varendra University (VU), City University (CU), ensuring diverse student and lecturer perspectives. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The questionnaires gathered quantitative data from students and teachers on speaking assessments, while interviews with teachers and department chairpersons explored challenges in assessing speaking skills. Classroom observations captured real-time evaluation methods and the integration of speaking in classroom activities. This multi-method approach provided both quantitative and qualitative insights.

Sample size

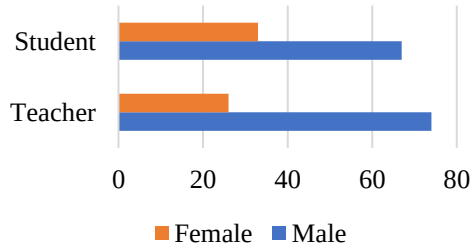

Figure 1. Demographic details of the sampling data in percentage.

The sample consists of 500 undergraduate students, 50 teachers, and 10 departments from different universities of Bangladesh where class test and final exam exist in the assessment process of RUET & KUET. On the contrary, class test, mid-term and final exam exist in the assessment process of EUB, VU & CU. This sample size ensures statistical significance for the quantitative analysis and provides detailed qualitative insights into teachers' assessment practices and challenges. **Figure 1** illustrates the distribution of departments, teachers, and students at the institution, showing an average of 50 teachers per department across 10 departments. Of the 50 faculty members, 74% are male and 26% are female. Similarly, the student body consists of 500 students, with 67% male and 33% female. This breakdown highlights the gender disparities in both the faculty and student populations within the institutions.

4. Data analysis

Table 1 and the **Figure 2** display the results of a survey conducted to determine the opinions of teachers and students regarding the inclusion of speaking activities in class tests and mid-term examinations. The data is presented in frequency and percentage format, and the categories of representatives are teachers and students. For the inclusion of speaking in class tests, many teachers strongly agreed (76%), while students had a higher percentage of agreement and strong agreement combined (68.4% + 11.2% = 79.6%). On the other hand, 12% of teachers disagreed with the inclusion of speaking in class tests, while only 2.4% of students disagreed. For the inclusion of speaking in mid-term examinations, both teachers and students had a higher percentage of agreement and strong agreement combined (58% + 62% = 120%) compared to the other categories. The percentage of those who disagreed was higher for teachers (6%) than for students (7.4%). In conclusion, many teachers and students agree or strongly agree that speaking activities should be included in class tests and mid-term examinations, although teachers were slightly less in favour of inclusion in mid-term examinations compared to students.

Table 1. Survey results for the inclusion of speaking in the class tests and mid-term examinations.

Exam Types	Likert's scale	Category of representatives					
		Teacher		Student		Sub Total	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Class test	Strongly agree	4	8%	56	11.2%	60	10.9%
	Disagree	6	12%	12	2.4%	18	3.3%
	Neutral	0	0%	2	0.4%	2	0.4%
	Agree	2	4%	88	17.6%	90	16.4%
	Strongly Disagree	38	76%	342	68.4%	380	69.1%
Mid-term	Strongly agree	5	10%	23	4.6%	28	5.1%
	Disagree	3	6%	37	7.4%	40	7.3%
	Neutral	2	4%	9	1.8%	11	2.0%
	Agree	11	22%	121	24.2%	132	24%
	Strongly Disagree	29	58%	310	62%	339	61.6%

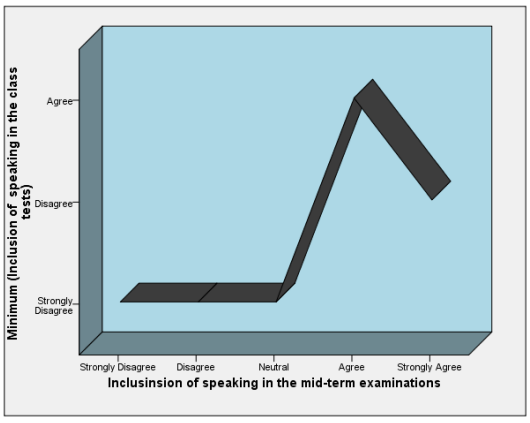

Figure 2. Plot for the inclusion of speaking in the class tests and mid-term examinations.

Table 2 showed the descriptive statistics for teachers' and students' opinions on including speaking in class tests and mid-term exams. For class tests, teachers' mean score was 4.28, with a median and mode of 5. The standard deviation was 1.386, indicating some variability, while the skewness (-1.583) and kurtosis (0.783) pointed to a negatively skewed and relatively flat distribution. For mid-term exams, the mean was 4.12, with similar median, mode, and distribution patterns. Students' mean scores were slightly higher (4.30 and 4.32), with less variability and more extreme skewness and kurtosis. Overall, both groups support including speaking activities, with high scores and negatively skewed distributions, indicating fewer low scores.

Table 2. Statistical analysis for the inclusion of speaking in the class tests and mid-term examinations.

Category	Statistical tools	Exam types	
Teacher	Mean	CT	MT
	Median	4.28	4.12
	Mode	5.00	5.00
	Std. Deviation	5	5
	Skewness	1.386	1.335
	Kurtosis	-1.583	-1.462
Student	Mean	0.783	0.842
	Median	4.30	4.32

	Mode	5.00	5.00
	Std. Deviation	5	5
	Skewness	1.307	1.118
	Kurtosis	-1.837	-1.760

Table 3 provided data on the opinions of teachers and students regarding the inclusion of speaking in the final exam and the availability of facilities for listening activities. The table includes the frequency and percentage of responses for each category. The data indicates that many of both teachers and students strongly agree that speaking activities should be included in the final exam, with 66% of teachers and 55.2% of students selecting this option. Additionally, 29.1% of respondents agree that speaking should be included in the final exam. Regarding the availability of facilities for listening activities, most both teachers and students also strongly agree that these facilities are available, with 56% of teachers and 53.6% of students selecting this option. Furthermore, 31.5% of respondents agree that these facilities are available. In contrast, a small percentage of both teachers and students disagreed with the inclusion of speaking activities in the final exam or the availability of facilities for listening activities. Overall, the data suggest that both teachers and students place importance on the inclusion of speaking activities in the final exam and the availability of facilities for listening activities. Many respondents strongly agreed with both statements, indicating that these are valued aspects of language education.

Table 3. Survey results for the inclusion of speaking in the final exam and facilities of listening.

Category of questionnaire	Likert's scale	Category of representatives					
		Teacher		Student		Sub Total	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Final exam	Strongly agree	3	6%	44	8.8%	47	8.5%
	Disagree	7	14%	14	2.8%	21	3.8%
	Neutral	0	0%	13	2.6%	13	2.4%
	Agree	7	14%	153	30.6%	160	29.1%
	Strongly Disagree	33	66%	276	55.2%	309	56.2%
Facilities of listening	Strongly agree	4	8%	21	4.2%	25	4.5%
	Disagree	5	10%	39	7.8%	44	8.0%
	Neutral	1	2%	11	2.2%	12	2.2%
	Agree	12	24%	161	32.2%	173	31.5%
	Strongly Disagree	28	56%	268	53.6%	296	53.8%

Table 4 presented the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis values regarding the inclusion of speaking in the final exam and facilities for listening activities, as perceived by teachers and students. The mean scores are high for both groups: 4.20 for teachers and 4.21 for students regarding speaking inclusion, and 4.10 for teachers and 4.23 for students regarding listening facilities. The median and mode for both variables are 5.00, indicating strong agreement among respondents. Low standard deviation values suggest that opinions are closely aligned. Negative skewness indicates a leftward tilt in the data, reflecting generally positive views about speaking inclusion and listening facilities. Positive kurtosis suggests heavier tails than a normal distribution, implying the presence of more extreme responses. The sample size for this analysis includes a diverse group of teachers and students, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. Additionally, the data was collected through structured questionnaires, which facilitated clear and concise responses regarding their experiences and opinions. However, the statistical data indicate that both teachers and students view the inclusion of speaking in exams and listening facilities positively. These findings highlight the importance of integrating comprehensive language skills into assessments to meet the expectations and preferences of both educators and learners.

Table 4. Statistical analysis for the inclusion of speaking in the final exam and facilities of listening.

Category	Statistical tools	Exam types	
Teacher	Mean	Final	Facilities of listening
	Median	4.20	4.10
	Mode	5.00	5.00
	Std. Deviation	5	5

	Skewness	1.325	1.313
	Kurtosis	-1.426	-1.374
Student	Mean	.492	.581
	Median	4.21	4.23
	Mode	5.00	5.00
	Std. Deviation	5	5
	Skewness	1.201	1.094
	Kurtosis	-1.760	-1.605

Table 5 and the **Figure 3** presented the responses of teachers and students on three different issues related to language learning. The first issue concerns the suitability of sitting furniture; the second issue relates to the exclusion of speaking at the undergraduate level, and the third issue is about the attention given to speaking compared to writing and reading. Regarding the suitability of sitting furniture, 62% of teachers and 58.6% of students strongly agree that the sitting furniture is suitable for language learning. 18% of teachers and 27.2% of students agree that the sitting furniture is suitable for language learning. Regarding the exclusion of speaking at the undergraduate level, 58% of teachers and 56.6% of students strongly agree that speaking should not be excluded from the undergraduate level. 22% of teachers and 29.2% of students agree that speaking should not be excluded from the undergraduate level. Regarding the attention given to speaking compared to writing and reading, 54% of teachers and 55.4% of students strongly agree that less attention is given to speaking than to writing and reading. 26% of teachers and 30.4% of students agree that less attention is given to speaking than to writing and reading. Overall, the data suggested that both teachers and students feel that sitting furniture is suitable for language learning and that speaking should not be excluded from the undergraduate level.

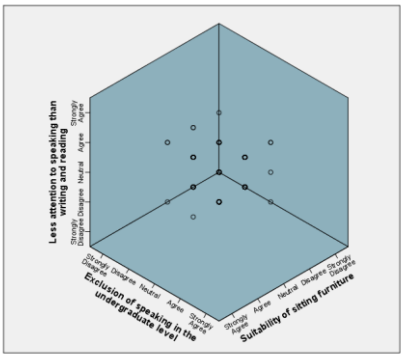

Figure 3. Plot for the comparison of suitability of sitting furniture, exclusion of speaking at the undergraduate level, and less attention to speaking and writing.

Table 5. Survey results for suitability of sitting furniture, exclusion of speaking at the undergraduate level, and less attention to speaking than writing and reading.

Category of questionnaire	Likert's scale	Category of representatives					
		Teacher		Student		Sub Total	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Suitability of sitting furniture	Strongly agree	4	8%	43	8.6%	47	8.5%
	Disagree	5	10%	15	3.0%	20	3.6%
	Neutral	1	2%	13	2.6%	14	2.5%
	Agree	9	18%	136	27.2%	145	26.4%
	Strongly Disagree	31	62%	293	58.6%	324	58.9%
Undergraduate speaking exclusion	Strongly agree	4	8%	22	4.4%	26	4.7%
	Disagree	5	10%	39	7.8%	44	8.0%
	Neutral	1	2%	10	2.0%	11	2.0%
	Agree	11	22%	146	29.2%	157	28.5%
	Strongly Disagree	29	58%	283	56.6%	312	56.7%
Speaking is overlooked than writing and reading	Strongly agree	2	4%	36	7.2%	38	6.9%
	Disagree	6	12%	20	4.0%	26	4.7%
	Neutral	2	4%	15	3.0%	17	3.1%
	Agree	4	8%	43	8.6%	47	8.5%
	Strongly Disagree	5	10%	15	3.0%	20	3.6%

Table 6 presented the responses of teachers and students on three different issues related to language learning. The first issue concerns the suitability of sitting furniture; the second issue relates to the exclusion of speaking at the undergraduate level, and the third issue is about the attention given to speaking compared to writing and reading. The data in the table show the frequency and percentage of responses for each category of representatives. Regarding the suitability of sitting furniture, 62% of teachers and 58.6% of students strongly agree that the sitting furniture is suitable for language learning. 18% of teachers and 27.2% of students agree that the sitting furniture is suitable for language learning. Regarding the exclusion of speaking at the undergraduate level, 58% of teachers and 56.6% of students strongly agree that speaking should not be excluded from the undergraduate level. 22% of teachers and 29.2% of students agree that speaking should not be excluded from the undergraduate level. Regarding the attention given to speaking compared to writing and reading, 54% of teachers and 55.4% of students strongly agree that less attention is given to speaking than to writing and reading. 26% of teachers and 30.4% of students agree that less attention is given to speaking than to writing and reading. Overall, the data suggest that both teachers and students feel that sitting furniture is suitable for language learning and that speaking should not be excluded from the undergraduate level. However, both groups also feel that less attention is given to speaking than to writing and reading.

Table 6. Statistical analysis for the inclusion of speaking in the final exam and facilities of listening.

Category	Statistical tools	Category of questionnaire		
Teacher	Mean	Suitability of sitting furniture	Undergraduate speaking exclusion	Speaking is overlooked than writing and reading
	Median	4.16	4.12	4.14
	Mode	5.00	5.00	5.00
	Std. Deviation	5	5	5
	Skewness	1.330	1.319	1.195
	Kurtosis	-1.443	-1.396	-1.326
Student	Mean	.673	.607	.630
	Median	4.24	4.26	4.23
	Mode	5.00	5.00	5.00
	Std. Deviation	5	5	5
	Skewness	1.204	1.109	1.159
	Kurtosis	-1.767	-1.647	-1.725

5. Conclusion

In engineering classrooms, the techniques, syllabus, materials, and evaluation are expedient to a lesser amount for improving the speaking ability of the students at the undergraduate level, but there is still significant potential for development in these contexts. Speaking is not evaluated in department exams, which has a detrimental impact on the undergraduate teaching of speaking. As speaking is not tested during the undergraduate examination, many teachers do not plan to set up speaking activities in the classroom. Speaking is now included in the evaluation process, which provides a few advantages for both instructors and students, according to the engineering classrooms in the Bangladesh case study.

First, speaking evaluations may provide teachers with a more thorough picture of students' language skills, which can be useful in creating suitable learning activities and offering feedback. Also, it may inspire instructors to incorporate more speaking exercises into their classes, fostering the growth of language and communication abilities.

The second benefit of including speaking assessments in the curriculum is that it will increase students' interest and involvement in the learning process. This is because it gives pupils the chance to hone their public speaking abilities, which may raise their self-esteem and promote active involvement in class. Also, adding speech evaluations to the curriculum might aid students in refining their analytical and problem-solving abilities. This is because they must be able to articulate their

thoughts and opinions logically and clearly, which might improve their capacity for data analysis and evaluation. Thus, speaking is a significant tool for fostering language acquisition and communication, and so its inclusion and continuation in the evaluation process should be made compulsory. Therefore, it is obvious from the data analysis that integrating speaking activities into the evaluation process of engineering-oriented classrooms in Bangladesh demonstrates the immense possibility of significant advantages for both educators and learners.

6. Recommendations

Engineering programs in Bangladesh, like in many other countries, tend to focus heavily on technical subjects, often at the expense of soft skills such as speaking. This imbalance can limit graduates' overall employability in global markets where communication skills are equally valued. The proposed reforms could bridge this gap, but they also require a cultural shift in how both students and instructors perceive the importance of speaking skills in technical disciplines. The findings of this study emphasize the need to meaningfully revise the undergraduate speaking tests for engineering students in Bangladesh. Based on these findings, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. The instructors should design a reliable method to assess students' proficiency in English speaking. Without consistent evaluation, students may lose motivation to improve their speaking skills, which are crucial in professional and academic settings.
2. Including speaking exams would encourage students to develop their verbal communication skills, which are often required in job interviews, presentations, and collaborative projects in professional environments.
3. The institutional management should ensure the availability of adequate technical tools to support a standardized and fair evaluation process. Without these resources, even the best evaluation plans might falter, leading to inconsistent assessments and further undermining students' development in speaking skills.
4. To facilitate effective speaking assessments, textbooks should include standard and relevant materials that align with the goals of speaking evaluations.
5. Training programs for the instructor could focus on modern methods of assessing speaking skills, feedback techniques, and best practices for creating an engaging learning environment where students feel encouraged to participate verbally.
6. Peer assessments and group discussions should be integrated into the classroom to foster a collaborative learning environment. Allowing students to engage in regular conversations, debates, or presentations with their peers can enhance their speaking confidence and fluency, preparing them for real-world communication scenarios.
7. Frequent practice sessions or workshops focused on public speaking and professional communication should be introduced into the curriculum. These sessions could provide students with a safe space to practice speaking in front of others and receive constructive feedback, which is essential for long-term improvement and mastery of communication skills.

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