# THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES (ACTFL) ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW ON ASSESSING SPEAKING SKILL IN ENGLISH PREPARATORY SCHOOLS AT HIGHER EDUCATION IN TURKEY

Emrah Gültekin
171113202

**MASTER THESIS**

Department of Foreign Language Education
English Language Teaching Programme
Advisor: Asst. Prof. Hakan Dilman

İstanbul
T.C. Maltepe University
Graduate School
February, 2022

# THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES (ACTFL) ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW ON ASSESSING SPEAKING SKILL IN ENGLISH PREPARATORY SCHOOLS AT HIGHER EDUCATION IN TURKEY

Emrah Gültekin
171113202
Orcid: 0000-0003-1120-1759

**MASTER THESIS**

Department of Foreign Language Education
English Language Teaching Programme
Advisor: Asst. Prof. Hakan Dilman

Istanbul
T.C. Maltepe University
Graduate School
February, 2022



# JÜRİ VE ENSTİTÜ ONAYI

Bu belge, Yükseköğretim Kurulu tarafından 19.01.2021 tarihli *"Lisansüstü Tezlerin Elektronik Ortamda Toplanması, Düzenlenmesi ve Erişime Açılmasına İlişkin Yönerge"* ile bildirilen 6689 Sayılı Kişisel Verilerin Korunması Kanunu kapsamında gizlenmiştir.

# ETİK İLKE VE KURALLARA UYUM BEYANI

Bu belge, Yükseköğretim Kurulu tarafından 19.01.2021 tarihli *"Lisansüstü Tezlerin Elektronik Ortamda Toplanması, Düzenlenmesi ve Erişime Açılmasına İlişkin Yönerge"* ile bildirilen 6689 Sayılı Kişisel Verilerin Korunması Kanunu kapsamında gizlenmiştir.

# DEDICATION

I would like to state my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Assist. Prof. Hakan Dilman for his guidance and encouragement.

I am deeply grateful to Fevzi İşssever for offering solutions with insightful ideas.

I would like to express my gratitude to Eren Aygün for supporting me along the process.

Last but foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Saadet Yıldız Gültekin, who has stood by me all the time. She has always given me support, help, and love throughout this entire process.

Emrah Gültekin

February, 2022

# ÖZ

# AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES (ACTFL) SÖZEL YETKİNLİK MÜLAKAT SINAVININ TÜRKİYE'DEKİ YÜKSEKÖĞRETİM KURUMLARININ İNGİLİZCE HAZIRLIK OKULLARINDA KONUŞMA BECERİSİNİN ÖLÇÜLMESİNE ETKİSİ

Emrah Gültekin
Yüksek Lisans Tezi
Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı
İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Yüksek Lisans Programı
Danışman: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Hakan Dilman
Maltepe Üniversitesi, Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü, 2022

Bu çalışmanın amacı yükseköğretim kurumlarının İngilizce hazırlık sınıflarında, ACTFL Sözel Yetkinlik Mülakat Sınavı'nın öğrencilerin konuşma becerisini ölçmede etkili ve fonksiyonel bir yöntem olup olmadığını araştırmaktır. Veri toplamak amacıyla Türkiye'deki bir vakıf üniversitesinin İngilizce hazırlık sınıfında öğrenim gören sekiz öğrenciye ACTFL Sözel Yetkinlik Mülakat Sınavı uygulanmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucu, ACTFL Sözel Yetkinlik Mülakat Sınavı'nın yükseköğretim kurumlarının İngilizce hazırlık sınıflarında konuşma becerisini ölçmede etkili ve fonksiyonel bir yöntem olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Öğrencilerin varsayılan seviyeleri ACTFL Sözel Yetkinlik Mülakat Sınavı sonuçları ile kıyaslandığında, öğrencilerin varsayılan seviyelerinin ACTFL Sözel Yetkinlik Mülakat Sınavı sonuçları ile uyumlu olmadığı saptanmıştır. Öğrencilerin bu sınavdaki konuşmaları kelime türleri ve seviyeleri açısından incelendiğinde, elde edilen sonuç doğrulanmıştır. Bununla birlikte öğrencilerle yapılan röportajlarda, öğrenciler okuldaki konuşma sınavına kıyasla büyük ölçüde ACTFL Sözel Yetkinlik Mülakat Sınavı'nda kendilerini daha etkili biçimde ifade edebildiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bu çalışma yükseköğretim kurumlarının İngilizce hazırlık sınıflarında konuşma becerisinin ölçülmesinde ACTFL Sözel Yetkinlik Mülakat Sınavı'nın etkili ve fonksiyonel bir araç olabileceğini ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular öğrenciler, öğretmenler, ölçme değerlendirme birimi çalışanları ve yöneticiler için önemli sonuçlar ortaya koymuştur.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Konuşma Becerisi, Konuşma Becerisini Ölçme, Konuşma Sınavı, ACTFL Sözel Yetkinlik Mülakat Sınavı.

# ABSTRACT

# THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES (ACTFL) ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW ON ASSESSING SPEAKING SKILL IN ENGLISH PREPARATORY SCHOOLS AT HIGHER EDUCATION IN TURKEY

Emrah Gültekin
Master Thesis
Department of Foreign Language Education
English Language Teaching Programme
Thesis Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Hakan Dilman
Maltepe University, Graduate School, 2022

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is an effective and functional method in assessing students' speaking skills in English preparatory classes of higher education institutions. In order to collect data, the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview was administered to eight students studying in the English preparatory class of a foundation university in Turkey. The result of the study revealed that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is an effective and functional method for assessing speaking skill in English preparatory classes of higher education institutions. When the students' assumed levels were compared with the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview results, it was found that the students' assumed levels were not compatible with the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview results. When the speeches of the students in this exam were examined in terms of word types and levels, the result was confirmed. However, in interviews with students, students stated that they were able to express themselves more effectively in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview compared to the speaking exam administered at school. This study revealed that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview can be an effective and functional tool in assessing speaking skills in English preparatory classes of higher education institutions. Findings revealed significant results for students, teachers, assessment unit staff and administrators.

**Keywords:** Speaking Skill, Assessing Speaking Skill, Speaking Exam, ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

JÜRİ VE ENSTİTÜ ONAYI ..... ii
ETİK İLKE VE KURALLARA UYUM BEYANI ..... iii
DEDICATION ..... iv
ABSTRACT ..... vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... vii
LIST OF TABLES ..... x
LIST OF FIGURES ..... xi
ABBREVIATIONS ..... xii
CURRICULUM VITAE ..... xiii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION ..... 1
1.1 The Research Background ..... 1
1.2 Statement of the Problem ..... 3
1.3 The Purpose of The Study ..... 4
1.4 The Significance of the Research ..... 5
1.5 Statement of Assumptions ..... 6
1.6 Statement of Limitations ..... 6
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 8
2.1 English Preparatory Schools at Higher Education in Turkey ..... 8
2.2 Speaking as a Skill and Its Significance ..... 9
2.3 Testing Speaking ..... 10
2.3.1 Need and Different Ways ..... 12
2.4 Characteristics of a Useful Test ..... 12
2.4.1 Reliability ..... 13
2.4.1.1 Inter-rater Reliability ..... 14
2.4.1.2 Intra-rater Reliability ..... 15
2.4.2 Validity ..... 15
2.4.2.1 Content Validity ..... 15
2.4.2.2 Face Validity ..... 15
2.4.2.3 Criterion-related Validity ..... 16
2.4.2.4 Validity in Scoring ..... 16
2.4.3 Authenticity ..... 16
2.4.4 Practicality ..... 16
2.5 Speaking Test Scales ..... 17

2.5.1 Holistic Scales ..... 17
2.5.2 Analytic Scales ..... 18
2.6 History of Language Tests and Assessing Speaking Skills ..... 18
2.7 ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI) ..... 20
2.7.1 ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview as a Language Assessment ..... 20
2.7.2 The Use of ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview and Speaking Tests in Turkey ..... 22
2.8 The ACTFL Rating Scale ..... 23
2.8.1 ACTFL OPI Major levels ..... 23
2.8.1.1 Distinguished ..... 23
2.8.1.2 Superior ..... 24
2.8.1.3 Advanced ..... 24
2.8.1.4 Intermediate ..... 25
2.8.1.5 Novice ..... 25
2.8.2 The “High” sublevel ..... 26
2.8.3 The “Mid” sublevel ..... 27
2.8.4 The “Low” sublevel ..... 27
2.9 The Assessment Criteria in ACTFL OPI ..... 28
2.10 The Phases of the ACTFL OPI ..... 30
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY ..... 32
3.1 The Research Questions ..... 32
3.2 The Hypotheses ..... 32
3.2 The Research Design ..... 33
3.3 Setting ..... 33
3.4 Participants of the Research ..... 35
3.5 Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation ..... 35
3.6 Current Speaking Exam at School ..... 36
3.6.1 Exam Preparation Process ..... 36
3.6.2 Speaking Exam’s Procedure ..... 49
3.7 The similarities and differences between the current speaking exam and ACTFL OPI ..... 52
3.8 A lexical analysis of the transcription of students’ speech in ACTFL OPI ..... 57
3.9 Interview ..... 58
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION ..... 59
4.1 An Overview of Findings ..... 59
4.2 Student A ..... 61
4.3 Student B ..... 63
4.4 Student C ..... 64
4.5 Student D ..... 66

4.6 Student E ..... 68
4.7 Student F ..... 70
4.8 Student G ..... 72
4.9 Student H ..... 74
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..... 76

5.1 Recommendations for Further Research ..... 80
APPENDICES ..... 82

APPENDIX A ..... 82
APPENDIX B ..... 83
REFERENCES ..... 84

# LIST OF TABLES

**Table 1:** Potential factors affecting testing process ..... 14

**Table 2:** ACTFL OPI rubric..... 29

**Table 3:** Phases of ACTFL OPI..... 31

**Table 4:** A sample task delegation chart for preparing an exam at the foundation university where the research was conducted..... 37

**Table 5:** A sample objective chart at the foundation university where the research was conducted..... 42

**Table 6:** A sample checklist for preparing an exam at the foundation university where the research was conducted..... 44

**Table 7:** Speaking exam assessment rubric at the foundation university where the research was conducted ..... 51

**Table 8:** A comparison of the speaking exam at school and ACTFL OPI ..... 56

**Table 9:** The comparison of ACTFL OPI scores and the program level of students..... 60

**Table 10:** The lexical analysis of student A..... 62

**Table 11:** The lexical analysis of student B..... 64

**Table 12:** The lexical analysis of student C..... 65

**Table 13:** The lexical analysis of student D..... 67

**Table 14:** The lexical analysis of student E ..... 69

**Table 15:** The lexical analysis of student F ..... 71

**Table 16:** The lexical analysis of student G..... 73

**Table 17:** The lexical analysis of student H..... 75

# LIST OF FIGURES

**Figure 1:** ACTFL OPI levels ..... 26

**Figure 2:** ACTFL OPI Sub levels ..... 27

**Figure 3:** A comparison of ACTFL OPI scores and CEFR levels ..... 30

**Figure 4:** Exam preparation process at the foundation university where the research was conducted ..... 49

**Figure 5:** Oral proficiency levels in the workplace ..... 55

# ABBREVIATIONS

**ACTFL** : American Council On The Teaching Of Foreign Languages

**ALM** : Audio-lingual Method

**CEF** : Common European Framework

**CEFR** : Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

**CIA** : Central Intelligence Agency

**DLIELC** : Defence Language Institute English Language Center

**DLIFLC**: : Defence Language Institute Foreign Language Center

**FSI** : Foreign Service Institute

**ILR** : Interagency Language Roundtable

**OPI** : Oral Proficiency Interview

**SLA** : Second Language Acquisition

**TOEFL** : Test of English as a Foreign Language

# CURRICULUM VITAE

**Emrah Gültekin**

**English Language Teaching**

**Education**

| *Degree* | *Year* | *University, Institute, Science/Art Major* |
|---|---|---|
| MA | 2022 | Maltepe University, Department of English Language Teaching |
| BA | 2011 | Boğazici University, English Language Teaching |
| High School | 2006 | Çorum Anatolian Teachers Training High School |

**Professional Experience**

| *Year* | *Position* |
|---|---|
| 2017 – Present | Unit Supervisor – Istanbul Medipol University |
| 2016 – Present | English Language Instructor – Istanbul Medipol University |
| 2015 – 2016 | Vice Head at SUREM – Istanbul 29 Mayıs University |
| 2013 – 2016 | English Language Instructor – Istanbul 29 Mayıs University |

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Being proficient in speaking skill is one of the fundamental components of knowing a language. The improvement in technology and having new inventions have given us a lot of opportunities to communicate with people all around the world, and this change lead to new paths in learning a second or foreign language. It can't be denied that learning a new language and having more opportunities in career are correlated to each other, therefore it is crucial for students to study and speak a foreign language. As Inman (1979) stated, a lot of research have proved that international companies regard speaking a foreign language as an important asset in the business world.

Communicating in one more language gives us the opportunity to comprehend other people speaking that language. Fostering speaking skills is important at schools, and a need in business, due to the consistently expanding requests of business world in the 21st century. Developing our students' speaking skills in the target language is one of the basic expectations from EFL instructors. Speaking activities, games, and different exercises which teachers do during their lessons might help students improve speaking skills. Although instructors' practices to develop the students' speaking skills are fundamental, it is similarly vital to make a record of the students' improvement. The way that EFL instructors evaluate their students' speaking skills gain more and more importance. Do we really evaluate speaking skills in a functional, valid, and reliable way? The answer to this question might be open to discussion. Therefore, the evaluation of their speaking skills gains more importance.

## 1.1 The Research Background

The capacity to communicate in the target language easily can motivate students to a significant extent as it empowers them to convey what they think clearly in the target language. In spite of the fact that students are capable of expressing themselves effectively, they might not be capable of managing challenging conditions in the target language. Therefore, students must learn a foreign language in a realistic learning environment. The assessment of speaking must also be realistic similarly. As Underhill (1987) expressed, in an authentic speaking test, the most important priorities are different. Unlike the written tests, people have a dialogue face to face without the idea of 'test'.

Instead of creating unreal settings while assessing speaking, newly developed authentic methods should be benefited. With the help of these authentic settings, students might express their opinions on real topics without paying much attention to the fact that they are being tested.

As Sayın (2015) expressed, students have anxiety in oral exams, and speaking tests trigger anxiety among students. Traditional testing strategies for speaking require students to talk about on an arbitrarily picked topic that they have never had an experience in their lives, which makes the testing more upsetting for them. The limitations such as having low self-confidence, focus, restricted timeframe, and the need to express themselves on the subject make the testing increasingly stressing for them.

As Madsen (1983) points out "The testing of speaking has always been seen as the most challenging skill as it is regarded hard to administer and score" (p.147). One reason why testing speaking is perceived as challenging is that it requires fair, valid, and reliable tools and assessment. There are several factors (content, organization, appropriate vocabulary, fluency, and accuracy; grammar, pronunciation, etc.) which must be kept in mind while assessing speaking, and it might be hard to follow them altogether because speaking tests are administered in a short and limited period of time. Similarly, even preparing the questions and prompts for testing speaking might be a challenging task. As Underhill (1987) expressed, because speaking skills are usually assessed similarly as other conventional tests, little attention is paid to oral testing. Therefore, speaking skill can be in some cases disregarded or not given enough consideration despite the fact that it is perhaps the main skill to be assessed.

In light of this information, this study sets out to evaluate the exams used in the assessment of speaking skills in preparatory schools in Turkey and to ascertain whether, and if so, why the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam is a more effective method as an alternative to traditional speaking exams.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The level based English teaching program is formed according to the exam results of the students. In other words, students are admitted to level classes according to the results they get in the exams. When the exam results are not correct, there are serious differences between the real level and the assumed level of the students. This prevents the implementation of the foreign language teaching program appropriately for the level of the student. The current problem reduces the quality of teaching a foreign language throughout the country, causes difficulties in English for students who pass their departments, and provides negative feedback to English preparatory schools.

Testing and assessment activities might be considered as an important task in English preparatory classes at universities in Turkey. Students who start studying at English preparatory classes attend general English courses for one year according to the needs of their departments. These courses prepare students for their English-medium courses and their future careers. Students who come to English preparatory schools are placed in classes suitable for their level with a placement exam at the beginning of the year. After students are placed in classes suitable for their level, they attend English classes for one academic year. These courses are mostly the main course, listening, speaking, writing, reading and grammar lessons. In these courses, students' progress is observed with different testing and assessment methods, and necessary activities are carried out in line with the needs of the students. Students are subjected to an exam at the end of the academic year at English preparatory schools, and if they are successful, they are entitled to move to their departments. For this reason, testing and assessment activities carried out in English preparatory classes gain importance.

Different methods and exams are applied to assess the success of students in English preparatory classes. These exams are mostly proficiency, placement, achievement and diagnostic exams. The content of these exams might be different in different universities. While some universities assess all skills in these exams, some universities assess only certain skills in some of these exams. In general, assessing speaking skill is less of a study than assessing other skills. This is because; it may be that assessing speaking skill requires significant training, standardization work, time, and effort. However, speaking skill as a learning outcome is extremely important for students'

future education and career experiences. For this reason, assessing speaking skills can make important contributions to the improvement and development of evaluation processes, and education programs in English preparatory schools.

Speaking skills in English preparatory schools in Turkey are assessed by exams prepared in schools. The exams are prepared by the instructors working in the testing offices of the schools or by the experienced teachers in the field of testing assessment. A major problem of these evaluation procedures is that students are not given enough time in speaking exams. They answer the questions asked to them within the given 5-10 minutes, make a speech on a subject and try to express themselves. Under these conditions, students might find it difficult to reveal their real performance in the speaking exam. A second problematic issue is that students answer random questions from previously prepared topics. Some of these questions may be far from students' life experience. Therefore, students might have problems in answering the questions. This causes them not to speak for enough amount of time in the speaking exams, and to get a low score in speaking skills. As a result, an increasing concern that these exams cannot adequately assess the speaking skills of the students might arise. Because of inaccurate evaluation, students might end up being criticized for their incapability of articulating themselves and the content areas they are studying by the teachers in their majors.

## 1.3 The Purpose of The Study

This study attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. Are speaking tests at English Preparatory Schools in Turkey valid and reliable to assess the designated proficiency level of students?

2. Is ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview a more functional testing and assessment tool compared to the speaking exams at English Preparatory Schools in Turkey?

3. Is a curriculum based on ACTFL OPI more effective to attain the designated proficiency level at English Preparatory Schools in Turkey?

## 1.4 The Significance of the Research

As Yule and Brown (1988) stated, testing English has forever been a migraine for instructors. Indeed, even in well-designed tests, the attention is on grammar or lexical items, and the speaking parts are generally disregarded. It is proposed that as opposed to grammar and vocabulary separately, these items ought to be assessed as a whole in the communicated in language. In some research Wall and Alderson (1993) discovered that the content of the teaching is impacted by the test, subsequently instructors are more keen on covering the pieces of the course that they feel are probably going to be tested in the exam. This implies that listening and speaking don't get the importance they ought to get, due to the consideration instructors feel they should pay to reading and other sections of the coursebooks.

Speaking skills are assessed with traditional methods in English preparatory schools. However, these traditional methods might not give us accurate results in assessing our students' speaking skills as they might not focus on the use of a language. As Uysal (2019) stated, evaluation method to assess language use should be adopted. Besides, teachers who administer the speaking test might not be experts in administering the speaking test. Therefore, the speaking tests applied might be of the desired quality and often do not give accurate results. This indicates that there might be a standardization problem in the comparison of scores among students. For this reason, the English level of the students might not be determined properly, and the proper language teaching program might not be applied to the students.

In traditional speaking exams, our students have about 7-8 minutes to express themselves. However, 7-8 minutes of time might be open to discussion in that it might not be enough for our students to deliver their best performance. In some cases, the speaking topics given to the students include themes that the students are not familiar with at all. For this reason, our students might not express themselves properly with a rich content, and they might fail in speaking exams. This might pose a problem in terms of the validity and reliability of the speaking exams administered in English preparatory schools. Therefore, a new method for the evaluation of speaking skill is needed. As an alternative to current practices of evaluation, the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview can be used. For this reason, ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam, which is thought as

more reliable, more valid, and more functional, can be applied as a more effective method in English preparatory schools. With the correct assessment and evaluation method, the language teaching system in the preparatory programs might be developed and the students might learn the language more effectively in the English preparatory programs and their speaking skills can be at a higher level. This study might have the potential to demonstrate the differences between the current speaking exams at English preparatory schools in Turkey and ACTFL OPI, subsequently this study might contribute to that area by exploring whether ACTFL OPI is a functional test compared to the traditional tests applied at English preparatory schools.

## 1.5 Statement of Assumptions

It was assumed that the students who participated in this study are motivated to study English. They are expected to spend a great amount of time and energy to improve their speaking skills in English, and they did not have any technical problem while they are being tested by ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview as it is applied to them on Zoom.

## 1.6 Statement of Limitations

With this study, speaking skills of English preparatory class students were assessed. During the study, some restrictions were determined. These restrictions are stated below with explanations.

The first restriction concerns the number of students participating in the study. 8 students volunteered for this study. ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam was administered to these 8 students. More reliable and more valid results could be obtained if the study had been applied to a higher number of students. Besides, ACTFL OPI was administered over the application named Zoom.

The second restriction is related to the researcher administering the exam. The researcher administering the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam is not a licensed ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview examiner. In order to be able to apply this exam, he examined different ACTFL OPIs, read a lot about the field and tried to improve himself in this field. Therefore, administration this exam to participants by a licensed examiner might produce more reliable and valid results.

The third limitation is about the intensive study schedules of students participating in this study. Students attend 28 hours of online English lessons per week, do weekly assignments, prepare projects, and make presentations in their English lessons. It was necessary for the students to spend a significant amount of effort to allocate time for this study in this intense workload.

The final limitation is that about the fact that this study was conducted in a foundation university in Turkey. Namely, the participants are students who study at the English preparatory school of a foundation university in Turkey.

# CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 English Preparatory Schools at Higher Education in Turkey

English has been commonly studied and learnt in different countries in the world. It has been the foreign language taught at schools in a lot of countries. Since the end of World War II, English has been recognized as the main foreign language in numerous nations all over the world including Turkey, where Turkish is the official language and the language of education (Kirkgöz, 2007). In Turkish education system, English is presently the main language taught as an obligatory foreign language at schools (Kirkgöz, 2007). English shows itself as the most generally and broadly taught foreign language from kindergarten and to all phases of Turkish education system. In Turkish language-medium schools, English is taught as an obligatory foreign language.

Concerning Turkish higher education, English is taught both in private and state universities, particularly to students in their language preparatory year. These English programmes that typically last the whole school year are called English preparatory programmes since the primary motivation behind such a plan is to enable students to develop English competence that they will benefit in their departments (Coskun, 2013). In other words, at most English-medium universities, new students can begin their departments after they follow an English language learning year at the schools' preparatory program. A curriculum for teaching English language is used in these schools. English language curriculum aims at promoting students' knowledge of general English and help them acquire the necessary skills to read and understand English publications in their specific subject area' (Kirkgöz, 2005, p. 219). It mainly focuses on the development of both receptive and productive English skills such as listening, reading, writing, speaking, grammar and vocabulary (Çetinavci & Topkaya, 2012). Such programmes are designed to foster students' competence in English through which they will be competent enough to be successful in their departmental courses. Students are also supported by listening and speaking skills that would enable them to follow lectures, ask questions to others and make presentations (Tunç, 2010). Notwithstanding, the majority of the Turkish EFL students might not to achieve the designated proficiency level at English preparatory programmes in Turkey.

It is also claimed that Turkish foreign language learners deal with getting more competent after they study the basics of English (Büyükkantarcioğlu, 2004) or they find it difficult to develop their skills in English when they are not tested (Karahan, 2007). Besides it is also stated that the academic English needs might be ignored in English preparatory schools (Kirkgöz, 2009). In short, it is recommended that there are some issues to be addressed in English preparatory schools to be addressed in Turkey. As Uysal (2015) stated, these issues are preparing and applying the curriculum in a well-designed way, the mismatch between the objectives of the preparatory curriculum and students' expectations, meeting the expectations of students to develop sufficiently in speaking skills, and evaluating speaking skills in a proper way. The importance of speaking sill will be addressed in the next section.

## 2.2 Speaking as a Skill and Its Significance

According to Bygate (1998: 23), speaking is an ability which incorporates specific methods like simply deciding and association during the discussion. This is thought a top-down perspective on speaking. In the light of this view, Eckard and Kearny (1981), Florez (1999) also Howarth (2001) recognize speaking as an interaction including thoughts, or emotions. Subsequently, Nunan (1989) recommends that students ought to be urged to learn the language in little units and special attention should be paid in speaking.

Chaney and Burk (1998) characterize speaking as the most common way of building and sharing meaning using verbal and non-verbal images in various settings. They also express that communicating in a foreign language is exceptionally difficult, and it ordinarily takes a long time to become skilful. This might be because of the way that the speaking skill contains various other macro and micro skills which comprise the entire skill when united. Brown (2004) defines these micro skills as producing, morphemes, words, collocations, and phrasal units. The macro skills are larger elements such as fluency, discourse, function, style, cohesion, nonverbal communication and strategic options. Learners do not need to have metalinguistic consciousness of the parts of the speaking skills to utilize them successfully (Bailey, 2006). However, students are expected to learn and utilize these parts since, as Bailey recommends, speaking may be acknowledged as the most crucial of human abilities. In addition, speaking has been perceived as an intelligent, social, and contextualized informative process.

## 2.3 Testing Speaking

As the way English is taught has been changing over the years, its assessment has been changing by including more communicative components in it. Bygate (2009) states that prototypically, speaking was not considered at all as worthy of attention in the grammar translation approach, he also expresses that speaking began to be perceived as central with communicative language teaching paradigm over the years. As teaching and testing are indivisible parts of an educational program, the emphasis on teaching speaking pave the way for assessing speaking.

As indicated by Hughes (2007), three basic kinds of tests can be utilized to assess oral performance of test takers: response to tape-recordings, interaction with peers, and interviews. He says that tape recording format requires test takers to respond to a prompt given in a video of audio file (Hughes, 2007), and Genç (2007) states that this way of testing speaking is convenient for testing a lot of test takers at the same time, therefore it is preferred in TOEFL like tests. However, Hughes (2007) also expresses that it is not possible to follow the candidates' responses in these tests, which leads to some discussions about authenticity.

Another way of testing speaking includes interaction tasks. The test taker and the examiner interact, and the examiner scores the test takers. Information gap is utilized in such tests. The test taker and the interlocutor negotiate meaning in such tests. Thus, this type of oral testing is advantageous in terms of "representing real conversation" (Hughes, 2007, p. 81). However, this way of testing speaking requires more time when compared to responding an audio or video file.

Genç (2007) expresses that the last way of testing speaking is oral interviews which might include a few sorts of tasks such as question-and-answer tasks, pair conversations or group conversations. He adds that oral interviews might be put under different categories depending on the manner in which they are organized, and number of the test-takers evaluated. There are two sorts of oral interviews: the free interview and the controlled interview.

In the free interview, no earlier arrangements are made to inspire specific sort of language from the competitors ahead of time. Genç (2007) states that although this kind

of interview is not difficult to create and doesn't need a great deal of effort on interlocutors' side, it's not a great strategy for oral assessment as a result of the difficulty in assessing oral performance. He adds that the performances of test takers might quite often fluctuate starting with one theme then onto the next. Furthermore, dependable scoring turns out to be difficult to achieve; particularly when the rubric for assessment incorporates restricted descriptors for each sort of scale (Weir, 1988). This kind of oral interview might not be convenient for evaluating large number of test-takers because of time restrictions.

Second type of oral interview is the controlled interview which is directed with some pre-determined procedures. This helps candidates put forth similar performances as test developers provide them with some sort of frame. As a result, performances become simpler to compare, contrast and score (McNamara, 1996). Genç (2007) states that controlled interviews have a few drawbacks as well; the sort of tasks or themes candidates cope with may be particular to certain language items; he also expresses that these themes may not be comprehensive enough compared to what test-takers might be involved in real-life circumstances. Concerning the scoring, inter-rater and intra-rater reliability is the focus to consider for these free and controlled interviews (Weir, 1988).

Seedhouse (2013) states that oral interviews may likewise be categorised into three classes according to the number of the test takers: individual interviews, pair interviews and group interviews.

Genç (2007) expresses that the conversation is between the test taker and the interlocutor in individual interviews which are applied for each test taker. He also states that in this sort of communication, the test taker acts as a respondent and answers the questions asked. The interlocutor plans to see the proficiency level of the test-taker.

As Seedhouse (2013) states, pair interview is one more type of oral interviews. In pair interviews, the collaboration happens between two test takers and the interlocutor facilitates their conversation. Direct conversation between the interlocutor and the test takers are restricted.

Scoring is important in interviews. As Davies (1990) states, to guarantee valid and reliable scoring in oral interviews, plan of the tasks utilized in the interviews is a critical point together with the way that oral interviews are organized. As indicated by Hughes (2007), “the relationship between the tester and the candidate is usually such that candidate speaks to a superior and is unwilling to take initiative” (p. 107). The tasks should be designed to foster candidate to candidate conversation rather than interlocutor to candidate conversation.

### 2.3.1 Need and Different Ways

According to researchers focusing on the assessment of oral proficiency (Larson, 2000; Luoma, 2004), the fact that speaking is a significant component of the educational programme in language teaching makes it an important component of testing and assessment as well. This has driven teachers to look for attainable, proficient, and pragmatic ways for evaluating oral proficiency. Among various task types for testing speaking, Thornbury (2005) recognizes interviews, live talks, recorded talks, role-plays, cooperative tasks and discussions as fundamentals ways of assessing speaking. Examples of commonly used criteria to assess speaking are the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Speaking Scale, the Common European Framework (CEF). Speaking tests ought to have certain characteristics to be viewed as useful tests. The characteristics of useful tests are stated below.

## 2.4 Characteristics of a Useful Test

The most important quality of a test is its usefulness, that is, whether it serves the purposes it is intended for (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 17). Bachman and Palmer (1996) define a convenient test with six characteristics: reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact and practicality. They also state that there must be a balance between these qualities as they affect the usefulness of a test when they are combined in various ways. Also, McNamara (2008) states three fundamental aspects - validity, reliability, and feasibility- the necessities of which ought to be adjusted relying upon the text setting and test purpose.

A language test which is defined as having good quality has certain features such as validity, reliability, practicality, and authenticity. These terms determine the quality of

a test to a significant degree. The components are also the core components of a speaking test. As Pengajaran (2018) expresses, the reliability and validity of your assessment instrument and practicality, authenticity play an important part in speaking assessment. These features will be elaborated in the following part.

### 2.4.1 Reliability

McNamara (2000) defines reliability as the "consistency of measurement of individuals by a test" (p. 136). Additionally, Heaton (1988) clarifies the point by stating that if the same test is applied to different test takers in different cases, if the test takers get different results, then the test is not reliable. Therefore, "reliability is a measure of accuracy, consistency, dependability, or fairness of scores resulting from administration of a particular examination" (Henning, 1987, p. 74).

Brown (1996) states that students' scores in speaking tests cannot be the solemn indicator of speaking skill. He also expresses that there are also some other factors affecting students speaking skill such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation. These items might contribute to the test score of a student, and they can also affect reliability (Harris, 1969; J.D. Brown, 1996).

Luoma (2004) and Douglas (2014) stated that the reliability of a speaking test might be affected by language level, gender, the status of the person administering the test, whether the person administering the test knows the student, the character of the student and the person administering the test, the nature of the communication, the tactics used by the student, the quality of the test, the instructions the student experiences while speaking, comfort, the tactics used by the student while speaking, and the criteria used to evaluate the performance. J.D. Brown (1996) categorized these factors in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Potential factors affecting testing process

| | |
|---|---|
| Environmental Factors | location, space, ventilation, noise, lighting, and weather |
| Administrative Factors | directions, equipment, timing, and mechanics of testing |
| Scoring Factors | errors in scoring, subjectivity, evaluator biases and evaluator idiosyncrasies |
| Test Factors | test booklet clarity, answer sheet format, particular sample of items, item types, number of items, item quality and test security |
| Students Related Factors | health, physical characteristics, comprehension of directions, concentration, impulsiveness, testwiseness, task performance speed, chance knowledge of item content, fatigue, motivation, emotion, forgetfulness, carelessness, memory and guessing |

Adapted from "Designing second language performance assessments" by Norris, J. M., Norris, J. M., Brown, J. D., Hudson, T., & Yoshioka, J., 1998, National Foreign Language Resource Center, p 198.

Two types of reliability which are inter-rater reliability and intra-rater reliability might be perceived as important in speaking tests. These types of reliability will be explained in the following part.

### 2.4.1.1 Inter-rater Reliability

If an examiner has no personal judgement about the score of a student, then the test is more objective, however certain tests such as speaking tests require the personal judgement of the examiner. According to Sak's (2008)," this type of reliability is estimated by examining the scores of two raters and calculating the correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores" (p. 23). Mead (1980) states that there are several types of reliability such as test-retest, parallel forms, inter-rater reliability, intra-rater reliability and item reliability but the most important of the is inter-rater reliability.

#### 2.4.1.2 Intra-rater Reliability

Intra-rater reliability is checked by getting two sets of scores given by an examiner in different times for the same group of students. Weir (2005) explains this as: “each marker needs to be consistent within himself, i.e., given a particular quality of performance, he needs to award the same mark whenever this quality appears “(p. 34).

### 2.4.2 Validity

Validity is among the most crucial characteristics of well-designed tests, and is an important issue of test production. Luoma (2004, p.185) states “validity refers to the meaningfulness of the scores.” It is an important criterion in test development. If a test is not valid for the purpose for which it is designed, the scores are far from meaning what they are intended to mean. (Alderson, et al., 2005). Henning (1987, cited in Alderson, et al., 2005) gives the definition for validity as “the appropriateness of a given test or any kind of its component parts as a measure of what it is purported to measure” (p. 79). There are different types of validity such as content validity, face validity, criterion-related validity, and validity in scoring. These different types of validity are explained in the following part.

#### 2.4.2.1 Content Validity

If a test is sufficient in assessing what it is designed for, then it has content validity. Hughes (2010, p. 41) states “a test is said to have content validity if its content constitutes a representative sample of the language skills, structures, etc. with which it is meant to be concerned.” There should be a correlation between the test and its purpose. The test might have content validity when it includes a proper sample of the relevant structures (Hughes, 2010). According to Alderson et al. (2005), a convenient method to analyse the content of a test is to compare it with a statement of what the content should include. A test should have content validity to be named as accurate.

#### 2.4.2.2 Face Validity

As indicated by Ingram (1977), face validity means the test's “surface credibility or public acceptability”. It is highly about the appearance of a test, and a test is said to lack face validity if does not meet the expectations of experts in the field. As Hughes

(2010) states, if such sort of a test is utilized, the test takers' response to it might imply that they don't perform on it in a manner that really mirrors their ability.

#### 2.4.2.3 Criterion-related Validity

Brown (2005) expresses that the criterion related validity includes ensuring validity by proving that the score in the test applied is highly correlated with a well-respected measure of the same construct. According to Hughes (2010) criterion related validity is about the degree to which the scores in a test match with the ones provided by an highly independent assessment of candidate's ability. He also expresses that this independent assessment is the criterion through which the test is validated.

#### 2.4.2.4 Validity in Scoring

To characterize a test as valid, validation of the parts of that test is not sufficient. Hughes (2010) expresses that "it is no use having excellent items if they are scored invalidly" (p. 32-33). While scoring the answers in a speaking part of a proficiency test, regarding that test as a diagnostic speaking test will make the scoring less valid as they have different purposes. Therefore, the purpose of the test must be digested by the examiners.

### 2.4.3 Authenticity

Doye (1995) states that to consider a test as authentic, it should be real, sensible, and practical in a real-life use of the learned information, skills, and traits. He also expresses that when a language evaluation test presents similarity with real life content, it will have a positive effect on students as it will be more meaningful for them. A language assessment test must be as close to real life conditions as possible.

### 2.4.4 Practicality

Fulcher (1993) states that while planning an oral test, practicality is vital since certain types of testing instruments might be valid or reliable. He also adds that we can use or reject a test by deciding whether it is practical or not. According to Finocchiaro and Sako (1983), if a test is not suitable for use in terms of time and physical conditions, it is not preferred even if other criteria are met. Fulcher (1993) also expresses that if the

physical conditions are not sufficient and the equipment to be used is not suitable, the prepared speaking exam may not be applied. This shows that the exam is not practical. He also states that the test process will be applied more accurately if the testers also consider whether it is practical when editing and creating the content of the test. "Using criteria and training in the use of grading rubrics/scales, test formats and equipment and resources available are very important with regards to increasing practicality of a direct English language test" (Al-Amri, 2011, p. 114).

## 2.5 Speaking Test Scales

When scoring a speaking test, students' speaking ability is matched to numbers. These numbers give us the student's speaking test grade. According to Luoma (2004), “one way to elicit the construct of speaking ability for a certain context is through a scoring rubric which informs test users what a test aims to ” (p. 54). Rating scales also help us understand the differences between good performance and bad performance and explain what each score means.

Correct scoring is important in terms of reliability and validity. McNamara (1996) states “a scoring rubric can affect the speaking assessment, as there may be an interaction effect between the rating criteria and the examinees’ performance” (p. 36). He also states that rating scales describe the speaking skills required by the speaking test. Galaczi (2011) states that there is a direct link between them and the speaking test. Therefore, rating scales must be studied well so that the speaking test can be scored in a fair way. There are two types of rating scales for speaking exams. They are elaborated in the following part.

### 2.5.1 Holistic Scales

According to Hughes (2010), these scales require giving a core based on the overall impression of the examiner. These scales are practical because examiners are expected to give only a score. In addition, the greatest advantage of a holistic scale is its simplicity and speed (O’Sullivan, 2008). It is flexible in terms of allowing various combinations of strengths and weaknesses at a level, and this is also an advantage according to by Luoma (2004). However, O’Sullivan (2008) also claims that there are some disadvantages of such a scale. The examiner gives a score and that score might

strongly be related to the examiner's first impression. He also states that this might cause a problem about valid and reliable scoring of speaking tests.

### 2.5.2 Analytic Scales

These scales assess the exam taker's performance on different components of speaking. Luoma (2004) defines them as: "Analytic scales contain a number of criteria, each of which has descriptors at the different levels of the scale. The scales form a grid, and the examinees usually get a profile of scores, one for each of the criteria" (p.68). Since each criterion is evaluated and scored differently, the details of speaking skill are assessed. Hughes (2010) expresses that there are some advantages of such scales. First, they focus on sub skills in test takers. Secondly, test takers are required to think about many aspects of speaking while giving a score. Thirdly, scores might be more reliable as the examiners assess various criteria. However, it takes a great amount of time, and this might be a disadvantage of this scale. Moreover, there are many details to be focused on, therefore the overall performance of the test taker might be ignored. "As the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts, a composite score may be very reliable but not valid." (Hughes, 2010, p. 62).

## 2.6 History of Language Tests and Assessing Speaking Skills

The historical background of language testing has been impacted by two characterizing hypotheses and a wide range of methodologies of teaching. The hypotheses that were compelling in the history of second language acquisition are Lado's (1957) structuralist hypothesis and Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence theory.

Lado (1957) categorized the knowledge on second language into five sections: the ability to comprehend the communication in a language, the ability to speak in that language, the ability to read it, the ability to write it, and the ability to comprehend the way of life of the target culture. While the fifth expertise has commonly been overlooked, language testers have believed that somebody's language ability can be surveyed by testing these four skills independently. This is called discrete-point testing. Discrete point tests have caused for a decontextualized way to deal with in language testing (Brown, 2004).

Then, at that point, an integrative way to deal with language testing has been preferred over discrete point testing since language ability has begun to be characterized as a unified set of abilities rather than discrete points (Oller, 1979; Bachman and Palmer, 1982; Bachman, 1990). As a result of the developments, there has been a new approach towards assessment which requires joining the test taker's knowledge of a language with performance in that language. This has raised the issue of communicative language ability (Bachman and Palmer, 1996), and the significance of context has gained importance (Bachman, 1990). In this way, Lado's (1957) simply semantic second language information thought has been expanded and prepared for various structures and models for the ability to communicate in the second language.

As communicative language testing became more widespread, a need for testing speaking in a more communicative way gained more attention (McNamara, 1996). Before communicative approaches to language testing, oral assessments were mostly disregarded (Bygate, 2009). The ability of speaking in a second language is a subset of a learner‘s overall ability or proficiency in the language (Young, 2013, p.16). In this manner, one has to know what the term speaking ability contains to get what it is to know a foreign language. Testing speaking has gained more importance since communicative language teaching attributes incredible significance to speaking performance (Sayer, 2005). Speaking tests has been a major field since then.

A wide range of tests have been utilized to assess speaking in a second language. According to Brown (2004), there are various kinds of speaking (imitative, concentrated, responsive, interactive, and extensive) that require various kinds of tests. A wide range of tests have been applied to address the sorts of speaking referenced previously. Some of them are imitation, reading aloud, picture description, dialogue completion, interviews, role plays, paired or group discussions, presentations and so on (Hughes, 2003; Brown, 2004). Researchers supporting communicative approach claimed that speaking tests need to include authentic language. In light of this idea, communicative performance became more and more important in speaking tests (Fulcher, 2000).

Bachman (1990) states that as communicative performance gained importance, a need to develop a test based on communicative performance arose, and international state agencies in the United States of America were among the leading institutions for it, one

of which was the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), to pave the way for such tests. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has made the primary speaking test that evaluates the speaking skill by enabling the communication of a test taker and interlocutor. (Fulcher, 2000; Bachman, 1990). To enable an appropriate amount of discourse from the test takers, FSI has both made a scale and the techniques for a face-to-face interview (Lowe and Liskin-Gasparro, 1982). They also benefited from a five-point scale (accent, comprehension, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary) to decide on a score (Brown, 2004).

After the presentation of FSI oral proficiency interview, it has been developed by different organizations. The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) delivered a speaking test to test the language ability with the assistance of these rules and they prepared better rules to assess speaking. Afterward, American Council on the Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL) refined the rules (Lowe and Liskin-Gasparro, 1982) and the test began to be applied in schools and universities (Fulcher, 2000).

## 2.7 ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI)

Since many organizations have "changed their way of assessment to methods that can straightforwardly test the test taker's speaking skills" (Park, 2011, p. 449), oral proficiency tests like the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI) have started to be widely used internationally. The ACTFL OPI is a worldwide test wherein speakers are tested holistically, and they get a score according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

Test takers have a dialogue with the examiner, and the examiner asks various questions to decide on the speaking level of the test taker. The interview is also scored by another examiner. This proficiency level could be any one of the ten rated proficiencies designated by ACTFL: Low, Mid, or High at the Novice, Intermediate, or Advanced levels, or Superior. (ACTFL, 2012a)

### 2.7.1 ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview as a Language Assessment

The ACTFL OPI's starting points can be followed to the U.S. State Department which fostered the "Government Definitions" of L2 speaking ability during the 1950s. From these, the oral interview framework was created and formally adopted by the mid-

1950s (Lowe, 1982). By the 1960s, the government's trust in the FSI's testing methods was high that they were embraced and adjusted by the Defence Language Institute English Language Center / Defence Language Institute Foreign Language Center, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Peace Corps (Chaloub-Deville and Fulcher, 2003). The combined efforts of U.S. Government agencies to improve the Foreign Service Institute system led to the development of the Interagency Language Roundtable Skill Level Descriptions and to the extension of the original 5-level FSI scale to include the plus levels, resulting in the 11-point scale in use today (Johnson, 2001).

Ulrich (2020) states that an ACTFL OPI program was also developed for American security institutions during the 1960s, so ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview was used in international locations of the USA. He also expresses that with the growing interest, the studies for ACTFL OPI gained momentum and this test started to be developed for use in high schools and secondary schools in the USA. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 contain the current and refreshed form of proficiency definitions.

Although this test is becoming more and more common, it was originally designed years ago to assess the speaking skills of employees in the government agencies. Today, however, this test is also used in many parts of the world to evaluate the speaking skills of candidates in different languages. This reveals the success of this exam over time.

Surface (2003) claims that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI) is a valid and reliable test which assesses how well an individual speaks in a language. He also adds that it involves a standard strategy for the worldwide evaluation of speaking skill. According to Surface (2003) it assesses the oral production in an holistic way and it also determines the weaknesses and strengths of the test taker in terms of speaking skill. Fulcher (2003) states that The ACTFL OPI is interactive and adaptable, changing in accordance with the interests, experiences, and the linguistic capacities of the test takers. He also expresses that through a progression of customized questions, an example of discourse is assessed by the descriptors portrayed in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 - Speaking. The ACTFL OPI assesses the speaking skill by including a mutual dialogue between the test takers and examiners.

Surface (2003) claims that the ACTFL OPI evaluates proficiency in language in regards to a speaker's ability to utilize the language successfully and suitable in real life conditions. He also expresses that it doesn't address when, where, why, or the manner by which a speaker has learned his/her language. Huebner and Jensen (1992) claim that the ACTFL OPI is totally different from an achievement test as it does not focus on specific elements of speaking skill such as grammar, or lexical items. They also state that the ACTFL OPI doesn't assess one person's performance in comparison to other people's performance, each test taker is assessed individually and independently.

### 2.7.2 The Use of ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview and Speaking Tests in Turkey

After the introduction of oral proficiency interviews (ACTFL OPI), they have been generally acknowledged in Turkey in many higher education settings (Tanrıverdi-Köksal, 2013). It has been uncovered that oral tests are the second most favoured strategy to assess language learners (Öz, 2014). Despite the fact that it is a moderately new concept in Turkey, there has been some research about ACTFL OPI. For example, as reliability of assessment of speaking is a controversial issue, some researchers have dealt with intra-rater reliability (Tanrıverdi-Köksal, 2013; Tanrıverdi-Köksal & Ortaçtepe, 2017) to see whether raters' prior knowledge of students' proficiency levels affects their grading. They have concluded that knowledge of the examiners about the test takers can be controlled. Another study has been done on the way tests takers deal with their problems they experience during ACTFL OPI (Genç, 2017). The consequences of that research support having more communicative tasks in English lessons.

Önem (2015) has analysed the evaluation standards for an oral interview, and his research focuses on understanding the perception of examiners for using analytic and holistic rubrics. His study has uncovered that examiner feel more positive about using holistic rubrics. Another researcher focusing on perceptions is Höl (2010), who aimed at finding out both students' and instructors' perceptions towards using communicative language testing in a preparatory class in a higher education setting in Turkey. He has discovered that students are not ready to have an oral test due to their anxiety. Lozovska-Güneş (2010) is one of the researchers who studied the difficulties experienced by both examiners and students in communicative speaking tests at universities in Turkey.

Additional research has been conducted about the improvement of speaking tests. Yıldız (2013) has focused on the final speaking exam at an English Preparatory School in Turkey and discovered that although there was inter-rater reliability, the exam lacks content validity, which is an important finding in terms of the speaking tests administered in Turkey.

## 2.8 The ACTFL Rating Scale

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that the ACTFL Rating Scale includes four different levels, and these levels are superior, advanced, intermediate and novice. These four levels are arranged according to a hierarchy. It is also expressed in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that the basis of this hierarchy is that the students taking the exam can express themselves in formal and informal situations, communicate on social and professional issues, and take an active role during communication. As it can be seen in the table, each level represents a different functional language skill. However, within each level, there is a categorization as low, mid, and high levels. Categories are graded in terms of the amount and quality of language used by test takers.

### 2.8.1 ACTFL OPI Major levels

There are five major levels in ACTFL OPI. These levels are distinguished, superior, advanced, intermediate and novice.

#### 2.8.1.1 Distinguished

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that speakers at the distinguished level are able to use language skillfully, and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are educated and articulate users of the language. They can reflect on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in a culturally appropriate manner. Distinguished-level speakers can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse for representational purposes, allowing them to advocate a point of view that is not necessarily their own. They can tailor language to a variety of audiences by adapting their speech and register in ways that are culturally authentic. Speakers at the distinguished level produce highly sophisticated and tightly organized extended discourse. At the same time, they can speak succinctly, often using cultural and historical references to allow

them to say less and mean more. At this level, oral discourse typically resembles written discourse. A non-native accent, a lack of a native-like economy of expression, a limited control of deeply embedded cultural references, and/or an occasional isolated language error may still be present at this level.

#### 2.8.1.2 Superior

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that speakers at the superior level are able to communicate with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They discuss their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy. They present their opinions on a number of issues of interest to them, such as social and political issues, and provide structured arguments to support these opinions. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities.

When appropriate, these speakers use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations. Such discourse, while coherent, may still be influenced by language patterns other than those of the target language. Superior-level speakers employ a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic, lexical, and phonetic devices.

Speakers at the Superior level demonstrate no pattern of error in the use of basic structures, although they may make sporadic errors, particularly in low-frequency structures and in complex high-frequency structures. Such errors, if they do occur, do not distract the native interlocutor or interfere with communication.

#### 2.8.1.3 Advanced

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that speakers at the advanced level engage in conversation in a clearly participatory manner in order to communicate information on autobiographical topics, as well as topics of community, national, or international interest. The topics are handled concretely by means of narration

and description in the major time frames of past, present, and future. These speakers can also deal with a social situation with an unexpected complication. The language of advanced-level speakers is abundant, the oral paragraph being the measure of advanced-level length and discourse. Advanced-level speakers have sufficient control of basic structures and generic vocabulary to be understood by native speakers of the language, including those unaccustomed to non-native speech.

#### 2.8.1.4 Intermediate

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that speakers at the intermediate level are distinguished primarily by their ability to create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life. They are able to recombine learned material in order to express personal meaning. Intermediate level speakers can ask simple questions and can handle a straightforward survival situation. They produce sentence-level language, ranging from discrete sentences to strings of sentences, typically in present time. Intermediate-level speakers are understood by interlocutors who are accustomed to dealing with non-native learners of the language.

#### 2.8.1.5 Novice

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that novice-level speakers can communicate short messages on highly predictable, everyday topics that affect them directly. They do so primarily through the use of isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled. Novice-level speakers may be difficult to understand even by the most sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to non-native speech.

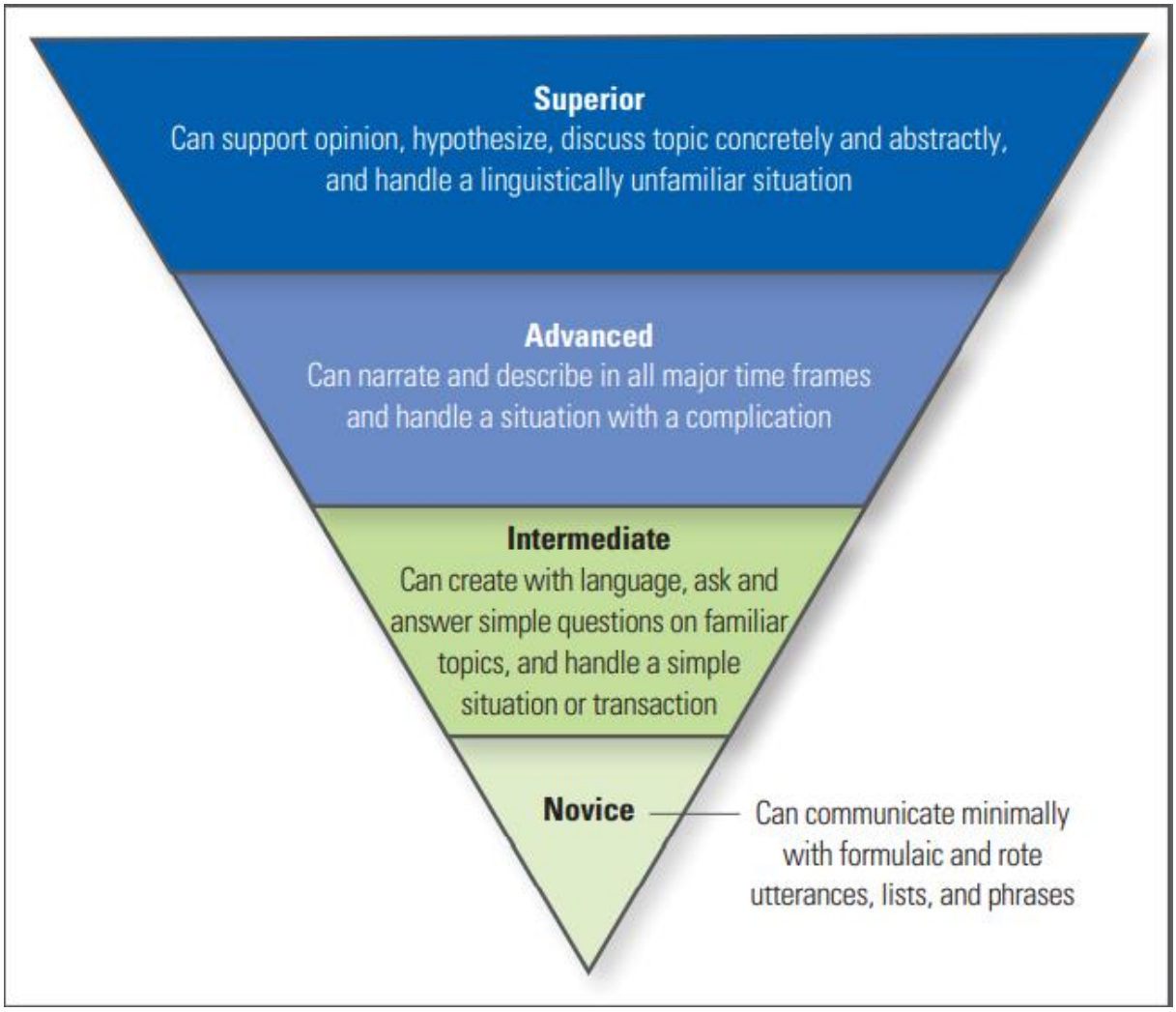



**Figure 1:** ACTFL OPI levels

*Note*. From "ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview familiarization manual." by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages., 2012, p. 4.

### 2.8.2 The "High" sublevel

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that students at this level easily and confidently fulfil the expectations of the level during the exam. It is also expressed that the speaking skill of students at this level is close to the next higher major level. Students perform at a higher level from time to time. However, this performance is not permanent.

### 2.8.3 The “Mid” sublevel

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that speakers at this sublevel have some specific speech profiles, based on their specific mix of quantity (sheer volume of speech produced) and/or quality (the way meaning is transferred) at level.

### 2.8.4 The “Low” sublevel

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that students at this level put a lot of effort into keeping the conversation going. Students can provide a minimum level of speaking content and a richness of speech. Besides, it is also expressed that the speeches of students at this level sometimes approach a lower level, but they are not permanent there.

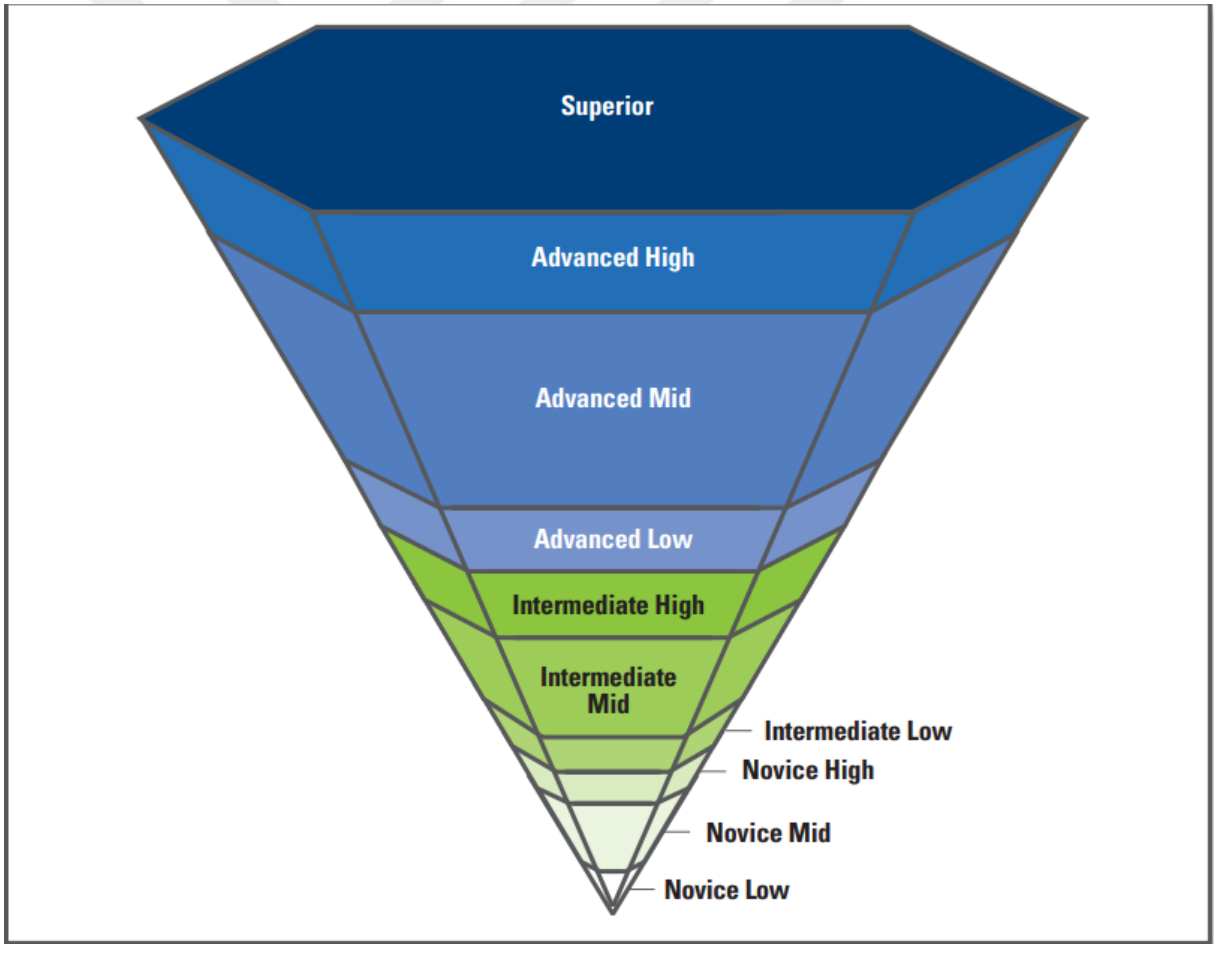



**Figure 2:** ACTFL OPI Sub levels

*Note*. From “ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview familiarization manual.” by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages., 2012, p. 5.

## 2.9 The Assessment Criteria in ACTFL OPI

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview evaluates several criteria simultaneously. According to ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) this exam does not evaluate any grammar rules and considers speaking as a whole. Grammar elements are considered to affect the overall speaking performance in this exam. The following criteria are taken into account when evaluating a speech.

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that the performance must be sustained in order to be said that the speaker is at that level. According to ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012), the speech of the test taker is supposed to be sustained across all of the criteria at that level in order the speaker to be rated at that level. The following criteria is benefited for each level.

• the functions or global tasks the speaker performs,

• the social contexts and specific content areas in which the speaker is able to perform them,

• the accuracy (i.e., degree to which the message is understood),

• the type of oral text or discourse the speaker is capable of producing.

**Table 2:** ACTFL OPI rubric

| Proficiency Level* | Global Tasks and Functions | Context/Content | Accuracy | Text Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Superior** | Discuss topics extensively, support opinions, and hypothesize. Deal with a linguistically unfamiliar situation. | Most formal and informal settings. Wide range of general interest topics and some special fields of interest and expertise. | No pattern of errors in basic structures. Errors virtually never interfere with communication or distract the native speaker from the message. | Extended discourse |
| **Advanced** | Narrate and describe in major time frames and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication. | Most informal and some formal settings. Topics of personal and general interest. | Understood without difficulty by speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-native speakers. | Paragraphs |
| **Intermediate** | Create with language, initiate, maintain, and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions. | Some informal settings and a limited number of transactional situations. Predictable, familiar topics related to daily activities. | Understood, with some repetition, by speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers. | Discrete sentences |
| **Novice** | Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists, and phrases. | Most common informal settings. Most common aspects of daily life. | May be difficult to understand, even for speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers. | Individual words and phrases |

Adapted from "ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview familiarization manual." by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages., 2012, p. 6.

As the levels of students, exams and the curriculum at the English preparatory school where this study is conducted are planned according to CEFR levels, a comparison between CEFR levels and ACTFL OPI scores is needed in this study. The comparison facilitates interpreting data in this study. A comparison of ACTFL OPI scores and CEFR levels is available in Figure 3.

| Level | ILR/FSI Levels (1950s US Gov't) | ACTFL (1980s-present) | CEFR |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Functionally Native or Bilingual Proficiency | (Distinguished)<br>Superior | C2 |
| 4+ | Advanced Professional Proficiency Plus | | |
| 4 | Advanced Professional Proficiency | | |
| 3+ | General Professional Proficiency Plus | | |
| 3 | General Professional Proficiency | | |
| 2+ | Limited Working Proficiency Plus | Advanced-HIGH | C1 |
| 2 | Limited Working Proficiency | Advanced-MID<br>Advanced-LOW | B2<br>B1.2 |
| 1+ | Elementary Proficiency Plus | Intermediate-HIGH | B1 |
| 1 | Elementary Proficiency | Intermediate-MID<br>Intermediate-LOW | A2.2<br>A2 |
| 0+ | Memorized Proficiency | Novice-HIGH | A1 |
| 0 | No Practical Proficiency | Novice-MID<br>Novice-LOW | |

**Figure 3:** A comparison of ACTFL OPI scores and CEFR levels

*Note*. From "The ACTFL proficiency guidelines and the oral proficiency interview: A brief history and analysis of their survival. *Foreign Language Annals*." by Liskin-Gasparro, J. E., 2007, p. 47.

## 2.10 The Phases of the ACTFL OPI

It is stated in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that the purpose of The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview Exam is to present a measurable speech sample. It is also expressed that in order for a speech sample to be assessed, the participant must be able to maintain his performance at a certain level. This level is called floor. However, the upper level where the participant cannot maintain his performance is called ceiling. It is expressed in ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012) that the examiner checks the level of the student after the warm-up questions, and then tries to determine the area in which the student exhibits sustainable performance with questions appropriate to the level of the student. According to ACTFL OPI Familiarization Manual (2012), if the student's performance is not sustainable at a higher point, the examiner continues his questions

from a lower point. The person administering the exam makes the level checks from time to time by forcing the student.

**Table 3:** Phases of ACTFL OPI

<table>
<tr><th>The Warm Up</th><th colspan="2">Iterative Process<br>The Level Checks ➡ The Probes</th><th>The Wind Down</th></tr>
<tr><td>This first phase of the ACTFL OPI serves as the introduction to the interview. It consists of greetings, informal exchanges of pleasantries, and conversation openers pitched at a level which appears comfortable for the speaker. Every ACTFL OPI begins with the assumption that a conversation will take place (Intermediate Level)</td><td>When the speaker has settled into the interview and appears to be reasonably comfortable using the target language, the interviewer moves to the next phase of the ACTFL OPI, the level checks. The interviewer engages the speaker in conversation on several topics of interest so that the tasks characterizing any given level can be performed. Level checks are questions that elicit the performance floor, the linguistic tasks, and contexts of a particular level which can be handled successfully</td><td>Once the interviewer has begun to establish that the speaker can handle the tasks and topics of a particular level, the interview proceeds to the next phase, the probes. The purpose of the probes is to discover the ceiling or limits of the speaker’s proficiency, i.e., the patterns of weakness. This is done by raising the level of the interview to the next higher major level in an attempt to discover the level at which the speaker can no longer sustain functional performance.</td><td>The final phase returns the speaker to a comfortable level of language exchange and ends the ACTFL OPI on a positive note.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">The Role Play<br>A transactional or social situation can serve as either an additional level check or probe as needed in a particular interview.</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Adapted from “ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview familiarization manual.” by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages., 2012, p. 7.

# CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This study tries to demonstrate that the speaking exams administered in English preparatory schools might be insufficient in assessing the actual level of students. As an alternative to speaking tests prepared and administered at English preparatory schools, ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview might be utilized as it includes a holistic assessment of the speaking skill. The study is based on three research questions and hypotheses which are stated below.

## 3.1 The Research Questions

There are three research questions for this study. The research questions are stated below.

**Research Question 1:** Are speaking tests at English Preparatory Schools in Turkey valid and reliable to assess the designated proficiency level of students?

**Research Question 2:** Is ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview a more functional testing and assessment tool compared to the speaking exams at English Preparatory Schools in Turkey?

**Research Question 3:** Is a curriculum based on ACTFL OPI more effective to attain the designated proficiency level at English Preparatory Schools in Turkey?

## 3.2 The Hypotheses

There are three hypotheses of this study. The hypotheses are stated below.

**Hypothesis 1:** Speaking tests might assess the proficiency level of students but they are insufficient in assessing it in a reliable and valid way.

**Hypothesis 2:** ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is a more functional testing and assessment tool compared to the speaking exams at English Preparatory Schools in Turkey as ACTFL OPI has various advantages over them.

**Hypothesis 3:** A curriculum based on ACTFL OPI might be more effective to attain the designated proficiency level at English Preparatory Schools in Turkey.

This part portrays the procedure of the study. The accompanying subsections elaborate on the research design, setting, participants, instruments, data gathering method, and additional information on speaking examination.

## 3.2 The Research Design

This study will address the impact of ACTFL OPI on assessing speaking skill in the English preparatory school of a university in Turkey. An explanatory sequential mixed method design will be benefited which includes collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In the quantitative phase of this study, the participants of the study are applied an ACTFL OPI, and the scores of the students are obtained. The second quantitative step is done by analysing students' speech in ACTFL OPI through a website called textinspector.com. The level of words, word diversity and the ratio of words at different levels to the number of words in their entire speech was calculated through the website given above.

> The intent of this design is not to merge or compare the data as in the convergent procedures, so having unequal sizes is not an issue in sequential designs. The important consideration lies in collecting enough qualitative information so that meaningful themes can be developed. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 186)

Therefore, an interview with the students who participated in this study is conducted to empower the quantitative data collected. Namely, quantitative data will be supported via qualitative data received through the interview with the students. As King and Mackey (2016) state, elaboration and clarification of the results will be done by integrating the perspectives of the students in this study.

## 3.3 Setting

This study was carried out in the English preparatory class of a foundation university in Turkey. General English lessons are given to students in this preparatory class. These courses are carried out for 72 weeks in a year, 28 hours a week in total. An academic year is divided into 4 tracks. Each track consists of 8 or 9 weeks. Different testing and assessment methods are applied within each track.

A mid-track exam is applied in the middle of each track, and at the of each track an achievement test is administered. These exams include listening, reading, vocabulary,

grammar and writing sections. As each track continues, students do projects and assignments. These affect the scores in a track to a certain extent. In addition, within each track, students do pre-planned written portfolio studies. These portfolio works are received from the students at the end of the track, and an evaluation is made. The portfolio grades affect the track score.

At the end of a semester, a half-term proficiency exam is held. This exam includes listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar and speaking sections. Students who get a passing grade in the first stage of the exam are invited to the speaking exam, which is the second stage of the exam; If students get a valid grade in the speaking exam which is the second phase, they are exempt from the English preparatory exam.

At the end of the second semester, another end-of-year exam is held. Students with a 4-track average of 80 and above during the year are exempt from the English preparatory class without taking the end-of-year exam; However, students with an average of less than 80 take the end-of-year preparatory passing exam if they are not blocked by absenteeism.

In this exam, there are parts of listening, reading, writing, grammar and speaking. End-of-year grades are calculated by taking 60% of the students' four track average and 40% of this end-of-year exam. If this calculated grade is 70 and above, students are exempt from the English preparatory class.

Students with a grade below seventy take the English proficiency exam to be held a few months later. In this exam, there are listening, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary and reading sections. In summary, there are no speaking sections in the mid-track and end-of-track exams during the year, but there is a speaking section in the half-term proficiency and proficiency exams.

At the beginning of the year, students are divided into classes according to their level. During the first two tracks, the 1st and 2nd group students study main course lessons. In the 3rd and 4th tracks, they study skill lessons. These lessons are listening, speaking, writing and grammar lessons. Especially in listening and speaking classes, students make a large amount of speech and presentation. In addition to these courses, in

the 3rd and 4th tracks, students meet with their department mates in the same class for 4 hours a week and study ESP lessons. These courses are also effective in the student's end-of-year preparatory passing grade.

The current study was carried out during the academic year when all courses were conducted online due to the pandemic conditions. In accordance with the decisions of the English Preparatory School administration, a speaking test was also administered as a part of each track test. Students were placed in classes according to their level in the following track. Due to the pandemic conditions, the current study was conducted online, and this exam was applied to the students via Zoom.

## 3.4 Participants of the Research

For this study, data were collected from 8 English preparatory class students between the ages of 18 and 21. These students take general English classes designed in accordance with their assumed level.

Before coming to the English preparatory class, these students took English classes for 8 or 9 years at different schools. These courses are general English courses. Seven of the students stated that they had not participated in any speaking exam before they came to the English preparatory class. One of the students stated that he had attended a language course at a university in Azerbaijan and took a speaking exam in this language course. While 7 of these students studied in public or private schools in Turkey, one of them studied in a public school in Azerbaijan. The students participated in this study voluntarily.

## 3.5 Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation

Different data collection tools which are ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview as a speaking exam, a website (textinspector.com) to analyse the vocabulary levels and an interview with two questions were used in this study. The data collected from these tools were compared with each other, and the findings were analysed and interpreted. In the study, the current levels of the students were determined respectively, then the assumed levels of the students were checked with the ACTFL OPI exam, and then the speeches of the students were transcribed and analysed. A tool which is accessible in textinspector.com was used to analyse students' speech in terms of word levels. Besides,

after the ACTFL OPI exam, an oral interview was held with the students to get their opinions.

## 3.6 Current Speaking Exam at School

A speaking exam is administered at school as well. The preparation process of this exam and the application process is quite different from Oral Proficiency Interview.

### 3.6.1 Exam Preparation Process

There is no separate testing office in the university where this study was conducted. Examinations are prepared and administered jointly by the unit supervisors and teachers. During the exam preparation stage, a task distribution is made to the teachers and unit supervisors who will prepare the relevant exam. According to this distribution of tasks, exam preparation is done according to certain dates and contents.

While preparing the exam, job descriptions are shared with the teachers who are responsible for preparing the exam at the first stage and they are expected to prepare the exam questions within the specified time frame. While preparing these exam questions, teachers benefit from the following documents which are ‘Exam Preparation Task Delegation’, ‘Language School Skill Based Objectives Chart’, and ‘Testing and Assessment Checklist Form for Preparers’. These documents guide the teachers who prepare the exam. In addition, teachers who are in charge of preparing exams participate in testing and assessment trainings at the beginning of each academic year. These trainings include both theoretical knowledge and practical applications. However, although it is known that these trainings contribute to the exam preparation process, their contribution to training a teacher as an exam preparation specialist can be questioned. The following document is the task distribution table, which is the first stage in the exam preparation process.

**Table 4:** A sample task delegation chart for preparing an exam at the foundation university where the research was conducted

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Plat Exam Date:**<br>**Speaking Part Date:** | **HALF TERM PROFICIENCY EXAM**<br>**TASK DETAILS** | | | |
| | **Exam Coordinator: Assigned Teachers** | | | |
| **Job Description** | Exam coordinator designs the exam, delegates the exam preparation tasks to the instructors, and makes sure that the exam is ready on time; valid and reliable. | | | |
| **Packs include** | Notes to proctors, a signature list of each class, an empty seating plan, scantrons, copies of exam papers with enough extras, labels on each pack. | | | |
| | | | | |
| **Skill** | **Preparers** | **Proof-readers** | **Observer** | **Approver** |
| **Listening** | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned |
| **Reading** | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned |
| **Use of English** | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Vocabulary** | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned |
| **Writing** | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned |
| **Speaking** | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned | A teacher is assigned |
| **Formatting** | ITP Supervisors | | | |
| **Exam Trial** | A teacher is assigned | | | |
| **Final Proofreading** | A teacher is assigned | | | |
| **Copying&Packing** | A teacher is assigned | | | |
| **DEADLINES & PROCESS** | | | | |
| **Level & Source Check** | Assigned Date | | | |
| | *As soon as the preparer finds the reading/listening text, s/he makes the approver check if it is from an open source and matches the Ss' level or not. Then s/he prepares the questions and sends it to the proof-reader.* | | | |
| **Preparer** | **Assigned Date**<br>**Preparer prepares the questions according to the exam content and sends it to the proof-reader along with the answer key before the due date..* | | | |
| **Proofreading** | **Assigned Date**<br>**Proof-reader checks and gives feedback, and preparer makes necessary changes.*<br>***Proof-readers may ask the preparers to make necessary changes as many times as it requires till the deadline.*<br>*AFTER THEY NEGOTIATE WITH PREPARERS, the proof-reader sends the exam to Assigned Teachers. Once* | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *the proof-reader sends the questions to Assigned Teachers, the necessary changes are made by the proof-reader.* ******Proof-readers also check the questions' answers that have been provided by the preparer and also whether there are any other possible answers.*** |
| **Approval** | **Assigned Date**<br>**The exam coordinators approve the related parts of the exam. if the part still needs changes, gives feedback and the proof-readers make the necessary changes.*<br>***The finalized and approved exam is sent to Assigned Teacher for the final proofreading.* |
| **Formatting** | **Assigned Date**<br>**IT & P unit gathers the questions* and arranges them in the correct format to apply on the exam day. |
| **Final Proofreading** | **Assigned Date**<br>**Final Proof-reader checks the exam questions of all parts from top to bottom for context and language and then sends them to the exam coordinator along with the comments. The exam coordinators revise and finalize the exam to make it ready to apply on the exam day.* |
| **Exam Trial** | **Assigned Date**<br>**The exam coordinator sends the questions of the whole exam to the instructor to be checked whether the exam has any faulty questions and whether some other options are possible in the answer key. Questions are answered in the exam format individually and the instructor provides feedback to the exam coordinators, Assigned Teachers* |
| **Photocopying & Packing** | **Assigned Date**<br>**Instructors assigned for photocopying & packing need to check the photocopied exam packs in case of any missing* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *pages and classify all packs by units&levels&classes accordingly. They also need to make sure that all exam packs include notes to proctors, a signature list of each class, an empty seating plan, scantrons copies of exam papers with enough extras, labels on each pack.*<br>**Instructors assigned for photocopying & packing sort out the scantrons according to the classes in each unit. Scantrons are to be sorted out a day earlier (on Tuesday).* |

**REMINDERS!**

*Please meet the deadlines.

*It is very important that during this process, not a single hard and softcopy is left anywhere.

*Please note that resource materials from course books and open resources for students should not be used. (e.g., online listening)

*All multiple-choice items must have 4 options.
Also, use tab button between the options, not space button.

*Supervisors need to make sure that the packs are prepared with the contents and are ready on the exam day.

| **Skills** | **# and Types of Q's for the Exam** | | **Points** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Part I: Listening: 1-20 | 1 note taking + 1 while listening (20 Qs) | | 20 |
| Part II: Reading: 21-44 | 3 texts (24 Qs) | | 24 |
| Part III: Use of English: 45-64 | 2 context multiple choice (20 Qs) | | 20 |
| Part IV: Vocabulary: 65-80 | 2 context multiple choice (16 Qs) | | 16 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Part V: Writing | 1 essay (3 prompts) | | 20 |
| Speaking | Warm-up / Monologue / Dialogue Questions | | 100 pts |

The teachers who are in charge of preparing the exam work on the exam section for the relevant skill by checking the level-based objectives after receiving this task delegation chart. Table 5 is a section of the chart containing level-based targets.

**Table 5:** A sample objective chart at the foundation university where the research was conducted

| | |
|---|---|
| SPEAKING A1 | • spelling names of people, places, etc<br>• asking and answering simple questions about age, time, hobbies, family, etc. (e.g. "What do you do?", "Do you live alone/with your parents?")<br>• giving short and simple instructions; some personal information (ex: name, surname, phone number, age, address, hobbies, occupation)<br>• greeting people<br>• answering greetings and questions<br>• asking for permission/help/repetition<br>• talking about everyday subjects such as daily activities, health, the weather<br>• delivering a presentational talk of 1-2' towards the end of the Track (about topics, such as oneself/people/a place)<br>• expressing feelings basically<br>• using linking words: and/but/because/so/then<br>• grasping differences between basic words which are quite similar to each other in terms of pronunciation and spelling |
| SPEAKING A2 | • interrupting politely when necessary<br>• explaining a process or a sequence of events<br>• telling an experience<br>• using correct intonation and stress<br>• discussing in small groups expressing opinion (agreement and disagreement) asking for clarification<br>• summarizing main points in a listening/reading text<br>• keeping a short conversation going<br>• USING: longer sentences with some hesitation or pause longer<br>• formal and informal language<br>• delivering a presentation of about 2-3'<br>• describing an object / person / situation<br>• asking and giving directions |
| SPEAKING B1 | • moderate flexibility in changing style of speaking<br>• introduction to debating for different situations and people<br>• keeping a conversation going<br>• participating in group discussion<br>• expressing feelings/ opinions/reservations implicitly and/or explicitly about a topic<br>• using a variety of complex sentences<br>• talking on the phone in familiar situations comfortably, despite having troubles talking to strangers<br>• using the grammatical items and pronouncing the words with fewer errors, which reduces confusion/difficulty in understanding for the listener<br>• researching, developing and delivering a 3-4' presentation |

| | |
|---|---|
| SPEAKING B1+ | • Understanding and responding on the phone and taking a message for someone else and passing it on with specific details<br>• researching, developing and delivering a 4'-5'presentation<br>• participating in a group discussion and expressing Opinions, feelings, and reservations about a topic. (Common familiar debate matters)<br>• participating in debate sessions and holding short presentations about the topics which are adapted from some courses in the departments |
| SPEAKING B2 | • changing the style of speaking for different situations and people<br>• participating in a group discussion and/or debate session (through refutation and persuasion) expressing Opinions, feelings and reservations about a topic.<br>• comfortably speaking about many topics involving problem-solving or decision-making by making a comparison that comes up in normal conversations in formal and informal situations<br>• fluently talking on the phone and taking a message for someone else and passing it on with specific details<br>• using a number of strategies to keep the conversation going and change the topics.<br>• expressing and responding to gratitude, appreciation, complaint, disappointment, dissatisfaction, satisfaction and hope.<br>• giving clear instructions and directions related to moderately complex, familiar, technical and non-technical tasks.<br>• researching, developing and delivering a 5'-7'presentation<br>• contributing drastically in the debate sessions and holding relatively comprehensive presentations about the topics which are adapted from some courses in the departments |
| SPEAKING B2+ | • Students will be able to maintain a conversation with another student and/or interlocutor within the following functions:<br>• Turn taking, expressing clearly their points of view, ideas or feelings naturally.<br>• Evaluating advantages and disadvantages, giving Opinions with relevant explanations, and practicing in reaching a decision.<br>• Giving clear, detailed descriptions about personal information and on a wide range of subjects related to their fields of interest.<br>• Students will be able to respond to:<br>• Using connected speech, reduced forms and natural intonation to have generally clear, natural pronunciation of most utterances.<br>• Employing a wide range of mostly accurately used grammatical structures, words and expressions, with little cause for misunderstanding.<br>• Producing stretches of language at a fairly even tempo.<br>• orally summarizing a lecture |

Afterwards, the teachers prepare the exam questions for the relevant department, taking into account the criteria specified in the Preparers' Checklist table. Teachers have about 4 or 5 days to prepare these exam questions. The teachers who prepare the exam questions send the part they are responsible for preparing to the proof-reader to be checked.

The teacher, who is in charge of proof-reading the exam, provides the necessary controls by making use of the task chart, objectives table, and the Preparer's Checklist for the relevant parts of the exam. The teacher who is in charge of checking the exam can make his own corrections when necessary or share his feedback with the teacher at the previous step for correction. They make use of the Proof-readers Checklist document when sharing their own feedback.

**Table 6:** A sample checklist for preparing an exam at the foundation university where the research was conducted

| | **TESTING AND ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST FORM FOR PREPARERS** | **DATE** |
|---|---|---|
| **GENERAL CRITERIA** | | **CHECKED** |
| 1 | Make sure there is only one correct answer. | |
| 2 | Write items at the students' level of proficiency. | |
| 3 | Avoid using ambiguous terms and statements. | |
| 4 | Avoid using negatives and double negatives. | |
| 5 | Avoid giving clues that could be used in answering other items. | |
| 6 | Avoid "absoluteness" clues *(all, always, never, etc.).* | |
| **CRITERIA FOR TRUE FALSE ITEMS** | | |
| 1 | Avoid using broad general statements. | |
| 2 | Avoid using statements which assess trivial points. | |
| 3 | Avoid using negative statements. | |
| 4 | Avoid using long and complex sentences. | |
| 5 | Make true and false statements approximately of similar length, difficulty, and distribution | |
| | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **CRITERIA FOR MULTIPLE CHOICE ITEMS** | | |
| 1 | Avoid all unintentional clues.<br>e.g. The fruit that she put on the table was an _____.<br>A. pear B. banana C. apple D. kiwi | |
| 2 | Create plausible distractors which are of similar length and level of difficulty. | |
| 3 | Avoid needless redundancy in the alternatives.<br>e.g. The man was sleeping _____.<br>A. when the kids broke his watch<br>B. when the kids left home | |
| 4 | Assign the correct answers randomly. | |
| 5 | Avoid distractors like “none of the above,” “A and B only,” etc. | |
| 6 | Make sure the stem is quite clear and state the point to be tested unambiguously. | |
| 7 | Make sure the stem includes as much of the item as possible. | |
| 8 | Avoid negative statements because they are likely to be ignored by the examinees. | |
| 9 | Make sure all of the alternatives are grammatically correct by themselves and consistent with the stem. | |
| 10 | Every item should have one correct or clearly best answer. | |
| 11 | Avoid using “all of the above” or “none of the above” as an alternative. | |
| 12 | Avoid using “all of the above” or “none of the above” as an alternative. | |
| 13 | Avoid using “all of the above” or “none of the above” as an alternative. | |
| **CRITERIA FOR MULTIPLE MATCHING ITEMS** | | |
| 1 | Include more options than premises. | |
| 2 | Write options shorter than premises to reduce reading. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | Make sure the option and premise lists are related to one central theme. | |
| 4 | Include an unequal number of items in each column. | |
| 5 | Clarify the way the items are to be matched from the two columns. | |
| 6 | Keep the list brief and place the shorter column to the right. | |
| **CRITERIA FOR FILL-IN-THE BLANK ITEMS** | | |
| 1 | Make sure the required response is concise. | |
| 2 | Include sufficient context to convey the intent of the questions to the students. | |
| 3 | Make sure the blanks are of standard length. | |
| 4 | Make sure the main body of the question precedes the blank. e.g., Based on the above sentence, teachers should put the main body of the question before the _____. | |
| 5 | Develop a list of acceptable responses. | |
| **CRITERIA FOR VOCABULARY** | | |
| 1 | The context should be clear enough to provide the testees with a clear meaning. | |
| 2 | If the item being written is a paraphrase or synonym type, the alternatives should be easier than word being tested. | |
| 3 | If the item being written is of completion type, the distractors and the word being tested should be of the same level of difficulty. | |
| 4 | The choices should be, to the extent possible, related to the same general topics or area. | |
| 5 | The choices should be approximately of the same length. | |
| 6 | Do not include any difficult or erroneous grammatical structures. | |
| 7 | In underlined items, the choices should be easier than the tested word and of the same grammatical category. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8 | In completion items, the choices should be of the same difficulty level. | |
| 9 | Don't give an easy item with difficult distractors | |
| **CRITERIA FOR READING** | | |
| 1 | No question should be answered without reading the passage. | |
| 2 | A good way in reviewing a test is just to read the questions to see whether they can be answered without reading the passage. | |
| 3 | The tester should be able to recognize what the item is assessing. | |
| 4 | Importance of objectives of reading | |
| **CRITERIA FOR USE OF ENGLISH** | | |
| 1 | The distractors must be correct by themselves. | |
| 2 | Avoid creating any confusion. | |
| 3 | The level of sentences should match the level of test-takers. | |
| 4 | Students should be familiar with the form of the test. | |
| 5 | The stem should represent natural language. | |
| 6 | Each item should have only one acceptable answer. | |
| 7 | The stem should provide sufficient context and the choices should be as brief as possible. | |
| 8 | The choices should be of equal size or paired by length. | |
| 9 | Each item should test only one point. | |
| **CRITERIA FOR LISTENING** | | |
| 1 | Comprehensions should be assessed (not hearing, spelling, prior knowledge of a topics or reading long multiple-choice questions) | |
| 2 | Learning objectives and listening tasks of the unit/course should be reflected. | |
| 3 | Ambiguous or 'trick' test items should be avoided. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | Audios with authentic, real-life speech should be used. (Notetaking: academic lectures, while listening dialogues and academic lectures). | |
| 5 | Texts that are dense and cognitively demanding (meant to be read and not listened to) should be avoided. | |
| 6 | Comprehension tasks that reflect real-life purposes for listening should be chosen. | |
| 7 | Difficult accents and dialects should be avoided. American accent should be a priority. | |
| 8 | Questions should not be formed through scripts of the audios. | |

After this stage is completed, the exam is sent to another teacher responsible for the relevant skill for approval. The related teacher can check the prepared section and share his feedback or make some corrections himself. After the approval of the exam is completed, the different parts of the exam are brought together and organized and shared with another lecturer whose mother tongue is English for the final check. After making the necessary checks for the exam, this lecturer can suggest corrections and make corrections himself. This stage is the final stage where the final version of the exam is formed. Once finalizing this stage, the exam is ready to be reproduced and administered. Exam preparation process is summarized in Figure 4.

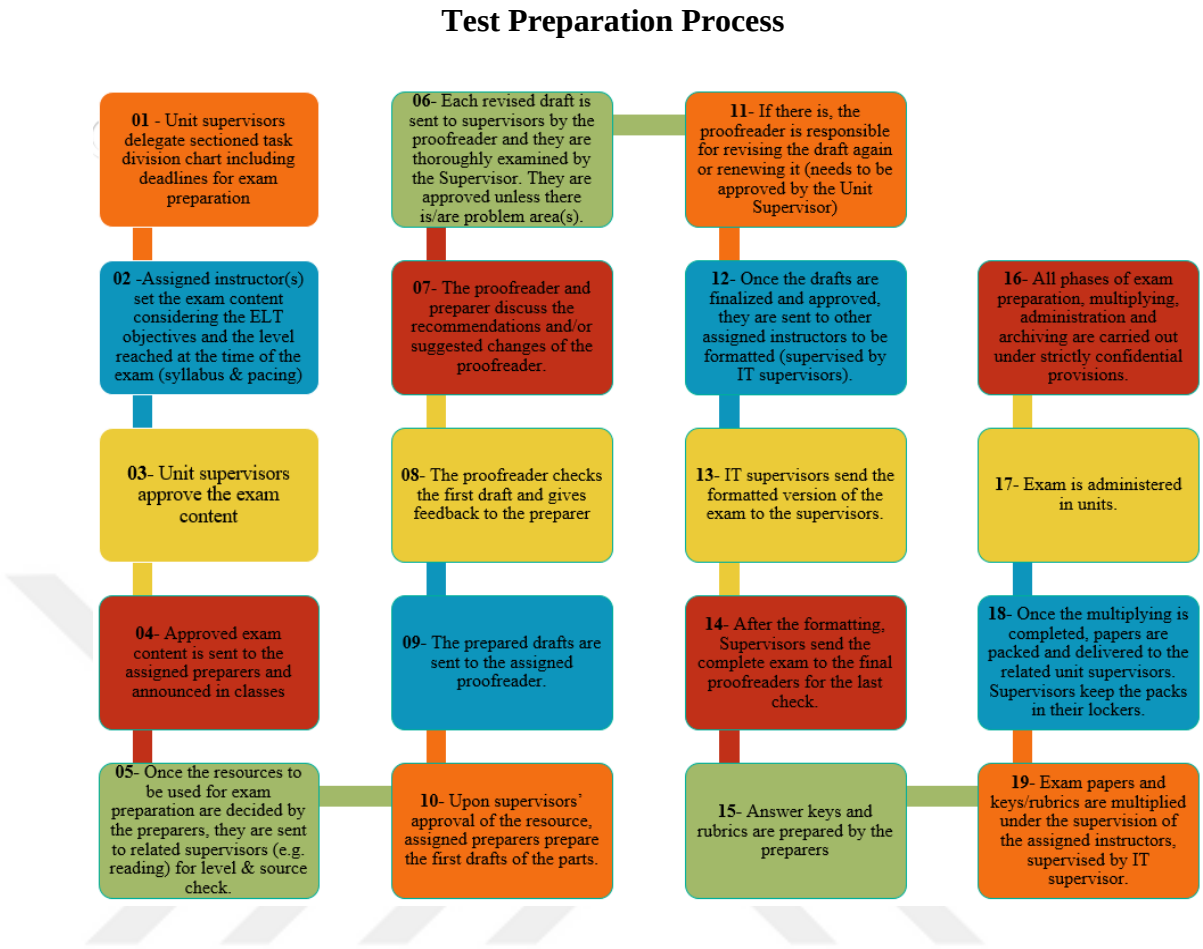



**Figure 4:** Exam preparation process at the foundation university where the research was conducted

### 3.6.2 Speaking Exam's Procedure

It consists of 3 steps which are warm-up, monologue, and dialogue parts. Instructors are provided some questions to be used in the Warm-up part. Two instructors apply the exam to the same student. After one of the instructors greet and welcome the student, he starts conveying the exam with asking some general questions which are chosen in the warm-up questions list. This part lasts for about 1-2 mins. The purpose of this part is to enable students relax and get ready for speaking. It has been observed that some students provide a lot of input to be used in this part.

The next part is monologue section. After the warm-up part is over, the same instructor asks the student to choose a card which has a prompt on it. Students are given one minute to think about this prompt and after that they give a speech about it for one or

two minutes. While the student is thinking about the prompt, he/she can take some notes on a piece of paper and use the notes while giving the speech. Each student is provided a different prompt and give a speech about a different topic. If the student does not understand the prompt, the instructors can paraphrase the question once. Even if the student cannot say anything on the topics, the instructors will not interfere with the monologue, and they will wait for the student for 1 minute.

The last part of the speaking exam is dialogue section. Once the monologue part is over, the instructors will continue with the exam asking follow-up questions depending on the topics. The student will be asked 2 or 3 of the questions depending on the performance of the student. This section lasts 2-3 minutes. If the student does not understand the prompt, the instructors can paraphrase the question once. When this section ends, the instructors thank the student and bids farewell. There are some important points that instructors are informed. It is crucial that instructors do not interfere with the monologue part whatsoever. The instructors should not give any information about their scores in any form including verbal or non-verbal signals to the examinees. After the dialogue part is over, the two instructors give their scores by using an analytic rubric and they take the average of their scores to calculate the final speaking score of the students. The rubric is available in Table 7.

**Table 7:** Speaking exam assessment rubric at the foundation university where the research was conducted

| **Speaking Rubric** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Task Response | Fluency/Pronunciation | Accuracy | Vocabulary | Interaction | TOTAL (40) |
| 8-7 points | 8-7 points | 8-7 points | 8-7 points | 8-7 points | 35-40 points |
| Gives a relevant, organized response | Able to communicate without long pauses and appropriate speed; pronunciation easy to understand | Succeeds in building a full range of correct sentences naturally, with minimal errors | Able to make use of a variety of words correctly at the intermediate level or better; naturally utilizes connectors and discourse markers | Stays on task and communicates effectively; almost always responds appropriately and always tries to develop the interaction | |
| 6-5 points | 6-5 points | 6-5 points | 6-5 points | 6-5 points | 25-30 points |
| The response is a bit short or disorganized, but still on topics | Pauses but not frequently or long; pronunciation is generally understood | Uses a range of structures but only moderate success with complex structures; some grammatical mistakes but does not cause communication problems | Makes use of a limited number of intermediate vocabulary and connectors/discourse markers | Stays on task most of the time and communicates effectively; generally, responds appropriately and keeps trying to develop interaction | |
| 4-3 points | 4-3 points | 4-3 points | 4-3 points | 4-3 points | 15-20 points |
| The response is either too short or sometimes lacking relevance | Pauses frequently and long; mispronunciations are frequent, causing difficulty in understanding | Produces basic sentences with reasonable accuracy; complex forms contain errors that lead to misunderstanding | Fails to make use of intermediate level vocabulary | Tries to communicate, but sometimes does not respond appropriately or clearly | |
| 1-2 point | 1-2 point | 1-2 point | 1-2 point | 1-2 point | 5-10 points |
| Almost no response or off-topics | Long and awkward pauses; speech is often unintelligible | Attempts basic forms but is generally unsuccessful; relies completely on memorized expressions | Sentences mostly contain elementary or pre-intermediate level vocabulary | Purpose isn't clear; needs a lot of help communicating; usually does not respond appropriately or clearly | |
| 0 point | 0 point | 0 point | 0 point | 0 point | 0 point |
| Does not attend the exam | | | | | |

## 3.7 The similarities and differences between the current speaking exam and ACTFL OPI

There are certain similarities and differences between the current speaking exam and ACTFL OPI. These similarities and differences not only affect the flow of the exam but also the effects of the exam on the students and teachers.

First of all, both of the exams include a warm-up section which enable students to get used to the process of the exam before starting to answer the questions that will take some time for them to answer. However, the time allocated for warm-up part in the current speaking exam that is applied at English Preparatory Program is only one or two minutes. The interlocutor is expected to move on to the monologue part after covering some of the questions in the monologue part. As opposed to this time limitation, there is no time limit in the warm-up part in of ACTFL OPI. The interlocutor is set free to ask some warm-up questions depending on the answers of the students. Moreover, examiners are provided a set of warm- up questions in the current speaking exam administered at school, so they are just expected to choose some of them and ask them. However, examiners in ACTFL OPI are not provided any warm-up questions, which makes it possible for them to ask the questions according to each student.

After the warm-up part is over, students go on the exam with the monologue part in the preparatory school's speaking exam. Students choose a card which has a prompt on it, and they are expected to think about it for one minute give a speech in the form of monologue for two minutes. However, the students do not choose any card which has a prompt on it in ACTFL OPI. There is no monologue part in ACTFL OPI as well. The examiner asks some questions to the students based on the data he/she gets from the students. The students answer the questions, and a new question is elicited out of the previous answers given by the students. This enables a natural flow of speech which is quite similar to the dialogues that people have in their daily lives. Moreover, students do not have any time to think about the questions and take notes for one minute in ACTFL OPI. They are expected to share their answers verbally right on the spot. Examiners do some level checks in ACTFL OPI and ask the next question the students by determining the level. The examiners determine the floor firstly and then determines the ceiling in terms of the level of the questions. After asking some questions at the ceiling level, if the

students can properly answer the questions, then the examiners ask the following question at a higher level. The sustained performance of students is needed at this point. If the students are not able to sustain their performance at the level, then the examiner asks the following question at a lower level. Moreover, the examiner presents an imaginary case, shares it with the students and asks the students various question based on that imaginary case in ACTFL OPI. For example, the examiner can ask what the students would to in the period of Covid-19 if they were a president in a country. This section is more like a role-play part in the exam. There is no role-play part in the current speaking exam administered at the prep school where this study is conducted. Some example questions for this part are stated below. This part lasts about 20 minutes.

1. You are on a bus/plane/train. You notice that the person sitting next to you is reading a new book. This is a title that you are also interested in. Introduce yourself. Then ask several questions to find out more about the book. I will play the part of the person sitting next to you.
2. You just moved into an apartment in a city. You meet one of your new neighbours in the elevator/stairwell/entryway/etc. Introduce yourself. Then ask several questions to get some more information about the apartment building, the neighbourhood, and the city in general. I will play the part of your new neighbour.

After the monologue part is over in the speaking exam applied at school, a part called dialogue part is administered. The examiner is just allowed to ask questions prepared in advance to the students. However, the questions are adaptable according to the input provided by the students in ACTFL OPI. This is a real advantage of ACTFL OPI as it fosters getting as much data as possible from the student. In the final part of both exams the examiner asks some follow-up questions and bids farewell to the students.

The examiners benefit from an analytic rubric in the current speaking exam. This analytic rubric contains some parts which are Task Response, Fluency/Pronunciation, Accuracy, Vocabulary, Interaction. Each of these sections are allocated some points. There are also four sections as a way of some categorization in these parts. The examiners assess the speaking exam of the students according to each criterion as sub level. The rubric of the exam is given above. However, a holistic rubric is utilized in ACTFL OPI. This holistic rubric enables the examiners assess the speech given by the student in a

wider perspective. When the examiners focus on the detailed lexical, grammatical, fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy criteria, they might fail to focus on the general aspect of the speech. Therefore, using the holistic rubric of ACTFL OPI to assess speaking might be a more functional alternative.

The structure of ACTFL OPI is summarized below:

- Warm-up: Interviewee hears the language and settles comfortably into it; tester gathers topics, gauges interest, gains preliminary idea about language ability
- Iterative process: Level checks and probes to establish floor and ceiling; probe up for linguistic breakdown; sustained performance at floor is required
- Role play: Towards the end; used to establish certain abilities not easily obtained in the conversational format of the ACTFL OPI.
- Wind-down: Brings interviewee back down to level of comfort, a few additional exchanges to close the interview, yes/no questions, closed questions, leaves interviewee with sense of accomplishment.

Because of the authentic nature of ACTFL OPI, it can be benefited in various fields in real life. A chart of working fields and possible proficiency level is available in Figure 5.

**Figure 5:** Oral proficiency levels in the workplace

*Note*. From "Oral proficiency levels in the workplace." https://www.actfl.org/

A comparison of the speaking exam at school and ACTFL OPI is available in Table 8.

**Table 8:** A comparison of the speaking exam at school and ACTFL OPI

| | **Current Speaking Exam at School** | **ACTFL OPI** |
|---|---|---|
| **Duration** | 7-8 minutes | Around 30 minutes |
| **Rubric** | Analytic | Holistic |
| **Parts of the exam** | Warm-up, Monologue, Dialogue | Warm-up, Iterative Process (Level Checks and Probes), Wind Down |
| **Questions** | Prepared in advance | Formed during the exam |
| **Preparation of items** | By assigned teachers | By the examiner |
| **Warm-up** | 1-2 minutes<br>Limited range of questions | No time limit<br>A wide range of questions |
| **Monologue** | Choosing a card<br>1 minute for taking notes<br>2 minutes for speaking using the notes | No monologue part |
| **Dialogue** | Questions are not adaptable<br>2-3 questions | The whole exam is in the format of a dialogue |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Limited | |
| **Iterative Process** | No Iterative Process | Level Checks<br>Probes<br>Floor<br>Ceiling |
| **Role Play** | Not available | Roles are assigned based on students' answers<br>Iterative |
| **The Wind Down** | Available but limited | Available and unlimited |

## 3.8 A lexical analysis of the transcription of students' speech in ACTFL OPI

After the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam was administered to the students, the speeches of the students were transcribed and analysed in this study. These speeches were examined through textinspecor.com, a website that analyses the details of a text, its level, word variety, word count, the number of words at different levels and their frequency of use. This website is a paid one that provides service over the internet. In order to use the program, a username is purchased, and it is used with the created password.

With the current analysis, the levels and number of the words in the speech of students were analysed. The percentage of words at each level to total number of words was also calculated. In this way, the performance of the students in the speaking exam was also evaluated in writing, and whether the students were at the correct level according to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam was also checked by revealing the levels of the words used.

## 3.9 Interview

After the ACTFL OPI is applied to the students, they are asked two questions to get their opinion about it. The questions asked to the students are below:

1. Do you think you could express your opinions in ACTFL OPI effectively?
2. Which speaking exam is more functional for you, the speaking exam at school or ACTFL OPI?

# CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

## 4.1 An Overview of Findings

Three different methods were used to analyse the findings in this study. One of these methods is to compare students' ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam results with students' assumed current levels. Another method is to examine students' speech, word levels, word diversity and the ratio of words at different levels to the number of words in their entire speech. The final method is to examine the answers of interview questions asked to the students. These questions were asked to the students in order to find out whether the students could express themselves easily in the Oral Proficiency Interview. The students are also asked to compare ACTFL OPI with the speaking exam administered at school.

The attained levels of students A, B, C, D, E, F, G were B1, and the attained level of Student H was B2, however, their ACTFL OPI scores were Intermediate- LOW for Students A, B, C, D, and F; Intermediate- MID for Student E; Intermediate- HIGH for Students G and H. The equivalents of these scores in CEFR are stated in Figure 3. Findings from these three methods reveal that students' attained levels are not actually their actual levels, according to the result of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam. Another proof that supports this idea is the examination of students' speeches. According to the analysis, the speeches of the students mostly contain A1 and A2 level words. For this reason, it can be interpreted that the speeches and levels of the students do not match their assumed levels.

When the current exam and the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam are compared in terms of functionality, it can be interpreted that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam is a more suitable exam for students, taking into account the students' answers. The reason for this is that students stated that they can express themselves more easily in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam, they can speak in a wider period of time, and the questions asked are based on their own life experiences.

When the students were asked questions based on their own experiences, they stated that they could express more, and they felt more comfortable doing this. Below, the results of each student's ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam are compared with their current levels, the analysis of the words in the students' speech is presented in tables,

and the students' ideas about the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam are explained. At this stage, the names of the students will not be expressed clearly, and the names of the students will be indicated as A B C D E F G H. Table 9 contains student's program levels and ACTFL OPI levels:

**Table 9:** The comparison of ACTFL OPI scores and the program level of students

| STUDENT | PROGRAMME LEVEL | CANDIDATES' SPEAKING SCORES IN ACTFL OPI | CANDIDATES' ACTFL OPI SCORES' EQUIVALENT IN CEFR | RESULT | LEXICAL SUMMARY IN TEXT ANALYZER |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STUDENT A | B1 | Intermediate- LOW | A2 | BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL | A1-A2 |
| STUDENT B | B1 | Intermediate-LOW | A2 | BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL | A1-A2 |
| STUDENT C | B1 | Intermediate-LOW | A2 | BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL | A1-A2 |
| STUDENT D | B1 | Intermediate-LOW | A2 | BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL | A1-A2 |
| STUDENT E | B1 | Intermediate-MID | A2 | BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL | A1-A2 |
| STUDENT F | B1 | Intermediate-LOW | A2 | BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL | A1-A2 |
| STUDENT G | B1 | Intermediate-HIGH | B1 | EXPECTED LEVEL | A1-A2 |
| STUDENT H | B2 | Intermediate-HIGH | B1 | BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL | A1-A2 |

## 4.2 Student A

According to the flow of the Oral Proficiency Interview, Student A was asked some questions. These questions are based on the answers given by the student as the exam progresses. The previous answer given by the student determines the content of the next question. While the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview continues, the examiner takes the notes and prepares for the next question.

Student A is an 18-year-old female. Before coming to the English preparatory program, she attended English lessons at primary, secondary and high schools. She used books at different levels in these lessons.

Student A's answers and the entire exam were evaluated using the rubric of the Oral Proficiency Interview, and the student's level was Intermediate-LOW, which was found to be A2 when compared to CEFR levels. However, as stated above, the level of the student in the English preparatory program is B1. This shows that the student's speaking skill is not actually at the assumed level.

When the student's answers to the questions are analysed in terms of words, the result confirms the score of the Oral Proficiency Interview. When the student's speech is examined, the type ratios and levels are as follows. The type ratio of the student at the A1 level is 60.54%, the type ratio at the A2 level is 16.27%, the type ratio at the B1 level is 5.72%, the type ratio at the B2 level is 3.01%, the type ratio at the C1 level is 0.90% and the type ratio at the C2 level is 0.90%.

**Student A Summary**

**Table 10:** The lexical analysis of student A

| Word List | Types | Tokens | cumul% Types | cumul% Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 201 (60.54%) | 779 (78.61%) | 60.5% | 78.6% |
| A2 | 54 (16.27%) | 87 (8.78%) | 76.8% | 87.4% |
| B1 | 19 (5.72%) | 28 (2.83%) | 82.5% | 90.2% |
| B2 | 10 (3.01%) | 14 (1.41%) | 85.5% | 91.6% |
| C1 | 3 (0.90%) | 6 (0.61%) | 86.4% | 92.2% |
| C2 | 3 (0.90%) | 3 (0.30%) | 87.3% | 92.5% |
| Unlisted | 42 (12.65%) | 74 (7.47%) | ~100% | ~100% |

When the student was asked whether she could express herself effectively in this exam, she stated that she could express herself very comfortably and well in this exam. She stated that the reason for this is that the duration of the exam is longer, the topics covered in the exam include examples from her own life, and the questions asked by the person administering the exam are related to the student's own life.

When a question was asked to compare the speaking exam at school with the Oral Proficiency Interview, the student stated that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam is more preferable for the reasons stated above. In other words, the student stated that she would have gotten a higher grade if the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam had been administered at school.

In the Oral Proficiency Interview, the student was asked questions about dancing, songs, health, and social media which are her field of interest in general, and the student answered the questions by adding examples from her own life. The student was asked questions about the themes above because she gave some information about them in her speech.

## 4.3 Student B

According to the flow of the Oral Proficiency Interview, Student B was asked some questions. These questions are based on the answers given by the student as the exam progresses. The previous answer given by the student determines the content of the next question. While the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview continues, the examiner takes the notes and prepares for the next question.

Student B is a 19-year-old female. Before coming to the English preparatory program, she attended English lessons in primary, secondary and high schools. she used books at different levels in these lessons.

Student B's answers and the entire exam were evaluated using the rubric of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam, and the student's level was Intermediate-LOW, which was found to be A2 when compared to CEFR levels. However, as stated above, the level of the student in the English preparatory program is B1. This shows that the student's speaking skill is not actually at the assumed level.

When the student's answers to the questions are analysed in terms of words, the result confirms the score of the Oral Proficiency Interview. When the student's speech is examined, the type ratios and levels are as follows. The type ratio of the student at the A1 level is 56.35%, the type ratio at the A2 level is 17.59%, the type ratio at the B1 level is 10.10%, the type ratio at the B2 level is 2.61%, the type ratio at the C1 level is 0.65 % and there is no type ratio at the C2 level.

However, the student's A1 level token ratio is 75.77%, A2 level token ratio is 9.36%, B1 level token ratio is 5.12%, B2 level token ratio is 1.16%, C1 level token ratio is 0.19% and there is no token ratio at the C2 level.

**Student B Summary**

**Table 11:** The lexical analysis of student B

| Word List | Types | Tokens | cumul% Types | cumul% Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 173 (56.35%) | 785 (75.77%) | 56.4% | 75.8% |
| A2 | 54 (17.59%) | 97 (9.36%) | 73.9% | 85.1% |
| B1 | 31 (10.10%) | 53 (5.12%) | 84.0% | 90.2% |
| B2 | 8 (2.61%) | 12 (1.16%) | 86.7% | 91.4% |
| C1 | 2 (0.65%) | 2 (0.19%) | 87.3% | 91.6% |
| Unlisted | 39 (12.70%) | 87 (8.40%) | ~100% | ~100% |

When the student was asked whether she could express herself effectively in this exam, she stated that she expressed herself correctly, easily, and effectively. She stated that the reason for this was that the exam generally continued on her own fields of interest. When she compared the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview with the speaking exam at school, she stated that the subject given to her to speak in the school exam was actually an irrelevant subject.

In the Oral Proficiency Interview, the student was asked questions about sports, which are her field of interest in general, and the student answered the questions by adding examples from her own life. The student was asked questions about the themes above because she gave some information about them in her speech.

## 4.4 Student C

According to the flow of the Oral Proficiency Interview, Student C was asked some questions. These questions are based on the answers given by the student as the exam progresses. The previous answer given by the student determines the content of the next question. While the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview continues, the examiner takes the notes and prepares for the next question.

Student B is a 21-year-old female. Before coming to the English preparatory program, she attended English lessons in primary, secondary and high schools. She used books at different levels in these lessons.

Student C's answers and the entire exam were evaluated using the rubric of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam, and the student's level was Intermediate-LOW, which was found to be A2 when compared to CEFR levels. However, as stated above, the level of the student in the English preparatory program is B1. This shows that the student's speaking skill is not actually at the assumed level.

When the student's answers to the questions are analysed in terms of words, the result confirms the score of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam. When the student's speech is examined, the type ratios and levels are as follows. The type ratio of the student at the A1 level is 56.11%, the type ratio at the A2 level is 16.83%, the type ratio at the B1 level is 9.90%, the type ratio at the B2 level is 3.96%, the type ratio at the C1 level is 1.32% and type ratio at the C2 level is 0.33%

However, the student's A1 level token ratio is 76.18%, A2 level token ratio is 8.74%, B1 level token ratio is 5.26%, B2 level token ratio is 1.25%, C1 level token ratio is 0.71% and C2 level token ratio is 0.09%.

**Student C Summary**

**Table 12:** The lexical analysis of student C

| Word List | Types | Tokens | cumul% Types | cumul% Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 170 (56.11%) | 854 (76.18%) | 56.1% | 76.2% |
| A2 | 51 (16.83%) | 98 (8.74%) | 72.9% | 84.9% |
| B1 | 30 (9.90%) | 59 (5.26%) | 82.8% | 90.2% |
| B2 | 12 (3.96%) | 14 (1.25%) | 86.8% | 91.4% |
| C1 | 4 (1.32%) | 8 (0.71%) | 88.1% | 92.1% |
| C2 | 1 (0.33%) | 1 (0.09%) | 88.5% | 92.2% |
| Unlisted | 35 (11.55%) | 87 (7.76%) | ~100% | ~100% |

When the student was asked whether she could express herself comfortably in this exam, she stated that she could not express herself very easily. She stated that the reason for this was that she could not find the right word to describe the thoughts in her mind, and that she could not explain the complex thoughts in her mind with simple words.

When the student is told to explain the difference between the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview and the speaking exam at school, the student stated that she expressed herself more easily in the exam at school. The reason for this was that she could see the questions in the exam at school, so she could understand the questions and prepare for speaking in a better way. The fact that the student has access to the written form of a speaking question in a speaking is open to discussion as the ability to comprehend a written sentence is also tested in this student's case. This might also lead to a discussion about the content validity of this speaking exam. However, the option for the student to see the questions in written form is not available in the Oral Proficiency Interview. This turns out to be a difficult situation for the student.

This student was mostly asked questions about his hobbies. These questions were mostly created about music, cinema, and technology. The student was asked questions about the themes above because she gave some information about them in her speech.

## 4.5 Student D

According to the flow of the Oral Proficiency Interview, Student D was asked some questions. These questions are based on the answers given by the student as the exam progresses. The previous answer given by the student determines the content of the next question. While the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview continues, the examiner takes the notes and prepares for the next question.

Student D is an 18-year-old male. Before coming to the English preparatory program, she studied English at different schools and in a private language course with the guidance of her family. However, the student stated that he was not very enthusiastic in the English lessons he attended.

Student D's answers and the entire exam were evaluated using the rubric of the Oral Proficiency Interview, and the student's level was Intermediate-LOW, which was found to be A2 when compared to CEFR levels. However, as stated above, the level of

the student in the English preparatory program is B1. This shows that the student's speaking skill is not actually at the assumed level.

When the student's answers to the questions are analysed in terms of words, the result confirms the score of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam. When the student's speech is examined, the type ratios and levels are as follows. The type ratio of the student at the A1 level is 63.14%, the type ratio at the A2 level is 14.51%, the type ratio at the B1 level is 5.88%, the type ratio at the B2 level is 4.31%, the type ratio at the C1 level is 1.18% and there is no type ratio at the C2 level.

However, the student's A1 level token ratio is 79.05%, A2 level token ratio is 8.82%, B1 level token ratio is 3.47%, B2 level token ratio is 1.88%, C1 level token ratio is 0.43% and there is no token ratio at C2 level.

**Student D Summary**

**Table 13:** The lexical analysis of student D

| Word List | Types | Tokens | cumul% Types | cumul% Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 161 (63.14%) | 547 (79.05%) | 63.1% | 79.0% |
| A2 | 37 (14.51%) | 61 (8.82%) | 77.7% | 87.9% |
| B1 | 15 (5.88%) | 24 (3.47%) | 83.5% | 91.3% |
| B2 | 11 (4.31%) | 13 (1.88%) | 87.8% | 93.2% |
| C1 | 3 (1.18%) | 3 (0.43%) | 89.0% | 93.7% |
| Unlisted | 28 (10.98%) | 44 (6.36%) | ~100% | ~100% |

When the student was asked whether he could express himself comfortably and effectively in the Oral Proficiency Interview, the student stated that he could express himself easily. The student stated that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview was easier for him when compared to the speaking exam at school because he did not feel time pressure during the exam.

This student was asked mostly about sports, travel, history, photography, quarantine, cinema, and computer games. The student was asked questions about these themes above because he gave some information about them in his speech.

## 4.6 Student E

According to the flow of the Oral Proficiency Interview, Student E was asked some questions. These questions are based on the answers given by the student as the exam progresses. The previous answer given by the student determines the content of the next question. While the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview continues, the examiner takes the notes and prepares for the next question.

Student E is a 19-year-old female. Before coming to the English preparatory program, the student studied in a private school and attended English at different levels in different classes, starting from primary school.

Student E's answers and the entire exam were evaluated using the rubric of the Oral Proficiency Interview, and the student's level was Intermediate-LOW, which was found to be A2 when compared to CEFR levels. However, as stated above, the level of the student in the English preparatory program is B1. This shows that the student's speaking skill is not actually at the assumed level.

When the student's answers to the questions are analysed in terms of words, the result confirms the score of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam. When the student's speech is examined, the type ratios and levels are as follows. The type ratio of the student at the A1 level is 52.85%, the type ratio at the A2 level is 19.52%, the type ratio at the B1 level is 14.41%, the type ratio at the B2 level is 6.31%, the type ratio at the C1 level is 0.30% and type ratio at the C2 level is0.30.

However, the student's A1 level token ratio is 74.31%, A2 level token ratio is 13.21%, B1 level token ratio is 5.19%, B2 level token ratio is 2.03%, C1 level token ratio is 0.16% and the token ratio at C2 level is 0.08.

**Student E Summary**

**Table 14:** The lexical analysis of student E

| Word List | Types | Tokens | cumul% Types | cumul% Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 176 (52.85%) | 917 (74.31%) | 52.9% | 74.3% |
| A2 | 65 (19.52%) | 163 (13.21%) | 72.4% | 87.5% |
| B1 | 48 (14.41%) | 64 (5.19%) | 86.8% | 92.7% |
| B2 | 21 (6.31%) | 25 (2.03%) | 93.1% | 94.7% |
| C1 | 1 (0.30%) | 2 (0.16%) | 93.4% | 94.9% |
| C2 | 1 (0.30%) | 1 (0.08%) | 93.7% | 95.0% |
| Unlisted | 21 (6.31%) | 62 (5.02%) | ~100% | ~100% |

When the student was asked whether she could express herself effectively in the Oral Proficiency Interview, she stated that she felt nervous at the beginning of the exam, but her anxiety decreased in the following stages. The student stated that she had difficulty in expressing herself in some cases, she first planned what she wanted to say in her mind in Turkish and then tried to express it after translating it into English.

When the student was asked to compare the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview with the speaking exam at school, she said that she felt more confident in the speaking exam at school. She stated that the reason for this was that when she was given a topics in the exam at school, she had one minute to think about that topics and that she could take notes within this time frame, and then she spoke by using notes she took.

This student was asked mostly about music and hobbies. The student was asked questions about these themes above because she gave some information about them in her speech.

## 4.7 Student F

According to the flow of the Oral Proficiency Interview, Student F was asked some questions. These questions are based on the answers given by the student as the exam progresses. The previous answer given by the student determines the content of the next question. While the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview continues, the examiner takes the notes and prepares for the next question.

Student F is a 19-year-old female. Before coming to the English preparatory program, she attended English lessons at primary, secondary and high school levels. She used books at different levels in these lessons.

Student F's answers and the entire exam were evaluated using the rubric of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam, and the student's level was Intermediate-LOW, which was found to be A2 when compared to CEFR levels. However, as stated above, the level of the student in the English preparatory program is B1. This shows that the student's speaking skill is not actually at the assumed level.

When the student's answers to the questions are analysed in terms of words, the result confirms the score of the Oral Proficiency Interview. When the student's speech is examined, the type ratios and levels are as follows. The type ratio of the student at the A1 level is 59.04%, the type ratio at the A2 level is 19.45%, the type ratio at the B1 level is 11.26%, the type ratio at the B2 level is 2.39%, the type ratio at the C1 level is 0.34% and type ratio at the C2 level is 0.68.

However, the student's A1 level token ratio is 77.46%, A2 level token ratio is 12.70%, B1 level token ratio is 4.04%, B2 level token ratio is 0.84%, C1 level token ratio is 0.08% and the token ratio at C2 level is 0.34.

## Student F Summary

**Table 15:** The lexical analysis of student F

| Word List | Types | Tokens | cumul% Types | cumul% Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 173 (59.04%) | 921 (77.46%) | 59.0% | 77.5% |
| A2 | 57 (19.45%) | 151 (12.70%) | 78.5% | 90.2% |
| B1 | 33 (11.26%) | 48 (4.04%) | 89.8% | 94.2% |
| B2 | 7 (2.39%) | 10 (0.84%) | 92.1% | 95.0% |
| C1 | 1 (0.34%) | 1 (0.08%) | 92.5% | 95.1% |
| C2 | 2 (0.68%) | 4 (0.34%) | 93.2% | 95.5% |
| Unlisted | 20 (6.83%) | 54 (4.54%) | ~100% | ~100% |

When the student was asked whether she could express herself effectively in the Oral Proficiency Interview, she said that she easily shared what she wanted to express in this exam.

When the student was asked to compare the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview with the speaking exam at school, she stated that she could express herself much more comfortably and effectively in the Oral Proficiency Interview. She stated that the reason for this was that the questions asked in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview were about her own life. Since the questions were related to her own life, the student found more to tell and could easily share. She stated that in the speaking exam held at school, she was asked a question about the curfew, and she could not answer it because she had no previous experience in this area, and she remained silent for that part of the exam.

In the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam, the student was asked questions about family relations, dentistry department, hobbies, and painting. The student was asked questions about these themes above because she gave some information about them in her speech.

## 4.8 Student G

According to the flow of the Oral Proficiency Interview, Student G was asked some questions. These questions are based on the answers given by the student as the exam progresses. The previous answer given by the student determines the content of the next question. While the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview continues, the examiner takes the notes and prepares for the next question.

Student G is an 18-year-old male. The student completed his primary, secondary and high school education in Azerbaijan. The student has studied English at different levels and classes. Besides, the student attended English lessons in a private language course in Azerbaijan.

Student G's answers and the entire exam were evaluated using the rubric of the Oral Proficiency Interview, and the student's level was Intermediate-MID, which was found to be B1 when compared to CEFR levels. The level of the student in the English preparatory program is B1. This shows that the student's speaking skill is actually at the assumed level.

When the student's answers to the questions are analysed in terms of words, the result confirms the result of the Oral Proficiency Interview. When the student's speech is examined, the type ratios and levels are as follows. The type ratio of the student at the A1 level is 50.11%, the type ratio at the A2 level is 19.74%, the type ratio at the B1 level is 13.23%, the type ratio at the B2 level is 6.94%, the type ratio at the C1 level is 0.43% and type ratio at the C2 level is 0.43%.

However, the student's A1 level token ratio is 78.54%, A2 level token ratio is 7.65%, B1 level token ratio is 5.45%, B2 level token ratio is 2.43%, C1 level token ratio is 0.12% and the token ratio at C2 level is 0.08%.

**Student G Summary**

**Table 16:** The lexical analysis of student G

| Word List | Types | Tokens | cumul% Types | cumul% Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 231 (50.11%) | 2002 (78.54%) | 50.1% | 78.5% |
| A2 | 91 (19.74%) | 195 (7.65%) | 69.8% | 86.2% |
| B1 | 61 (13.23%) | 139 (5.45%) | 83.1% | 91.6% |
| B2 | 32 (6.94%) | 62 (2.43%) | 90.0% | 94.1% |
| C1 | 2 (0.43%) | 3 (0.12%) | 90.5% | 94.2% |
| C2 | 2 (0.43%) | 2 (0.08%) | 90.9% | 94.3% |
| Unlisted | 42 (9.11%) | 146 (5.73%) | ~100% | ~100% |

When the student was asked whether he could express himself comfortably in the Oral Proficiency Interview, the student stated that he could express himself easily. The student stated that the questions asked belonged to an area in which he had knowledge as a reason for this.

When the student was asked to compare the speaking exam at school with the Oral Proficiency Interview, the student stated that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview gave him more opportunities to express his thoughts.

The student was asked questions mostly about pandemic conditions, medicine, working abroad and socializing. The student was asked questions about these themes above because he gave some information about them in his speech.

## 4.9 Student H

According to the flow of the Oral Proficiency Interview, Student H was asked some questions. These questions are based on the answers given by the student as the exam progresses. The previous answer given by the student determines the content of the next question. While the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview continues, the examiner takes the notes and prepares for the next question.

Student H is an 18-year-old female. The student had previously attended English classes at primary, secondary and high school levels and used books suitable for his level in these lessons.

Student H's answers and the entire exam were evaluated using the rubric of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam, and the student's level was Intermediate-MID, which was found to be B1 when compared to CEFR levels. The level of the student in the English preparatory program is B2. This shows that the student's speaking skill is not actually at the assumed level.

When the student's answers to the questions are analysed in terms of words, the result confirms the result of the Oral Proficiency Interview. When the student's speech is examined, the type ratios and levels are as follows. The type ratio of the student at the A1 level is 50.89%, the type ratio at the A2 level is 18.23%, the type ratio at the B1 level is 13.67%, the type ratio at the B2 level is 4.56%, the type ratio at the C1 level is 1.27% and type ratio at the C2 level is 0.25%.

However, the student's A1 level token ratio is 72.51%, A2 level token ratio is 12.22%, B1 level token ratio is 5.45%, B2 level token ratio is 2.53%, C1 level token ratio is 0.32% and the token ratio at C2 level is 0.06%.

**Student H Summary**

**Table 17:** The lexical analysis of student H

| Word List | Types | Tokens | cumul% Types | cumul% Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 201 (50.89%) | 1145 (72.51%) | 50.9% | 72.5% |
| A2 | 72 (18.23%) | 193 (12.22%) | 69.1% | 84.7% |
| B1 | 54 (13.67%) | 86 (5.45%) | 82.8% | 90.2% |
| B2 | 18 (4.56%) | 40 (2.53%) | 87.3% | 92.7% |
| C1 | 5 (1.27%) | 5 (0.32%) | 88.6% | 93.0% |
| C2 | 1 (0.25%) | 1 (0.06%) | 88.9% | 93.1% |
| Unlisted | 44 (11.14%) | 109 (6.90%) | ~100% | ~100% |

When the student was asked whether she could express herself effectively in the Oral Proficiency Interview, the student stated that she could express herself in detailed way and effectively in this exam. As the reason for this, she stated that the questions asked to her as questions are generally the topics on the agenda.

When the student was asked to compare the speaking exam at school with the Oral Proficiency Interview, she stated that she had more time in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam and was able to explain her thoughts in detail. For this reason, the student described the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam as a better exam than the speaking exam at school.

The student was asked questions about her hobbies, family, daily routine, social media, books, and personality traits. The student was asked questions about these themes above because she gave some information about them in her speech.

# CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the English preparatory school where this study was conducted, testing and assessment activities are carried out as projects, written portfolio studies, presentations, assignments, proficiency, placement, achievement exams. Normally, proficiency exam is the only exam which has a speaking component. However, due to the pandemic, a speaking section has been added to the achievement exams, as the lessons are held over the internet and testing and assessment activities are carried out over the internet in the same way. This application only covers online education carried out during the pandemic period.

Students who successfully complete the English preparatory school take courses in English when they study in the department. These students verbally inform their teachers at different times that they have problems with speaking skills, especially in lessons. In addition, teachers who teach these courses in departments state that those students have problems in expressing themselves, sharing their ideas, making presentations, participating in discussions, and asking critical questions verbally. These feedbacks lead to the development of an idea to revise the speaking exam conducted in English preparatory schools. A student who successfully completes the English preparatory school should have less of the above problems in speaking skills because it is assumed that the students in the English preparatory school have B2 level English skills when they graduate. The content of the English preparatory program is also prepared in order to reach the B2 level. On the current problem, it strengthens the idea that the speaking exams held in English preparatory schools do not assess the real level of students and that a different speaking exam is needed. In this context, the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview was considered as a strong alternative and was applied to the students participating in the study.

ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is not used as a testing and assessment method in English preparatory schools in Turkey however, this study reveals that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview can be used to assess speaking skills in English preparatory schools in Turkey.

In order to carry out the study, first of all, volunteer students were determined, and the level of these students in the English program was determined, and the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview was applied to the students. The scores of the students taking ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview were compared with the level they are continuing in the current English program, and it was determined that the students were not suitable for the level of the program they were attending. After ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is administered, the students were interviewed and asked whether they could express themselves effectively in Oral Proficiency Interview, and they were asked to compare the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview with the speaking exam they took in the English preparatory program. In addition, the speeches of the students in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview were transcribed and the levels of the words in the students' speech and the ratio of these words to the whole speech were analysed.

At the end of the analysing the data, it was revealed that the assumed English levels of the students did not right, both as a result of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview and as a result of the lexical analysis of the words in the students' speech. Besides, the majority of the students stated that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is a more preferable exam compared to the speaking exam conducted in the English preparatory program.

Testing and assessment activities in English preparatory classes are extremely important as they directly affect the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. Testing and assessment activities directly or indirectly affect various third parties as well. However, testing and assessment activities directly affect students, teachers, families, school administrators, and the success of students in their departments. Therefore, testing and assessment in English preparatory schools should be carried out with valid and reliable methods. This study opens the following issues for discussion.

In most of the English preparatory schools in Turkey, the goal is for students to reach B2 level upon graduation. In this context, the English preparatory school programs are based on the B2 level, and it is assumed that the graduates have English skills at the B2 level. However, this study reveals that there is a significant difference between students' assumed and actual levels.

The assumption that students will be at B2 level when they graduate from English preparatory schools is open to discussion. For this reason, the target level in English preparatory schools should be redefined and the existing English education programs should be rearranged within this framework.

Testing and assessment activities carried out in line with the updated target should also be updated. It is obvious that these testing and assessment activities have an effect on the students' acquisition of English skills.

The content of the placement exam, which is used to determine the level of students should also be updated. The placement exam should assess different skills and the speaking exam should be a part of this exam, although logistical opportunities are difficult. In addition, achievement exams administered during the academic year must also have a speaking section because in order to be able to say that a student has reached a certain level, it is necessary to make sure that he has reached that level in all skills. In addition to these, the speaking section must be included in the English proficiency exam at the end of the year.

ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview or a speaking exam based on ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview should be applied for assessing speaking. Additionally, an assessment system based on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview should be applied. This is because the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is suitable for the real level of the students and is more effective in determining the real level of the students.

Although the questions asked to the students in the current speaking exams are related to the themes in the books, they may not be based on the students' lives. This may cause students to have difficulty in answering the questions asked in the exam and even to be unable to answer them. In the Oral Proficiency Interview, on the other hand, since the questions are created based on the answers given by the students, students will perform better in the speaking exam with examples from their own lives. This shows that the person who administers the speaking test can get more data to evaluate the students' performance correctly and a more accurate assessment will be made.

Another reason why the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is a better alternative to the existing speaking exams is about the duration of the exam. In current speaking tests, students have about 7 or 8 minutes. In the Oral Proficiency Interview, students have approximately 20 or 30 minutes. ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview has been determined as a more valid and reliable exam for students who cannot reveal their real performance in a short time. Questions and dialogues in speaking tests should be similar to real-life questions and dialogues. The authenticity of the questions and dialogues in the speaking exams administered in English preparatory schools is open to discussion. However, since the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam is based on real-life dialogues and situations, it provides the opportunity to better evaluate the student's performance.

In addition, the presence of a role-play section in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview makes it possible for a more reliable and valid assessment. In English preparatory schools, role-play activities are frequently carried out in lessons. However, this section is not available in the current speaking exams. Having this section in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview exam is seen as an advantage, as it proves the assessment of what is taught in the lessons.

In current speaking exams, students may have a minute to think about speaking, as well as to take notes. During this period, students can benefit from internet resources, especially in online education. When a student starts to speak, he or she can make use of these resources in a more effective and various way. This raises considerable doubts about the validity of existing speaking tests.

In the Oral Proficiency Interview, on the other hand, students do not have a one-minute notetaking time before speaking. Students make their speeches by answering the questions asked to them at that moment, which is not only similar to the dialogues and conversations in daily life but also more natural. For this reason, it can be stated that the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is a more functional exam in assessing speaking skill.

The rubric used for assessment in speaking exams is usually an analytical rubric. This rubric can be effective in assessing the items that make up students' speech. However, its effectiveness in assessing the general speech of the students can be questioned. The teacher who focuses on the details of the speech may have difficulty in

determining the general level of the speech and determining an overall grade. However, the rubric used in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is a holistic rubric. This is a rubric that is more advantageous in assessing the overall speaking test of teachers. Using this rubric, teachers can more accurately assess students' level.

Another problem with current speaking exams is related to exam preparation processes. Some of the questions created while preparing the exams may not be suitable for some students who take the exam, in this case, these questions might affect the exam grades of those students and their speaking performance. Forming and asking questions based on the answers given by the students in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview can be considered as a solution to this problem.

The person who will administer the speaking test should be knowledgeable about the content of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview and be experienced in the administration of the exam. Otherwise, while listening to the student during the speaking test, he/she may have problems forming the next question and evaluating the answers. Just because an English teacher is very good at teaching English doesn't mean he can also do a good speaking test. For this reason, it is extremely important that teachers who will administer the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview in English preparatory schools undergo significant training. Teachers should be trained as ACTFL OPI testers by organizing some in-service training programs.

When a testing and assessment system based on ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is implemented in English preparatory schools, the education program should be updated accordingly. Along with the training program, the textbooks used in the course materials and their exams should be updated.

## 5.1 Recommendations for Further Research

This study aims to evaluate the use of ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview in assessing the speaking skills of students in English preparatory classes of higher education institutions, to test whether the speaking exams in schools assess the actual levels of students, and as an alternative to the assessment and evaluation activities carried out in schools, an assessment and evaluation method based on Oral Proficiency Interview.

The present study was conducted with eight students studying in the English preparatory class of a foundation university in Turkey. In order to expand the scope of the study, the current study can be expanded and carried out with more students.

However, the current study was conducted by a researcher who studied, administered, and scored the Oral Proficiency Interview. In the following stages, the scope and depth of the study can be expanded with a certified ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview tester. In addition, this study was conducted only in a foundation university. Expanding the scope of this study and conducting it in state universities can provide much more diverse data when considering the scope of testing and assessment activities in English preparatory classes.

It is foreseen that the studies carried out in the future will contribute significantly to the education and testing and assessment activities in the English preparatory classes of higher education institutions.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## Interview Questions

1. Do you think you could express your opinions in ACTFL OPI effectively?
2. Which speaking exam is more functional for you, the speaking exam at school or ACTFL OPI?

# APPENDIX B

## Transcriptions of the Interviews

Bu belge, Yükseköğretim Kurulu tarafından 19.01.2021 tarihli “Lisansüstü Tezlerin Elektronik Ortamda Toplanması, Düzenlenmesi ve Erişime Açılmasına İlişkin Yönerge” ile bildirilen 6689 Sayılı Kişisel Verilerin Korunması Kanunu kapsamında gizlenmiştir.

# REFERENCES


ACTFL. (2009a). *ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI): Testing for proficiency* [Electronic version]. Retrieved July 20, 2021, from http://www.actfl.org/professional-development/certified-proficiency-testing program/testingproficiency?pageid¼3348

ACTFL. (2009b). *ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI): ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview–computer (ACTFL OPIc)* [Electronic version]. Retrieved July 20, 2021, from http://www.languagetesting. com/oral-proficiency-interviewACTFL OPI-2

Alderson, J. C., & Wall, D. (1993). Does washback exist?. *Applied linguistics*, *14*(2), 115-129.

Alderson, J.C., Clapham, C. & Wall, D. (1995). *Language test construction and evaluation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Al-Amri, M. (2011). Assessment techniques practiced in teaching art at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. *International Journal of Education Through Art*, *7*(3), 267-282.

Alawiyah, T. (2018). Speaking self-efficacy and EFL student teachers' speaking achievement. *Edukasi: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pengajaran*, *5*(1), 87-96.

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (2012). ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview familiarization manual.

Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford University Press.

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.

Bachman, L. F., & Savignon, S. J. (1986). The evaluation of communicative language proficiency: A critique of the ACTFL oral interview. *The modern language journal*, *70*(4), 380-390.

Bailey, K. M. (2006). Issues in teaching speaking skills to adult ESOL learners. In J. Comins, B. Garner & C. Smith (Eds.), *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy, Volume 6: Connecting Research, Policy, and Practice* (pp. 113-164). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. New York: Longman.

Büyükkantarcioğlu, N. (2004a). A sociolinguistic analysis of the present dimensions of English as a foreign language in Turkey. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 33-58.

Bygate, M. (1987). *Speaking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bygate, M. (1998). Theoretical Perspectives on Speaking. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. *18* (1) 20-42.

Bygate, M. (1999). Quality of language and purpose of task: Patterns of learners' language on two oral communication tasks. *Language Teaching Research, 3*(3), 185-214.

Bygate, M. (2002), Effects of Task Repetition on the Structure and Control of Oral Language. *Researching pedagogic tasks second language learning and testing*. Longman.

Bygate, M. (2009). Teaching and testing speaking, In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 412-440). Oxford: WileyBlackwell.

Bygate, M. & P. Skehan & Swain M. (2001) *Researching Pedagogic Tasks: Second Language Learning, Teaching, and Testing.* Applied Linguistics and Language Study. London

Caban, H. L. (2003). Rater group bias in the speaking assessment of four L1 Japanese ESL students. *Second Language Studies, 21*(2), 1-44.

Canale, M. & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics,1*, 1-47.

Chalhoub-Deville, M., & Fulcher, G. (2003). The Oral Proficiency Interview: A research agenda. *Foreign Language Annals*, *36*, 498–506.

Chaney, A. L., & Burk, T. L. (1998). *Teaching oral communication in grades K-8*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Comins, B. Garner & C. Smith (Eds.), Review of Adult Learning and Literacy, *Volume 6: Connecting Research, Policy, and Practice* (pp. 113-164). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Coşkun, A. (2013). An investigation of the effectiveness of the modular general English language teaching preparatory program at a Turkish university. *South African Journal of Education*, *33*(3), 1-18.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

Çetinavcı, U. R., & Topkaya, E. Z. (2012). A Contrastive Qualitative Evaluation of Two Different Sequential Programs Launched at the School of Foreign Languages of a Turkish University. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, *3*, 82-101.

Eckard, R. & Kearny, M. (1981). Teaching Conversational Skills in ESL. *Washington: Center of Applied Linguistics.*

Davies, A. (1990). *Principles of language testing*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.104

Douglas, D. (2014). *Understanding Language Testing*. Routledge.

Doye, P. (1991). *Authenticity in Foreign Language Testing*. Institute of Education Sciences.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Finocchiaro, M., & Sako, S. (1983). *Foreign Language Testing: A Practical Approach*. Regents Publishing Company, Inc., 2 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016.

Fulcher, G. (1993). *The construction and validation of rating scales for oral tests in English as a foreign language* [Doctoral dissertation], University of Lancaster, England.

Fulcher, G. (1996). Testing tasks: issues in task design and the group oral. *Language Testing*, *13*(1), 23-51. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026553229601300103.

Fulcher, G. (1997). *The testing of speaking in a second language*. In C. Clapham and D. Corson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education: language testing and assessment* (vol. *7*, 75-85). Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Fulcher, G. (2010). *Practical language testing*. London: Hodder Education.

Fulcher, G. (Ed.) (2014). *Testing second language speaking* (Second Edition). London &New York: Routledge.

Fulcher, G. & Davidson, F. (2007). *Language testing and assessment: an advanced resource book.* New York: Routledge.

Galaczi, E. D., french, A., Hubbard, C., & Green, A. (2011). Developing assessment scales for large-scale speaking tests: A multiple-method approach. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 18*(3), 217-237.

Genç, G. (2017). *Conversation strategies in the ELT curriculum and their effect on EFL learners' oral proficiency exam performance* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation], Bilkent University, Ankara.

Harmer, J. (1992). *The practice of English language teaching*, Longman, London.

Harris, D. P. (1969). *Testing English as a second language*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Heaton, J.B. (Eds.) (1988). *Writing English language tests* (Second Edition). New York: Longman.

Henning, G. (1987). *A Guide to language testing: development, evaluation, and research*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

Herman, J.L., Aschbacher, P.R. and Winters, L. (1992). *A practical guide to alternative assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Höl, D. (2010). *Perceptions and attitudes of the English language instructors and preparatory students towards testing speaking communicatively in the school of foreign languages at Pamukkale University*. [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Pamukkale University, Denizli, Turkey.

Huebner, T., & Jensen, A. (1992). A study of foreign language proficiency-based testing in secondary schools. *Foreign Language Annals*, *25*(2), 105-115.

Hughes, A. (2000). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hughes, A. (2007). *Testing for language teachers* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hughes, R. (2002). *Teaching and researching speaking*. London: Longman

Hymes, D.H. (1972). On communicative competence. In J.B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (269-293). Baltimore, USA: Penguin Education.

Ingram, E. (1977). Basic concepts in testing. In J.P.B. Allen and A. Davies (Eds.), *Testing and experimental methods (Volume 4*). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Inman, M. E. (1987). *How foreign language study can enhance career possibilities*. Eric.

Johnson, M. (2000). Interaction in the Oral Proficiency Interview. *Pragmatics*. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA), *10*, 215–231.

Johnson, M., & Tyler, A. (1998). Reanalyzing the ACTFL OPI: How much does it look like natural conversation? In R. Young & A. Weiyun He (Eds.), *Talking and testing: discourse approaches to the assessment of oral proficiency* (pp. 27–51).Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Lozovska-Güneş, A. (2010). *Differences and challenges involved in the assessment of speaking skill: the case of three universities in Ankara*. [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

Kırkgöz, Y. (2005). English Language teaching in Turkey: Challenges for the 21st century. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Teaching English to the world: History, curriculum, and practice* (pp. 159-175). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kırkgöz, Y. (2007). English language teaching in Turkey: policy changes and their implementations. *RELC Journal, 38*(2), 216-228.

Kırkgöz, Y. (2009). Globalization and English Language Policy in Turkey: *Educational Policy*, 23(5), 663-684.

King, K. A., & Mackey, A. (2016). Research methodology in second language studies: Trends, concerns, and new directions. *The Modern Language Journal*, *100*(S1), 209–227. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12309

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers.* Michigan, Michigan Publishing.

Lado, R. (1965). *Language testing: The construction and use of foreign language tests: A teacher's book.* London: Longman.

Language Testing International (LTI). (2020, March 10th). *ACTFL speaking assessment: The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI)*. Retrieved from https://www.languagetesting.com/oral-proficiency-interview-ACTFL OPI

Larson, J. W. (2000). Testing oral language skills via the computer. *CALICO Journal*, *18*(1), 53-66.

Lee, S., J. Park and S. Sohn (2011). *Expanded responses of English-speaking Korean heritage speakers during oral interviews*. In Pallotti, G. and J. Wagner (Eds.), L2 Learning as Social Practice: *Conversation-Analytic Perspectives* (pp. 87-104). Honolulu: Natl Foreign Lg Resource.

Liskin-Gasparro, J. (2003). The ACTFL proficiency guidelines and the Oral Proficiency Interview: A brief history and analysis of their survival. *Foreign Language Annals*, *36*, 483–490.

Lowe, P. J., & Liskin-Gasparro, J. E. (1982). *Testing speaking proficiency: The oral interview*. Q & A. ERIC, 1-6.

Luoma, S. (2004). *Assessing speaking*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Madsen, H. S. (1983). *Techniques in Testing*. Oxford University Press, New York.

McNamara, T. (1996). *Measuring second language performance*. London: Longman.

McNamara, T. (2008). *Language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McNamara T. F., Lumney T. (1993). *The Effect of Interlocutor and Assessment Mode Variables in Offshore Assessments of Speaking Skills in Occupational Settings: Language Testing Research Colloquium*. England, University of Cambridge.

Mead, N. A., (1980). Assess*ing Speaking Skills: Issues of Feasibility, Reliability, Validity and Bias.* Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New York: NY.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Oller, J. W. (1979). *Language tests at school: A pragmatic approach*. London: Longman.

O'Sullivan, B. (2000). *Towards a model of performance in oral language testing.* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Reading, Berkshire, England.

O'Sullivan, B. (2006). *Modelling performance in oral language tests: language testing and evaluation.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

O'Sullivan, B. (2013). Assessing spoken language: scoring validity. In D. Tsagari, S. Papadima-Sophocleous, S. Ioannou-Georgiou (Eds.), *Language Testing and Evaluation: international experiences in language testing and assessment* (Volume 28, 261-274). Frankfurt: Peter Lang Edition.

O'Sullivan, B. and Weir, C. (2002). *Research issues in testing spoken language. (Unpublished research report).* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.

Önal, A. (2010). *Testing and assessment of speaking skills in preparatory classes.* [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Selçuk University, Konya, Turkey.

Önem, E. E. (2015). *Instructors' attitudes towards assessing speaking holistically and analytically* [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Bilkent University, Ankara.

Öz, H. (2014). Turkish Teachers' Practices of Assessment for Learning in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(4), 775-785.

Sak, G. (2008). *An investigation of the validity and reliability of the speaking exam at a Turkish university.* [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Middle East Technical University, School of Social Sciences, Ankara, Turkey.

Sayer, P. (2005). An intensive approach to building conversation skills. *ELT Journal*, 59(1), 14-22.

Sayın, B. A. (2015). Exploring anxiety in speaking exams and how it affects students' performance. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 2(12), 112-118.

Seedhouse, P. (2013). Oral proficiency interviews as varieties of interaction. In *Assessing second language pragmatics* (pp. 199-219). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Surface, E. A., Poncheri, R. M., & Bhavsar, K. S. (2008). Two studies investigating the reliability and validity of the English ACTFL OPIc with Korean test takers. *The ACTFL OPIc Validation Project Technical Report*.

Swender, E., Surface, E. A., & Hamlyn, H. (2007, November). *What proficiency testing is telling us about teacher certification candidates* [Conference presentation]. ACTFL annual conference, San Antonio, TX.

Tanrıverdi-Köksal, F. (2013). *The effect of raters' prior knowledge of students' proficiency levels on their assessment during oral interviews* [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Bilkent University, Ankara.

Tanrıverdi-Köksal, F. & Ortaçtepe, D. (2017). Raters Knowledge of Students Proficiency Levels as a Source of Measurement Error in Oral Assessments. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, 1-19.

Thompson, I. (1995). A study of interrater reliability of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview in five European languages: Data from ESL, French, German, Russian, and Spanish. *Foreign Language Annals*, *28*, 407–422.

Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to teach speaking*. Harlow, England: Longman.

Tunç, F. (2010). *Evaluation of an English Language Teaching Program at a Public University Using CIPP model*. [Unpublished master's thesis]. Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

Ulrich, T. (2020). *The Influence of the Foreign Service Institute on US Language Education: Critical Analysis of Historical Documentation*. Routledge.

Underhill, N. (1987). *Testing spoken language: a handbook of oral testing techniques*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Usó-Juan, E., Martínez-Flor, A., & Alcón-Soler, E. (2006). Approaches to language learning and teaching: Towards acquiring communicative competence through speaking. In E. Usó Juan & A. Martínez Flor (Eds.), *Current trends in the development and teaching of the four language skills* (pp. 139-157). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Uysal, D. (2019). Problems and solutions concerning English language preparatory curriculum at higher education in view of ELT instructors. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research, 6*(2), 452-467.

Van Lier, L. (1989). Reeling, writhing, drawling, stretching, and fainting in coils: Oral Proficiency Interviews as conversation. *TESOL Quarterly*, *23*, 489–508.

Weir, C. J. (1988). Communicative language testing with special reference to English as a foreign language. *Exeter Linguistic Studies*, *11*, 1-241.112

Weir, C.J. (2005). *Language testing and validation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Yıldız, Ö. (2013). *An analysis of the final speaking exam at an English preparatory school in Turkey* [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Çağ University, Mersin.

Young, R. F. (2013). Learning to talk the talk and walk the walk: Interactional competence in academic spoken English. *Iberica, 25*, 15-38.

,