



Students' Speaking Proficiency and Perceptions of the British Council EnglishScore Application (Kemampuan Berbicara Siswa dan Persepsi terhadap Aplikasi EnglishScore dari British Council)

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 10 June 2026 Revised: 23 October 2026 Accepted: 23 October 2026 Keywords: Speaking Proficiency EnglishScore Application Student Perceptions Kata Kunci: Kemampuan Berbicara Aplikasi EnglishScore Persepsi Mahasiswa	This study investigated the speaking proficiency and perceptions of eighth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Programme at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo toward the British Council EnglishScore application as a speaking assessment tool. Employing a descriptive mixed-methods design, this study involved 36 students from the 2021 cohort. Data were collected through the EnglishScore speaking test, a structured questionnaire with 15 items, and semi-structured interviews with 8 selected participants. Data were analysed using score distribution, percentage calculation, and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that 58.3% of students reached the B1 CEFR level, while 22.2% remained at A1 or A2. Among speaking sub-skills, pronunciation emerged as the dominant strength (61.1% in the 400–599 score range), fluency showed moderate performance (50% in the 300–399 range), and communication was identified as the critical weakness (25% scoring below 300). Student perceptions were largely positive: 94% valued the sub-skill score breakdown, 89% reported increased motivation to practice speaking, and 86% found the test relevant to academic speaking preparation. These findings suggest that while students have acquired foundational language skills, a significant gap persists between structural knowledge and real-time communicative competence. The EnglishScore application demonstrates considerable pedagogical value as a diagnostic and formative assessment instrument that promotes self-awareness and supports self-regulated speaking practice in EFL contexts. Abstrak Penelitian ini mengkaji kemampuan berbicara dan persepsi mahasiswa semester delapan pada Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Negeri Gorontalo terhadap aplikasi British Council EnglishScore sebagai alat asesmen berbicara. Penelitian menggunakan desain metode campuran deskriptif yang melibatkan 36 mahasiswa angkatan 2021. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes berbicara EnglishScore, kuesioner terstruktur berisi 15 pernyataan, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 8 partisipan terpilih. Analisis data dilakukan dengan distribusi skor, perhitungan persentase, dan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan 58,3% mahasiswa berada pada level B1 CEFR, sementara 22,2% masih berada di level A1 atau A2. Di antara sub-keterampilan berbicara, pengucapan (pronunciation) muncul sebagai kekuatan utama (61,1% berada pada rentang skor 400–599), kelancaran (fluency) menunjukkan performa sedang (50% pada rentang 300–399), dan komunikasi diidentifikasi sebagai kelemahan kritis (25% memperoleh skor di bawah 300). Persepsi mahasiswa umumnya positif: 94% menghargai rincian skor per sub-keterampilan, 89%

melaporkan peningkatan motivasi berlatih berbicara, dan 86% menilai tes relevan dengan persiapan berbicara akademik. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa meskipun mahasiswa telah memiliki keterampilan bahasa dasar, terdapat kesenjangan signifikan antara pengetahuan struktural dan kompetensi komunikatif secara real-time. Aplikasi EnglishScore menunjukkan nilai pedagogis yang signifikan sebagai instrumen asesmen diagnostik dan formatif yang mendorong kesadaran diri serta praktik berbicara mandiri dalam konteks EFL.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, speaking represents one of the most critical competencies that learners must develop. As the primary medium of oral communication, speaking enables individuals to convey ideas, engage in social interaction, and demonstrate their linguistic abilities in real time (Riadil, 2020). Beyond mere verbal expression, the speaking skill carries complex academic dimensions, as it requires the capacity for persuasion, accurate information delivery, and the management of oral discourse within specific communicative contexts (Basalama et al., 2020). For these reasons, speaking occupies a central role in English language curriculum design, particularly at the tertiary level.

Despite its acknowledged importance, speaking remains a persistent challenge for many learners in Indonesia. Extant research has identified a range of barriers, including psychological obstacles such as language anxiety and low self-confidence, linguistic difficulties such as limited vocabulary and inability to construct sentences spontaneously, and contextual constraints arising from insufficient opportunities to practise in authentic communicative settings (Shen & Chiu, 2019; Fitriani & Zulkarnain, 2019). These challenges are also evident among senior-year students in the English Language Education Study Programme, who, despite having completed a series of speaking courses, continue to encounter difficulties in using English fluently and spontaneously in high-stakes formal situations such as thesis defence sessions and academic seminars.

The rapid advancement of educational technology, particularly Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), has opened new possibilities for language learning and assessment. Applications such as Duolingo, Babbel, and ELSA Speak have been widely adopted to support autonomous and flexible language learning (Viberg & Grönlund, 2017; Loewen et al., 2020). Among these platforms, the British Council EnglishScore application offers a more comprehensive and academically oriented approach. It assesses speaking ability in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and provides detailed diagnostic feedback across three sub-skills: fluency, pronunciation, and communication.

A number of previous studies have explored the use of British Council platforms in English language learning. Anton and Yodi (2021) employed the EnglishScore application to predict learners' general proficiency levels, although their focus was not specifically directed at speaking skills. Putri and Franscy (2022) examined the implementation of the British Council website within Indonesian classroom contexts, while Palupi et al. (2023) investigated students' perceptions of using the same website for speaking practice. A notable gap in the literature, however, is the absence of studies that specifically analyse EFL pre-service teachers' speaking proficiency as reflected in EnglishScore application results, alongside an in-depth examination of their perceptions as users of this technology-based assessment tool.

The present study therefore aims to: (1) describe the speaking proficiency levels of eighth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Programme at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo based on the results of the British Council EnglishScore speaking test; (2) identify students' strengths and weaknesses across the sub-skills of fluency, pronunciation, and communication; and (3) explore students' perceptions of the application as a speaking assessment instrument. The article is structured as follows: a presentation of the conceptual background and literature review, followed by an account of the research methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions with their pedagogical implications.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design. The quantitative component described students' speaking proficiency levels and sub-skill scores as generated by the EnglishScore application, while the qualitative component explored students' perceptions through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This design was selected because it allows for the integration of objective performance data with participants' subjective experiences, thereby yielding a more comprehensive understanding of speaking proficiency and technology-based assessment in EFL contexts.

The study was conducted at the English Language Education Study Programme, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo (UNG). The participants consisted of 36 students from the 2021 cohort who voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. These students were selected because they had nearly completed all core coursework, including speaking courses, and were therefore expected to have developed adequate speaking competencies and to be prepared for the academic and professional demands they would face as prospective English language teachers. For the qualitative phase, eight of the 36 students were purposively selected to participate in follow-up interviews in order to gain deeper insights into their individual experiences.

Data were collected through two primary instruments. First, the British Council EnglishScore Speaking Test was administered to measure students' speaking ability across the three sub-skills of fluency, pronunciation, and communication. Each student completed the test independently using their own mobile device, with a total duration of approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The application automatically recorded and analysed responses using AI-powered speech recognition technology, then generated numerical scores on a scale of 0 to 600 along with CEFR level designations (A1–B2) for each sub-skill. Second, a structured questionnaire comprising 15 items including 10 closed-ended Likert-scale statements and five open-ended questions was administered immediately following the completion of the speaking test. Additionally, the eight selected participants took part in semi-structured interviews to provide more nuanced accounts of their experiences with the application.

Data analysis followed a descriptive qualitative approach. For quantitative data, EnglishScore results were analysed using frequency distribution and percentage calculation to describe the distribution of CEFR levels and sub-skill performance patterns. For qualitative data, questionnaire responses were coded and categorised to identify recurring themes, while thematic analysis based on the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied to the interview transcripts. The trustworthiness of the data was strengthened through the triangulation of data sources (cross-referencing test results, questionnaire responses, and interview data), member checking to verify the accuracy of qualitative interpretations, and an audit trail to ensure procedural consistency. In terms of the technical properties of the instrument, the EnglishScore application has a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.83, and its scores are aligned with the CEFR through a standard-setting procedure conducted by a panel of language assessment specialists (British Council, 2021; Anton & Yodi, 2021).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Overall Speaking Proficiency

Analysis of the British Council EnglishScore speaking test results from 36 eighth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Programme at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo revealed that the majority of participants (58.3%, $n = 21$) attained the B1 level on the CEFR scale, followed by B2 and A2 at 19.4% each ($n = 7$), with one student (2.8%) at the A1 level. The complete distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Overall Speaking Proficiency

CEFR Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
A1	1	2.8
A2	7	19.4
B1	21	58.3
B2	7	19.4
Total	36	100

The predominance of the B1 level indicates that most students have established a basic communicative foundation but remain limited in their capacity to express abstract or technical ideas spontaneously. This finding is consistent with the results of Damayanti et al. (2020), who reported that the majority of Indonesian university students fall within the A2 to B1 range, and with those of Rofik et al. (2020), who identified limited authentic exposure, insufficient diversity in teaching approaches, and inadequate real-world communicative practice as primary contributing factors. Of particular concern is the

finding that 22.2% of participants remained at the A1 or A2 level, given that these students are prospective English language teachers who are expected to model fluent and spontaneous English use in classroom settings. Miqawati et al. (2023) have demonstrated that CEFR implementation in Indonesian higher education is frequently inconsistent, and that many programmes fail to support students in reaching at least the B1 threshold prior to graduation a pattern that is evident in the present study as well.

3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses in Speaking Sub-Skills

3.2.1 Pronunciation: The Main Strength

Among the three sub-skills assessed, pronunciation emerged as the area of greatest strength within the participant group. As shown in Table 2, 22 students (61.1%) obtained scores within the 400–599 range, reflecting above-average to high phonological accuracy. An additional 10 students (27.8%) fell within the 300–399 range, indicating moderate but functionally adequate pronunciation. Only four students (11.1%) scored below 300

Table 2. Distribution of Pronunciation Scores

Score Range	CEFR Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
0–199	A1	3	8.3
200–299	A2	1	2.8
300–399	B1	10	27.8
400–499	B2	17	47.2
500–599	C1	5	13.9
Total		36	100

The relative strength in pronunciation is consistent with the findings of Susanto et al. (2023), who reported that students who regularly engage with English-medium digital content tend to exhibit higher phonological accuracy. Students in the English Language Education Study Programme likely benefit from daily exposure to YouTube, podcasts, and streaming platforms, which may facilitate the internalisation of English phonological patterns. Nevertheless, Saito and Hanzawa (2022) caution that accurate sound production correlates only weakly with overall communicative success. The pronounced gap between high pronunciation scores and low communication scores observed in the present study provides clear empirical support for this claim: sounding accurate does not guarantee coherent and meaningful discourse.

3.2.2 Fluency: Moderate Level

Fluency scores were distributed more evenly across the score ranges, indicating that this sub-skill exhibited the widest performance variation among the three assessed areas. As shown in Table 3, 18 students (50%) obtained scores in the 300–399 range, classified as moderate. Ten students (27.8%) reached the 400–499 range, indicating adequate fluency with minimal hesitation. Critically, eight students (22.2%) scored below 300, suggesting notable difficulty in sustaining continuous speech without frequent pauses, repetitions, or false starts.

Table 3. Distribution of Fluency Scores

Score Range	CEFR Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
0–199	A1	1	2.8
200–299	A2	7	19.4
300–399	B1	18	50.0
400–499	B2	10	27.8
Total		36	100

The moderate fluency scores reflect a well-documented gap between students' declarative knowledge of English and their procedural capacity to deploy it spontaneously. Oral fluency is fundamentally dependent on automaticity the ability to access vocabulary, grammar, and discourse markers rapidly and without substantial conscious effort. Students who have primarily been educated through formal, teacher-centred instruction are still in the process of developing this automaticity. The time-limited response format of the EnglishScore test exacerbates these difficulties, as Cendra and Sulindra (2022) have argued that accuracy-focused pedagogy rarely prepares learners for the cognitive demands of spontaneous speech production. Purwati et al. (2023) similarly found that spontaneous speaking represents a significant challenge for Indonesian EFL teachers in vocational secondary schools, even after completing an English education programme a pattern that closely parallels the findings of the present study.

3.2.3 Communication: The Main Weakness

Communication defined by the EnglishScore application as the ability to convey ideas coherently, maintain topical relevance, organise responses logically, and respond appropriately to prompts—was identified as the weakest sub-skill across the participant group. Table 4 shows that while 44.4% of students (n = 16) achieved moderate scores in the 300–399 range and 30.6% (n = 11) scored within the 400–499 range, a

substantial 25% of all participants (n = 9) obtained scores below 300. Among those in the low-scoring group, four students (11.1%) fell within the lowest band of 0–199.

Table 4. Distribution of Communication Scores

Score Range	CEFR Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
0–199	A1	4	11.1
200–299	A2	5	13.9
300–399	B1	16	44.4
400–499	B2	11	30.6
Total		36	100

This finding carries significant implications, as communicative competence rather than phonological accuracy or fluency alone constitutes the core objective of English language instruction and an essential qualification for pre-service language teachers. The fact that one in four students experienced difficulty communicating ideas coherently reveals a critical gap between structural linguistic knowledge and real-time pragmatic language use. Elisathusilawani (2023) found that university-level EFL learners consistently struggle to structure their thinking, maintain topical coherence, and construct multi-sentence responses even after years of English language study and these are precisely the competencies assessed by the communication component of the EnglishScore test. The stark contrast between high pronunciation scores (61% in the top band) and low communication scores (25% below 300) suggests that many students have mastered surface-level linguistic features but have not yet developed the ability to think and organise ideas in English at the discourse level. Suryani and Argawati (2023) and Prianty and Wijayanto (2021) have demonstrated that extended unscripted speaking tasks and task-based language teaching approaches significantly improve discourse coherence and overall communicative performance an instructional approach that appears not yet to have been optimally implemented within the curriculum under examination.

3.3 Students' Perceptions of the EnglishScore Application

Following completion of the speaking test, students responded to 15 questionnaire items addressing the application's ease of use, cognitive demands, feedback value, and motivational impact. A summary of student perceptions is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Students' Perceptions Toward the EnglishScore Speaking Test

Statement	Agree / Strongly Agree (n)	Percentage (%)
The test was easy to use	25	69
The test required strong memory	32	88
The result revealed fluency weaknesses	30	83
The result revealed pronunciation strengths/weaknesses	31	86
The score breakdown increased awareness	34	94
The test encouraged more speaking practice	32	89
The test helped evaluate readiness for academic speaking	31	86

3.4 Ease of Use and Technical Accessibility

Sixty-nine percent of students (n = 25) found the application easy to use. From a pedagogical standpoint, ease of use is of considerable importance: cognitive resources expended on navigating an unfamiliar interface represent capacity that is no longer available for the speaking task itself. This finding aligns with those of Manggiasih et al. (2023), whose evaluation of the AI-powered speaking assessment platform SmallTalk2Me concluded that a straightforward interface allows learners to concentrate on language production rather than on technical operation. The 31% who did not fully agree with the ease-of-use statement may have encountered technical barriers related to microphone sensitivity or device compatibility issues that warrant careful attention before the application is formally integrated into the curriculum.

3.5 Cognitive Demands and the Inherent Challenge of Spontaneous Speech

Eighty-eight percent of students (n = 32) acknowledged that the test demanded strong memory and concentration. This high proportion does not indicate a design flaw; rather, it reflects the inherent cognitive demands of spontaneous oral production in a second language, as theorised within Cognitive Load Theory. Zahwa and Hanif (2024) found that tasks requiring simultaneous mental processing significantly elevate cognitive load, while Syahban et al. (2020) noted that when learners have not yet achieved automatised control over the target language, each stage of speech production requires discrete conscious effort. Students' awareness of these demands reflects developing metacognitive skills; interview data indicated that participants recognised their primary difficulties as stemming not from vocabulary or grammar limitations, but from the speed of processing and the organisation of ideas in real time.

3.6 Detailed Feedback and the Development of Self-Awareness

The most salient finding from the perception data was that 34 students (94%) found the separate score breakdowns for pronunciation, fluency, and communication highly useful for identifying specific areas requiring improvement. This near-unanimous consensus indicates that the application's disaggregated feedback is substantially more informative and pedagogically valuable than the holistic single scores that remain commonplace in lecturer-administered speaking assessments within the programme. This finding supports the arguments advanced by Firdaus and Prastikawati (2022), who identified the absence of clear and actionable feedback as a primary barrier to independent learning, and by Widiastuti and Saukah (2020), who demonstrated that effective formative assessment helps align students' self-perceptions with their actual performance outcomes. Interview responses revealed a significant cognitive shift: students moved from vague self-evaluations ("my speaking is generally not very good") toward granular, data-driven self-understanding ("my pronunciation is actually adequate, but my communication score is low because I do not organise my ideas effectively").

3.7 Motivation and Perceived Readiness for Academic Speaking

Eighty-nine percent of students (n = 32) reported that viewing their test results motivated them to practise speaking more frequently and in a more purposeful manner. Furthermore, 86% (n = 31) expressed the belief that the test had helped them assess their readiness for the high-stakes academic speaking tasks they were about to face, including thesis defence sessions, proposal seminars, and teaching demonstrations. These findings are consistent with those of Azhar (2024), who identified the provision of constructive feedback and the use of educational technology as among the most effective strategies for enhancing student motivation. When students have a clear understanding of where they currently stand and what they need to do to improve, they are more likely to invest meaningfully in their own development (Elmahdi et al., 2018). Students' perception of alignment between the EnglishScore test format and authentic academic tasks such as presentations and thesis defence sessions reflects what they regard as an instance of authentic assessment, a factor of critical importance in determining the long-term impact of any assessment instrument.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study draws two principal conclusions. First, the majority of eighth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Programme at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo demonstrated speaking proficiency at the B1 CEFR level (58.3%), while 22.2% remained at A1 or A2. A consistent sub-skill pattern was observed: pronunciation emerged as the dominant strength, with 61.1% of students scoring within the 400–599 range; fluency showed moderate performance, with the largest proportion distributed within the 300–399 range; and communication was identified as the most critical weakness, with 25% of students obtaining scores below 300. These findings indicate an imbalance in students' speaking development: they tend to have mastered surface-level linguistic features such as pronunciation, but encounter substantial difficulty in organising and conveying ideas coherently under time pressure.

Second, students' perceptions of the British Council EnglishScore application were overwhelmingly positive. The majority valued the disaggregated sub-skill feedback as an especially useful tool for developing self-awareness regarding their speaking competencies. The high level of post-test motivation indicates that the application holds considerable pedagogical value not only as a diagnostic assessment instrument, but also as a catalyst for autonomous and reflective speaking practice in EFL contexts.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

Based on these findings, the English Language Education Study Programme is encouraged to integrate more spontaneous speaking activities such as impromptu speaking tasks, unscripted discussions, and task-based communicative activities into regular classroom practice, in order to strengthen students' discourse organisation and real-time communicative performance. Periodic use of the EnglishScore application as a diagnostic assessment instrument may also be considered, as it provides detailed, sub-skill-specific feedback that supports self-directed speaking practice. Individual students are encouraged to engage in regular self-assessment using accessible digital tools such as EnglishScore to monitor their speaking progress and identify specific areas requiring further development. For future researchers, studies involving participants from different cohorts or institutions would offer a broader comparative perspective, while investigations into the effectiveness of targeted classroom interventions in improving specific speaking sub-skills over an extended period would further advance understanding in this area.

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