

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of this study, including the background of the study, research questions, research purposes, research significances, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

A. Background

English has been widely taught as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesian educational institutions, where it is expected to support students' academic success and future professional communication. In EFL classrooms, students often demonstrate varying levels of English proficiency due to differences in educational backgrounds, prior learning experiences, and exposure to the target language. This diversity in learners' prior knowledge and language competence remains a significant issue in mixed-ability classrooms, particularly in speaking courses (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Such variation presents challenges for instructors in identifying students' actual learning needs and designing appropriate instructional strategies, highlighting the importance of initial assessment practices, such as pre-tests, to better understand students' speaking abilities and learning requirements.

Speaking is considered one of the most demanding skills in English language learning because it requires learners to integrate linguistic knowledge and communicative competence simultaneously. Learners are expected to produce language accurately and fluently while managing pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence in real-time communication. Many EFL learners experience anxiety, low self-confidence, and limited opportunities for oral practice, which hinder their speaking performance (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Without adequate instructional support that considers learners' initial abilities, speaking activities may fail to engage students optimally and may result in uneven learning outcomes.

To address learner diversity, contemporary language teaching emphasizes the importance of diagnostic assessment before instruction begins. Diagnostic assessment enables instructors to identify learners' strengths, weaknesses, and

learning needs, thereby informing instructional planning (Brown, 2004). One commonly used form of diagnostic assessment is the pre-test, which functions as an initial evaluation of learners' competence before the teaching process (H. s Brown, 2010). Harmer (2007) states that pre-tests help teachers recognize learners' difficulties and gaps, allowing them to design appropriate learning activities. Similarly, Brown (2004) emphasizes that effective pre-tests provide detailed information about learners' specific needs, particularly in productive skills such as speaking.

Several previous studies have highlighted the role of pre-tests as a diagnostic assessment and needs analysis in English language teaching. Jimola and Ofodu (2019) investigated ESL teachers' perceptions and practices of diagnostic assessment and found that diagnostic tools, including pre-tests, play a crucial role in identifying learners' learning needs and informing instructional decisions (Alderson, 2005; Brown, 2004). Their study suggests that systematic diagnostic assessment enables teachers to adapt teaching strategies to students' actual abilities. In a similar context, a study by Classroom-based Diagnostic Assessment Practices of EFL Instructors (2022) found that many EFL instructors at the higher education level employ initial assessments to understand students' proficiency profiles and learning challenges. The findings emphasize that diagnostic assessments conducted at the beginning of a course significantly contribute to more targeted and effective instruction. Similarly, at Universal Course, Indonesian mentors have conducted a pre-test at the beginning of the speaking course. However, it remains unclear how the results of these pretests are utilised to inform decision-making in the learning process and to identify students' needs in the speaking course.

In addition, needs analysis studies further reinforce the importance of identifying learners' speaking needs before course. Yana (2016) conducted a needs analysis for English-speaking syllabus development and found that identifying students' lacks, wants, and necessities is essential for designing relevant speaking materials. Although the study did not focus specifically on pre-tests, it demonstrates that systematic identification of learners' needs is fundamental in speaking instruction. These findings align with the function of pre-tests as diagnostic tools

that reveal learners' speaking needs before instructional planning (Brown, 2004; Hughes, 2003).

Despite the growing body of research on diagnostic assessment and needs analysis, most existing studies have focused on teachers' perceptions, syllabus development, or general assessment practices, such as those conducted by Folasade Jimola and Graceful Ofodu (2019) on teachers' perceptions of diagnostic assessment, and I. Nation and John Macalister (2010) on needs analysis and syllabus development. Limited attention has been given to how pre-tests are specifically implemented in speaking courses and how they function to identify students' learning needs, particularly in higher education contexts (I. Nation & John Macalister, 2010). Moreover, few studies have adopted a qualitative case study approach to explore the practical implementation of pre-tests in real classroom settings. Existing studies, such as those by Folasade Jimola and Graceful Ofodu (2019) and I. Nation and John Macalister (2010), mainly focus on general assessment practices and needs analysis rather than on in-depth classroom implementation.

At the Universal Course, English courses are attended by learners from diverse educational and academic backgrounds with varying levels of speaking ability. In the EFL context, these differences may be influenced by learners' previous English learning experiences, exposure to the target language, and individual learner factors (Brown, 2004). Therefore, this study aims to explore the implementation of pre-tests in identifying students' needs in a speaking course through a qualitative case study at the Universal Course, Bandung, Indonesia. By exploring how pre-tests are conducted and how they inform the identification of students' speaking needs, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of pre-test practices in EFL contexts and to provide practical insights for improving speaking courses.

B. Research Questions

This research has two questions that come from the problem stated in the background. The following are the questions of this study:

1. How are pre-tests implemented by the mentor in the speaking course at the Universal Course?

2. How does the mentor follow up on the results of the pre-test implementation to identify students' learning needs in the speaking course at the Universal Course?

C. Research Purposes

From the research question above, this study aimed to obtain the following purposes:

1. To describe how pre-tests are implemented by mentors in the speaking course at the Universal Course.
2. To explore how mentors follow up on pre-test results to identify students' learning needs in the speaking course at the Universal Course.

D. Research Significances

This research has two significances, there are:

1. Theoretical Significances

This study provides a deeper theoretical understanding of the implementation of pre-tests as a form of diagnostic assessment in a speaking course at the Universal Course. The findings offer empirical insights into how pre-tests function not only as initial assessments but also as pedagogical tools for identifying students' learning needs in speaking, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and confidence.

2. Practical Significance

- a. For Instructors

This study provides practical insights for English mentors, especially those in the EFL context, on applying pre-tests in speaking courses as diagnostic tools. These findings can guide the mentors in designing and conducting pre-tests before new speaking materials, identifying students' specific strengths and weaknesses, and using results to plan adaptive, differentiated activities aligned with EFL best practices.

- b. For Future Researchers and Readers

For future researchers, this study offers a framework for exploring pre-tests as a diagnostic assessment through pre-test practices in speaking courses, particularly in the English course. These findings serve as a reference for further studies with

similar or varied designs. For readers interested in language assessment and pedagogy, this study highlights the practical implementation of pre-tests in real EFL settings, emphasizing their potential to support innovative teaching at institutions.

E. Research Scope

This study focuses on the implementation of pre-tests as diagnostic assessments to identify students' learning needs in the speaking course at the Universal Course, Bandung, Indonesia. It centers on English mentors who teach speaking courses in the programs. The study specifically explores pre-tests as diagnostic tools for speaking needs, including task formats used, implementation procedures, and how results inform activity design. This study does not cover other language skills such as listening, reading, or writing, nor does it examine the effectiveness of pre-tests in improving speaking proficiency. Instead, it focuses on how pre-tests are implemented to identify students' initial speaking abilities and learning needs. The study is conducted in the real context of EFL speaking courses.

F. Conceptual Framework

Assessment is an essential component of language learning, particularly in the development of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. In the English as a Foreign Language Context, assessment plays a crucial role in understanding students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels. One form of assessment commonly used at the beginning of instruction is the pre-test, which is considered a form of diagnostic assessment used to identify students' initial speaking abilities and learning needs (Brown, 2004). In line with this, language assessment aims to gather meaningful information about learners' abilities to support informed pedagogical decision-making. Accordingly, in the context of the Universal Course in Bandung, Indonesia. Pre-tests are utilized to identify students' current speaking competence, which serves as the basis for pedagogical decisions in designing an appropriate speaking course.

The first stage of the conceptual framework involves the implementation of pre-tests by mentors in a speaking course. This stage includes determining the objectives of the pre-test, the types of tasks administered, the timing of the assessment, and the criteria used to assess speaking performance, such as

pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and comprehension. This practice aligns with the concept of assessment for learning, which emphasizes that assessment should function as an integral part of the learning process rather than merely as a tool for measuring outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 2009). By administering pre-tests before the speaking course begins, mentors obtain preliminary information that is essential for planning and organizing subsequent learning activities.

The second stage focuses on identifying students' initial abilities and learning needs in the speaking course. The results of pre-tests provide mentors with a comprehensive overview of students' strengths and weaknesses in some aspects of speaking. According to Brown (2004), diagnostic assessment enables mentors to identify specific areas that require further attention, such as limited vocabulary, frequent grammatical errors, pronunciation difficulties, or low speaking fluency. This diagnostic information allows mentors to understand the diverse learning profiles of students within an EFL context, where learners often come from different educational backgrounds. Furthermore, the information obtained from pre-tests is used as the basis for pedagogical decision-making in the speaking course. This process is supported by constructivist learning theory, which states that learning is constructed based on learners' prior knowledge and experiences (Piaget, 1970). In addition, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory emphasizes that learning becomes more effective when instruction is designed according to the gap between learners' actual abilities and their potential development (Vygotsky, 1978). By understanding students' initial speaking abilities through pre-tests, mentors can provide appropriate scaffolding, adjust the level of difficulty of speaking tasks, and select instructional strategies that correspond to students' learning needs.

Therefore, pre-tests function not only as diagnostic assessment tools but also as a bridge between assessment and instruction, as they are used to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses (Brown, 2004). In this context, pre-tests serve as an initial evaluation to determine students' prior knowledge and speaking ability at the beginning of a course, enabling teachers to plan appropriate teaching.

Furthermore, Alderson (2005) emphasizes that diagnostic tests provide detailed information about learners' specific needs, which can guide instructional decisions. This supports the role of pre-tests as a bridge between assessment results and teaching strategies. By using pre-test results, instructors can design more effective and differentiated speaking activities that align with students' actual ability levels

Figure 1.1 illustrates a systematic process of designing a speaking course based on pre-test results. The process begins with pre-test implementation, which includes determining objectives, task types, timing, and assessment criteria. The results of the pre-test are then used to identify students' initial speaking abilities, including their strengths and weaknesses. This information serves as the basis for pedagogical decision-making, where instructors adjust course content, select appropriate teaching strategies, and provide scaffolding based on students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Ultimately, this process leads to the development of a responsive and student-centered speaking course that is aligned with students' needs and supports their speaking development.



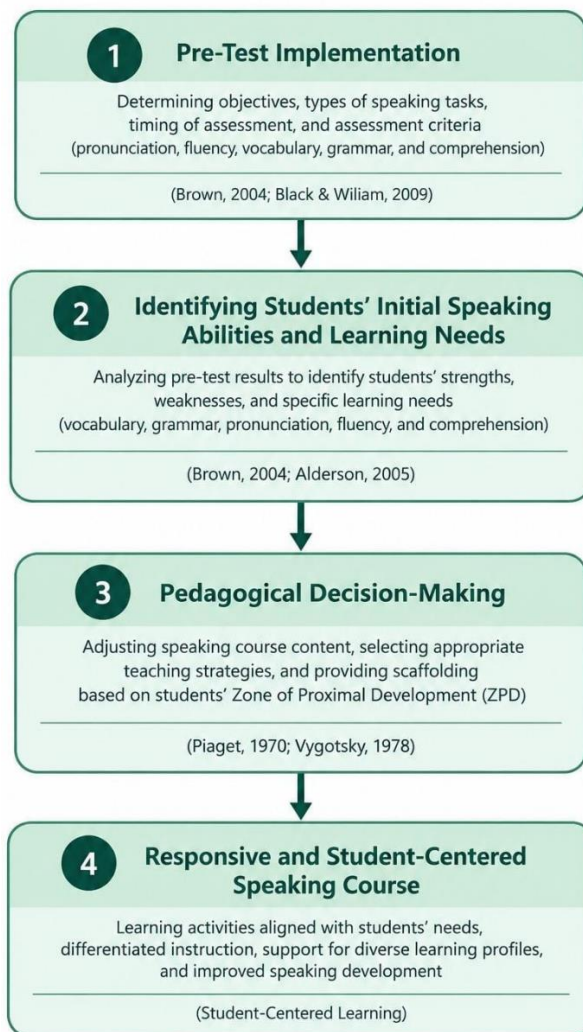


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

G. Previous Studies

There are several previous studies related to this research. The first study, conducted by Abdulaal et al. (2022), entitled “Dynamic vs. Diagnostic Assessment: Impacts on EFL Learners’ Speaking Fluency and Accuracy, Learning Anxiety, and Cognitive Load,” examined the effects of diagnostic assessment on learners’ speaking performance. This study was conducted in an EFL context with 90 learners divided into two experimental groups and one control group, with a focus on speaking skills (fluency and accuracy). The study employed a quantitative experimental method using pre-tests and post-tests as instruments to measure speaking performance, learning anxiety, and cognitive load. The data were analyzed

using one-way ANOVA. The findings revealed that diagnostic assessment helps identify learners' strengths and weaknesses and provides useful feedback for improving performance.

The second study, conducted by Liu, Hashim, and Sulaiman (2025), entitled "Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment for IELTS Speaking Skills: A Chinese High School Case Study," focused on identifying students' specific needs in speaking through the implementation of cognitive diagnostic assessment. This study was conducted in a Chinese high school context involving five Grade 11 students and one English teacher, with a focus on speaking skills in IELTS preparation. The research employed a qualitative case study design over a period of 16 weeks. Data were collected through multiple instruments, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, mock speaking test recordings, and document analysis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the learning process. The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis to identify patterns related to students' cognitive development and learning processes. The findings showed that cognitive diagnostic assessment was effective in identifying detailed subskills of speaking, such as linguistic knowledge, pronunciation mastery, discourse management, and speech organization. In addition, the study revealed that diagnostic assessment helped students develop metacognitive awareness and enabled teachers to design more targeted instructional strategies.

The third study, conducted by Suzuki et al. (2025), titled "Feedforwarding Diagnostic Language Assessment: AI-driven Weakness Identification and Contextualised Feedback for L2 Speaking," examined how diagnostic language assessment can identify learners' weaknesses and enhance speaking performance by integrating feedback and remedial learning activities. This study was conducted in a Japanese EFL context involving 59 learners at beginner to intermediate levels, focusing on speaking skills, particularly lexical use. The research employed an experimental design in which participants were divided into control and experimental groups. The instruments used included AI-based speaking tasks and a diagnostic feedback system that provided contextualized feedback on learners' performance. The data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative methods

to measure learning gains and qualitative analysis to examine learners' perceptions of the feedback. The findings showed that learners who received diagnostic feedback demonstrated greater improvement in speaking performance and increased awareness of their linguistic weaknesses compared to those who engaged only in task repetition. The study emphasized that diagnostic assessment is crucial in identifying both strengths and weaknesses and in guiding subsequent learning processes.

This study differs from some previous studies in several significant aspects. While the studies by Abdulaal et al. (2022), Liu et al. (2025), and Suzuki et al. (2025) mainly focus on the effectiveness of diagnostic assessment, feedback mechanisms, and the improvement of speaking performance, they don't specifically investigate the implementation of pre-tests as an initial diagnostic tool to identify students' learning needs before the lesson begins. In addition, although Liu et al. (2025) employed a qualitative case study approach, their focus was on cognitive diagnostic frameworks rather than on the practical classroom implementation of pre-tests. Therefore, this study fills the existing research gap by focusing specifically on the implementation of pre-tests as a form of diagnostic assessment in a speaking course. Using a qualitative case study design, this research aims to explore in depth how pre-tests are conducted, how they function in identifying students' needs, and how mentors use the results to adjust teaching strategies and learning materials. This study is conducted at the Universal Course, Bandung, Indonesia, and does not aim to generalize the findings; rather, it aims to explore in depth the phenomena and experiences of how pre-tests identify students' needs and inform the subsequent learning process.