

From accuracy to fluency: Exploring EFL teachers' perceptions of speaking assessment in *pesantren*-based school context

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the gap between the ideal framework of speaking assessment, which emphasizes grammatical accuracy as a primary indicator, and classroom practice in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), where fluency and confidence are often prioritized over linguistic accuracy. Accordingly, this study explores EFL teachers' perceptions of grammatical accuracy in speaking assessment and how these perceptions influence the design and implementation of assessment rubrics. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three EFL teachers teaching at the elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. The findings reveal that although grammatical accuracy is acknowledged as important, teachers tend to prioritize effective communication, fluency, and speaking confidence. The assessment rubrics applied are flexible and adapted to students' backgrounds, proficiency levels, and learning needs. The study also confirms that teachers' prior learning experiences, professional training, and personal beliefs significantly shape their assessment practices. However, the limited number of participants and the specific institutional context restrict the generalizability of the findings. The study highlights the importance of teacher training that promotes a holistic and contextual approach to speaking assessment, as such an approach may enhance learners' communicative confidence, reduce speaking anxiety, and foster more active participation in English use within the *pesantren* environment. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term effects of improved speaking assessment practices on graduates' social engagement and future opportunities.

Keywords: grammar accuracy; *pesantren*-based schools; speaking assessment; teachers' cognition; teachers' perceptions

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability is often considered a key indicator of success in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Bakhshayesh et al., 2023; Chen & Hwang, 2020). In assessing this skill, teachers often refer to an assessment rubric that covers various aspects, such as fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and

grammar accuracy (Zaim & Arsyad, 2020). Among these aspects, grammar accuracy is often considered important, as it reflects the extent to which students can use language structures correctly in oral communication. However, in practice, the emphasis on grammar in speaking assessment may vary depending on school policies, teachers' perceptions, and the learning objectives promoted in the classroom (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2021). Thus, teachers should have the expertise in designing an accurate and fair assessment for students (Prastikawati et al., 2024).

Assessment is a systematic process in an academic context that is used to comprehend and evaluate the extent to which students have achieved learning objectives (Rozak et al., 2024). The current problem that arises is a mismatch between the ideal expectation of speaking assessment, which places grammar accuracy as one of the core criteria, and the actual practice in the classroom (Alsalem, 2020). Some teachers may emphasize fluency, while others focus strictly on grammatical aspects. This discrepancy indicates a problem to solve between the idealized theory of speaking assessment and its application in EFL learning contexts. Therefore, it is essential to explore how teachers' perceptions of grammar accuracy affect the way they construct and apply speaking assessment rubrics in the classroom.

To understand how teachers assess grammar accuracy in speaking assessment, the teacher cognition theoretical framework proposed by Borg (2003) is a relevant foundation. Teacher cognition refers to what teachers know, think, and believe about the teaching process and how it affects their classroom practices. In the context of speaking skills assessment, this theory helps reveal how teachers' perceptions are formed from their experiences as learners, professional training, and previous teaching practices. Borg (2003) identifies several main types of teacher cognition, including beliefs, knowledge, and decision-making, all of which are interrelated and shape teachers' actions. Using this theory, research can explore how teachers' beliefs about grammar accuracy influence the way they construct and implement speaking assessment rubrics in EFL classrooms.

Studies over the past five years have provided important information on grammar accuracy criteria in the speaking assessment. Limgomolvilas and Sukserm (2025) found that the use of analytic rubrics in oral presentation assessment can improve teachers' consistency in several aspects, including grammar accuracy. However, teachers' perception and understanding of the rubric played a key role in the reliability of the speaking assessment. Razmjoo and Hassanzadeh (2024) concluded that in developing local rubrics for EFL students' speaking assessment in Iran, teachers and lecturers have different views regarding the aspects that should be prioritized. Some teachers emphasized speaking fluency, while lecturers tended to emphasize grammatical accuracy as an indicator of academic competence. This study shows that perceptions of the importance of grammar in speaking assessment are influenced by each assessor's professional background and teaching context.

Fadila and Trisno (2025) revealed that teachers felt that with clear assessment criteria, including grammar accuracy, students were encouraged to pay more attention to language structure in their oral communication. Therefore, it emphasizes the importance of grammar accuracy as one of the main elements in assessing EFL students' speaking ability objectively and pedagogically (Ferlina, 2023). Furthermore, the implementation of dynamic assessment significantly contributes to the improvement of speaking accuracy and fluency in pre-intermediate EFL learners. This is also due to teachers placing grammatical accuracy as a core criterion in speaking assessment rubrics, as well as highlighting the importance of assessment strategies that encourage the development of students' linguistic aspects (Safdari & Fathi, 2020).

Several studies also showed that assessment of speaking skills should include a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the specific needs of academic and professional communication (Masuram & Sripada, 2020; Tiu et al., 2023). The grammar accuracy aspect is one of the important indicators in assessing speaking proficiency, because the use of appropriate language structures determines the effectiveness of the message conveyed (Fitria, 2024; Saptiany & Prabowo, 2024). It also confirms that grammatical accuracy is an essential element in a valid speaking assessment rubric that is relevant to the needs of EFL learners (Dang & Le, 2023; Granda et al., 2020). Although various studies confirm that speaking skill assessment needs to consider both academic and professional communication

needs, and place grammatical accuracy as an important indicator in determining the clarity and accuracy of messages, these findings mostly come from the general EFL context. However, studies on how these principles are applied in the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) environment are still very limited. This discrepancy indicates a gap between theoretical recommendations regarding the importance of grammatical accuracy and the implementation of speaking assessment in the *pesantren* context, which has its own pedagogical and cultural characteristics.

The novelty of this study lies in combining the analysis of EFL teachers' perceptions of grammatical accuracy in speaking assessment with the pedagogical and sociocultural context of *pesantren*-based schools. Although studies on teacher perceptions and grammatical accuracy have been conducted in various EFL contexts, this study offers a new perspective by exploring how these two aspects interact in the *pesantren* environment, which has different learning characteristics and communication orientations. This approach provides a more specific understanding of how teachers design and implement speaking assessment rubrics in a religious-based educational setting that balances the demands of structural and grammatical accuracy and language confidence. Therefore, to address this problem, the researcher formulates two research questions to be answered:

1. How do EFL teachers perceive the importance of grammar accuracy in speaking assessment?
2. How do these perceptions influence the way teachers construct and apply speaking assessment rubrics in the classroom?

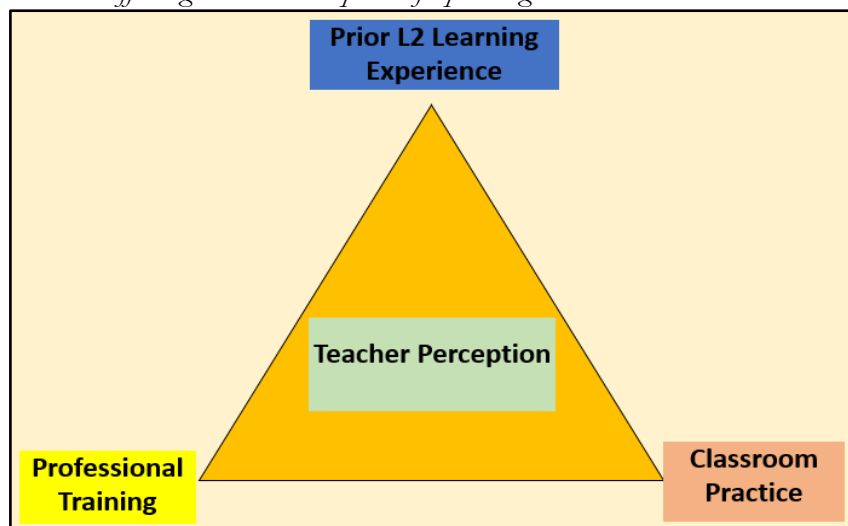
LITERATURE REVIEW

Grammatical accuracy in speaking assessment

Grammatical accuracy is one of the key components in assessing speaking proficiency in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This aspect refers to the extent to which students are able to use correct language structures when communicating orally. Grammatical accuracy not only reflects mastery of grammatical forms but also demonstrates students' awareness of the appropriate and effective use of language in conveying messages. In the context of speaking assessment, grammatical accuracy is often included in analytical assessment rubrics as an objective indicator that can be measured systematically. In *pesantren*-based schools, which integrate religious values into the learning process, the approach to assessing speaking skills may differ from that of educational institutions in general. In this unique pedagogical context, teachers' educational backgrounds, teaching experience, and professional training (see Figure 1) are factors that substantially influence how grammatical accuracy is applied in teacher-based assessment (Nguyen et al., 2024). Emphasis on this aspect is important so that the assessment focuses not only on fluency or eloquence, but also on the accuracy of the language forms used.

Figure 1

Factors Affecting Teacher Perception of Speaking Assessment



Previous research shows that teachers' perceptions of speaking aspects, particularly regarding the importance of grammar, play a role in determining how they construct assessment rubrics (Razmjoo & Hassanzadeh, 2024). Further, Estaji and Nezhad (2025) demonstrated that experienced and novice teachers differ significantly in how they conceptualize speaking components and translate these conceptions into assessment frameworks. The way teachers define speaking, the components they prioritize, and the assessment criteria they emphasize are fundamentally interconnected. When teachers construct speaking assessment rubrics, they are essentially codifying their beliefs about language communication into measurable criteria (Kolay & Ulu, 2024). This process reveals that teachers' prior conceptions of language learning, shaped by their own educational experiences and teaching backgrounds, substantially influence which aspects of speaking they include in their rubrics and how heavily they weigh each component. Similarly, teachers' prior learning experiences, including their own experiences as language learners, substantially shape their conceptualizations of what constitutes important aspects of speaking proficiency and how these should be assessed. In *pesantren*-based schools, teachers with backgrounds specifically in Islamic education alongside formal language teaching training often navigate complex negotiations between traditional pedagogical approaches emphasizing memorization and modern communicative language teaching methodologies prioritizing authentic interaction and grammatical accuracy development (Noh & Matore, 2022; Madkur & As'ad, 2024). Therefore, teachers' educational background, teaching experience, and professional training have a significant contribution in shaping the application of grammatical accuracy in speaking skill assessment.

English teaching and speaking assessment in pesantren-based schools

Pesantren-based schools are educational institutions that integrate the formal education system with the *pesantren* education system, where students not only follow the national curriculum like public schools, but also participate in religious activities, character building, and foreign language development programs, especially Arabic and English, which are intensively managed by the *pesantren*'s internal language institution (Isbah, 2020; Mujahid, 2021; Ali & Halim, 2023). In the context of foreign language development institutions within *pesantren*, English language learning typically occurs in a more intensive and sustained manner compared to public schools, as students participate in various language-based activities such as daily conversation, storytelling, debates, speeches, dramas, and language clubs designed to create an immersive environment. This difference makes English language learning at *pesantren*-based schools more communicative and contextual than merely theoretical classroom instruction, as in public schools, as stated by Jufriadi and Wahibah (2025) that Islamic schools emphasize more on practice-oriented learning. As a result, the assessment of speaking skills in *pesantren*-based schools have the potential to differ significantly, as it is not only based on formal academic standards, such oral exams based on the national curriculum rubric but also considers aspects of everyday communication fluency, the courage to speak in public, and the ability to use English in real-life interactions within the boarding school environment. By that, as stated by Mukmin et al. (2025), this makes speaking assessment at *pesantren*-based schools more integrated with the daily lives of students and places greater emphasis on performance-based assessment than traditional oral tests in public schools.

In this context, the intensive, continuous, and integrated English language learning environment in *pesantren*, which is integrated with character building and religious activities, has the potential to shape different perceptions of grammatical accuracy compared to the general EFL context. Students' exposure to daily language practice, ranging from mandatory conversations and speeches to public activities in English, can encourage teachers to assess speaking skills based on courage, fluency, and smooth communication as the main indicators of success. Conversely, the discipline atmosphere at *pesantren*, which emphasizes obedience to rules and character building, can also cause some teachers to view linguistic accuracy as a form of linguistic discipline that must be upheld. It is this dynamic between communicative demands and disciplinary values that has the potential to produce unique

assessment priorities, making teachers' perceptions of grammatical accuracy in the *pesantren* context a novel finding compared to other EFL environments.

Teacher cognition in assessment practices

The main theoretical foundation of this study is the teacher cognition theory proposed by Borg (2003), which encompasses what teachers know, think, and believe, as well as how these factors influence their teaching practices. In the case of EFL learning context Wang and Ryan (2020) have noted the interplay between EFL teacher cognition and teacher practice. Chen and Abdullah (2022) mention that EFL teacher cognition is very influential in forming teacher practice and thus affects students' academic achievement. On this issue, research has provided evidence of the claim that EFL teachers' cognition is influential in shaping their instructional practices, thereby affecting the learning assessment as well as learning outcomes of students (Gao et al., 2020; Mohammadi & Moradi, 2017). Thus, the theory of teacher cognition can also be relevant for understanding how teachers make decisions when designing rubrics for assessing speaking skills.

In the context of assessing speaking ability, teacher cognition encompasses how they perceive the importance of grammatical accuracy, how they evaluate students' abilities based on these criteria, and how they design and implement rubrics that are fair and appropriate to the learning context. The influence of teachers' cognition is particularly significant in *pesantren*-based schools, where pedagogical approaches and institutional policies can shape unique perspectives on the assessment standards used. Some of the previous studies indicate that the use of analytical rubrics that are well understood by teachers can improve the consistency and reliability of assessment, including in terms of grammatical accuracy (Fadila & Trisno, 2025; Limgomolvilas & Sukserm, 2025). These contributions form the basis for further exploring how EFL teachers, particularly in *pesantren*-based school settings, understand and implement grammatical accuracy in speaking assessment practices, an aspect that remains under-explored currently.

METHOD

Research design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design because it specifically aims to produce a detailed, in-depth, and comprehensive description of EFL teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences regarding grammatical accuracy in assessing speaking skills in the context of *pesantren*-based schools. The descriptive approach is particularly suitable for addressing the focus of this study, as it not only explores teachers' perceptions in general but also describes how and what they understand, value, and practice in the assessment process in the *pesantren* environment. In line with Cresswell's (2017) view, this design allows researchers to capture phenomena from the subjective perspectives of participants in rich and contextual detail, resulting in a descriptive understanding that reflects the authentic conditions of assessment practices that cannot be captured by other more interpretive quantitative or qualitative approaches. This design thus provides a strong methodological basis for describing teachers' practices and considerations as they are in the context of *pesantren* education.

Participants' profile

The participants in this study consisted of three English teachers who taught speaking subjects at elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels in *pesantren*-based schools, specifically at an informal institution focused on foreign language development in one of the Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in East Java. These levels are equal to first, second, and third grades of senior high school students. The teachers were selected purposively, who have teaching experience for about 4 years at different levels, direct involvement in the speaking assessment process, as well as a relevant English educational background. These teachers were considered capable of providing rich information related to their perceptions of grammatical accuracy in speaking assessments.

Research instrument

The key instrument of this study was the researchers themselves (Creswell, 2017). Meanwhile, the supporting instrument used in data collection was a semi-structured interview guideline designed to explore teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and practices in assessing speaking skills with a focus on aspects of grammatical accuracy. The interview guideline contained several main questions and flexible follow-up questions to allow the researcher to explore the participants' answers more exploratively according to each teacher's context.

Data and data source

The data in this study are verbal statements in the form of sentences uttered by the teachers through interviews regarding their perceptions of the importance of grammar accuracy and how it affects the development and application of speaking assessment rubrics. Although the number of participants was limited, this data provides deep and contextual insights into the practices and understandings of teachers in the *pesantren*-based school. Thus, the findings of this study are not intended to represent all EFL teachers broadly, but to present a rich and detailed understanding of the experiences and perspectives of teachers in the specific context in which they teach.

Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure of this study began with contacting participants through coordination with the institution. After obtaining consent from the participants, interviews were conducted in person and recorded using an audio device with their permission. Each interview lasted for approximately 20-25 minutes, depending on the depth of information provided and needed. Subsequently, the data from the recorded interviews were transcribed for further analysis. In collecting the data, the researchers conducted multiple interviews to check the participants' consistency in responding to the questions given. Furthermore, multiple interview sessions were carried out not only to validate the stability of participants' responses but also to allow follow-up clarification, probe deeper into emerging themes, and ensure that the data captured truly reflected the teachers' authentic perceptions and practices. This process enabled the researcher to refine questions, revisit ambiguous statements, and obtain richer, more nuanced information that might not surface in a single interview session.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were used to ensure the participants' responses and to allow the researchers to explore in-depth the participants' responses. During the interviews, the researchers asked several questions related to teachers' perceptions of the importance of using grammar accuracy in speaking assessment and how teachers' perceptions influence the way they construct and apply speaking assessment rubrics in the classroom. The interview questions were adapted from teacher cognition theory by Borg (2003). In detail, the interview questions focused on exploring teachers' beliefs about grammar accuracy in speaking, teachers' past learning experiences which shaped teacher cognition, and exploring the process of creating rubrics and the components that are considered important (see Appendix 1).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The analysis process started with reading the whole interview transcript to understand the general context, then coding the parts that were relevant to the research focus. After that, the codes were grouped into several main themes that reflected teachers' perceptions of grammar accuracy and how these perceptions influenced the construction and application of speaking assessment rubrics. Last, the researchers write the report descriptively.

FINDINGS

This part of the research presents the findings in terms of data quotation and data analysis. The findings focus on advanced, intermediate, and elementary English teachers' perception of grammar

accuracy as the main criterion in speaking assessment and how their perceptions influence, they construct a speaking rubric by following the theory of teacher cognition proposed by Borg (2003).

RQ1: How do EFL teachers perceive the importance of grammar accuracy in speaking assessment?

In this part, the provided data answers the first research question related to teachers' perception of grammar accuracy in speaking assessment by following the concept of teacher cognition, including what teachers know, think, and believe (Borg, 2003).

Advanced-level teacher

Excerpt 1

"I think that grammar accuracy is crucial in speaking skills as it affects the clarity and effectiveness of communication."

"My experiences as an English learner have taught me that grammar accuracy is essential for effective communication. However, I've also learned that fluency and the ability to convey ideas and thoughts are equally important. I have also joined a training that has made me realize that speaking assessment should be holistic and not just focus on grammar accuracy."

The excerpt shows that an advanced-level teacher considers grammatical accuracy as an important aspect because it affects the clarity and effectiveness of communication. However, she also recognizes that the ability to convey ideas and fluency in speaking are equally important. Based on the quotation of her statement, the teacher's belief (Borg, 2003) was likely formed from her personal experience as a learner and the professional training she had received, which introduced a more holistic approach to assessment. These findings are specific to this teacher and are not intended to conclude a pattern that applies generally to all teachers.

Intermediate-level teacher

Excerpt 2

"Grammar accuracy serves as a foundation for effective communication, but it should not overshadow communicative competence. I also focus more on whether grammatical errors impede understanding rather than penalizing every minor mistake because excessive focus on accuracy can create speaking anxiety and reduce participation. In addition, the training I ever joined introduced me to a holistic assessment approach, shifted my perspective from error counting to communicative effectiveness."

The teacher prioritizes communication competence and fluency as the basis for assessment. While acknowledging the importance of grammatical accuracy, she chooses to focus on the extent to which grammatical errors affect comprehension. Her past experiences as a student and the professional training she had undergone were thought to have shaped his teacher cognition in terms of teaching beliefs and knowledge (Borg, 2003; Borg, 2019). Based on his statements, it can be interpreted that she tends to prioritize fluency and meaningfulness of communication over grammatical perfection. This interpretation arises from the way he emphasizes the importance of conveying ideas clearly and fluently, even if they are not always accompanied by a completely correct language structure.

Elementary level teacher

Excerpt 3

"Correct grammar not only boosts confidence but also demonstrates a good understanding of language structure. But I prioritize students' courage to speak, fluency in expressing ideas, and then gradually guide and correct their grammar. Further, in a training I ever joined, I realized that focusing too much on grammar can make students afraid to speak."

Elementary level teacher places courage and fluency in speaking as top priorities, with grammatical accuracy as an aspect that develops over time because students are commonly being shy to speak since they do incorrect grammar or pronunciation errors (Zuhairi & Mistar, 2023). This change in perception shows that teacher cognition is influenced by teaching experience and professional training, in line with Borg's (2003) theory that teachers' beliefs can change through experience and continuous learning.

RQ2: How do these perceptions influence the way teachers construct and apply speaking assessment rubrics in the classroom?

The provided data below answers the second research question related to how teachers' perceptions influence the way they construct and apply assessment rubrics in the classroom, following the concept of teacher cognition, including what teachers know, think, and believe (Borg, 2003).

Advanced-level teacher

Excerpt 4

"I construct an assessment rubric based on the curriculum, including fluency, pronunciation, grammar accuracy, and the ability to convey ideas and thoughts. And the portion of grammar accuracy in my rubric is around 30-35%. In addition, I modified the rubric from the school because I have to adjust my speaking assessment rubric for students with different language backgrounds. By that, I believe that a flexible rubric can help me assess speaking skills holistically."

The teacher demonstrated decision-making cognition (Borg, 2003; Borg, 2019) in developing and adjusting the assessment rubric. She maintained grammar as an important but not dominant aspect. The adjustment of the rubric was based on the needs of the students, demonstrating an adaptive pedagogical orientation toward the diversity of backgrounds and needs of learners. The teacher's decision to adjust the rubric, as driven by the diversity of the students' linguistic backgrounds, shows how decision-making cognition (Borg, 2003; Borg, 2019) is operationalized in practice. This adjustment was not only intended to accommodate differences in initial proficiency in grammar but also to respond to variations in communication confidence levels and cultural constraints that might make students reluctant to accept direct correction. Thus, a more flexible and less prescriptive rubric helped create a more inclusive assessment system that was aligned with diverse learning needs.

Intermediate-level teacher

Excerpt 5

"I construct rubrics that include fluency and coherence (35%), vocabulary (25%), grammar accuracy (25%), and pronunciation (15%). I modified the school's existing rubric by reducing grammar accuracy from 40% to 25%. From that, the assessment rubric that I designed helps accommodate diverse learning styles and backgrounds."

The data shows that the teacher consciously balances grammar and other elements of communication in the rubric. Modifications to the rubric reflect teacher beliefs and decision-making (Borg, 2003), where grammar does not become a barrier for students to speak confidently. In an interview, the teacher explained that the reduction in the weighting of grammar assessment was done intentionally so that students would not feel pressured by overly high accuracy requirements, thereby encouraging them to be more courageous and confident in speaking. In other words, reducing the weighting of grammar is a pedagogical strategy explicitly aimed at encouraging students' verbal participation. Adjustments according to the learning context show that the rubric is not static, but responsive to the classroom situation.

Elementary-level teacher

Excerpt 6

"I chose aspects such as fluency, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence in my assessment rubrics. At the basic level, I prioritize fluency, vocabulary, and confidence, which the Grammar will improve gradually. I also adjusted the rubric that emphasize more on courage and fluency. Although the grammar is not yet correct, they can convey ideas clearly and are easily understood."

Elementary teachers develop rubrics that are appropriate for the developmental stages of their students. Grammar is assessed, but it is not the main focus. This reflects teacher decision-making that emphasizes the importance of confidence as the foundation for learning. Teachers also provide formative feedback for the gradual development of students' grammar.

Based on [Borg's \(2003\)](#) teacher cognition theory, teachers' perceptions of the importance of grammar accuracy in speaking assessment are influenced by beliefs, learning experiences, professional training, and instructional decisions. All teachers believe that grammar is important, but not absolute. Teachers tend to balance effective communication and structural accuracy in assessment. This is reflected in the construction and application of flexible and contextual rubrics.

DISCUSSION

The main findings show that although all teachers consider grammar accuracy to be important, they tend not to make it a primary aspect of speaking assessment. Instead, they prioritize effective communication, confidence, and fluency in speaking. These perceptions directly influence how they develop and apply flexible and contextual assessment rubrics, tailored to students' ability levels and backgrounds. These results reinforce [Borg's \(2003\)](#) theory, which states that teacher cognition is shaped by what teachers know, think, and believe based on their learning experiences, professional training, and instructional decisions. An advanced teacher, for example, still places grammar as an important aspect, but not dominant, and adapts the rubric to the needs of multilingual students. Meanwhile, the basic-level teacher emphasizes students' courage and fluency and provides formative assessment to support gradual grammar development.

Scientifically, these results reflect a shift in the approach to speaking assessment from one that previously focused on structural accuracy to one that is more communicative and holistic. This is in line with the views of [Brown and Abeywickrama \(2010\)](#), who state that in the context of EFL, speaking assessment should consider the balance between linguistic accuracy and communicative fluency. An excessive emphasis on grammatical errors can increase speaking anxiety and hinder student participation ([Hartono et al., 2022](#)), as expressed by advanced, intermediate, and elementary teachers in the interview excerpts. They expressed concern that an excessive focus on grammatical errors could make students hesitant to speak. This statement is in line with findings in the literature on speaking anxiety, which confirms that pressure to always be grammatically correct can inhibit students' oral participation.

Compared to previous studies, the results of this study show a slightly different pattern. Previous studies, such as those conducted by [Lingomolvilas and Sukserm \(2025\)](#), show that the use of analytical rubrics in oral presentation assessment can improve teacher consistency in several aspects, including grammatical accuracy. However, teachers' perceptions and understanding of rubrics greatly determine the reliability of the speaking assessment. Meanwhile, [Razmjoo and Hassanzadeh \(2024\)](#) found that in the development of local rubrics for assessing EFL students' speaking in Iran, there were differences in perspective between teachers and lecturers regarding the aspects that should be prioritized. Some teachers place more emphasis on fluency, while lecturers tend to emphasize grammatical accuracy as an indicator of academic competence. This study confirms that perceptions of the importance of grammar in speaking assessment are greatly influenced by the professional background and teaching context of each assessor. This statement is in line with findings in the literature on speaking anxiety, which confirms that pressure to always be grammatically correct can inhibit students' oral participation.

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In addition, the implementation of dynamic assessment has been proven to significantly contribute to improving the fluency and accuracy of speaking in pre-intermediate EFL learners. This occurs because teachers place grammatical accuracy as a core criterion in the speaking assessment rubric and apply assessment strategies that support the development of students' linguistic aspects ([Safdari & Fathi, 2020](#)). Speaking skill assessment should include pedagogical approaches aligned with academic and professional communication needs ([Masuram & Sripada, 2020](#); [Tiu et al., 2023](#)). Grammatical accuracy is considered an important indicator in assessing speaking proficiency, as proper language structure significantly determines the effectiveness of the message conveyed ([Saptiany & Prabowo, 2024](#); [Fitria, 2024](#)). This further underscores that grammatical accuracy is an essential element in a valid and relevant speaking assessment rubric tailored to the needs of EFL learners ([Dang & Le, 2023](#); [Granda et al., 2020](#)).

However, the results of this study show a different nuance, in which teachers do not place grammatical accuracy as the main focus in speaking assessment. Instead, they place more emphasis on effective communication skills, courage to speak, and fluency in conveying ideas. This difference indicates that teacher agency and professional training play an important role in shaping teachers' perceptions and pedagogical decisions. Teachers who have undergone training that emphasizes a holistic assessment approach tend to be more flexible in developing rubrics and adapting them to their students' contexts. Furthermore, the professional training usually introduces assessment concepts that focus not only on linguistic accuracy, but also on communicative aspects such as speaking confidence, message coherence, and the ability to convey ideas effectively. This new understanding encourages teachers to reduce their excessive emphasis on grammatical perfection and place greater emphasis on successful communication, resulting in real changes in the way they design rubrics and make assessment decisions. Thus, professional training serves as the main mechanism that facilitates a shift in the orientation of assessment from a structural approach to a more holistic and contextual one.

Thus, it can be concluded that teachers' perceptions of grammar accuracy in speaking assessment are not singular and absolute, but rather contextual and dynamic. Teachers consider various aspects in constructing assessment rubrics, including students' ability levels, language backgrounds, and communicative learning objectives. This shows that teachers' understanding and beliefs, which develop through experience and training, greatly influence how they assess speaking skills in a more fair, inclusive, and effective manner.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study indicate that EFL teachers' perceptions of the importance of grammatical accuracy in speaking assessment are not absolute, but rather contextual and dynamic, depending on the level of their students and their teaching background. This study reveals that teachers' learning experiences, professional training, and personal beliefs shape how they construct and apply speaking assessment rubrics. These findings imply the importance of teacher training that emphasizes a holistic assessment approach so that teachers can balance structural accuracy and

communicative competence. The main contribution of this study lies in its focus on the *pesantren*-based school context, which remains under-researched in speaking assessment studies. However, the limitations of this study include the limited number of participants and the local context, which may not represent the general situation. These limitations not only restrict the scope of the findings but also have implications for the transferability of the research results. By that, the findings of this study should be understood as analytical generalizations that depend on contextual appropriateness when applied to other settings. Furthermore, without a more structured and in-depth Limitations section, the potential for researcher bias, subjectivity of interpretation, and methodological constraints specific to qualitative research have not been comprehensively discussed, thus limiting critical reflection on the internal and external validity of this study. Therefore, further research is recommended to involve more teachers from various institutional backgrounds to strengthen the generalization of the results, as well as to further explore how assessment training can influence teachers' assessment practices in the long term. Theoretically and practically, this study provides insights for curriculum developers and teacher trainers to consider the flexibility and diversity of contexts in developing speaking skill assessment standards.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT:

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Appendix 1

In-depth interview questions

1. What do you think of the importance of grammar accuracy in students' speaking skills? (Exploring teachers' beliefs about grammar accuracy in speaking)
2. How have your past experiences as an English learner influenced your views on the importance of grammar accuracy? (Based on Borg, past learning experiences shape teacher cognition.)
3. How do you construct an assessment rubric for students' speaking skills? What aspects do you include? (Exploring the process of creating rubrics and the components that are considered important.)

Adapted from [Borg \(2003\)](#)