ONE-TO-ONE VS. PAIRED INTERVIEWS IN ASSESSING ORAL PROFICIENCY. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF A GROUP OF 3RD YEAR EFL STUDENTS AT CONSTANTINE-1 UNIVERSITY

المقابلات الفردية و المقابلات المزدوجة في تقييم الكفاءة الشفهية. دراسة مقارنة لمجموعة من طلبة السنة الثالثة إنجليزية بجامعة قسنطينة-1

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Abstract:

The present paper provides a comparative framework of using individual (one-to-one) and paired interviews to assess EFL students' oral proficiency at Constantine-1 University. Moreover, it investigates the students' perceptions and attitudes towards undertaking each of the aforementioned assessments. Admittedly, the current study represents an individual renewal attempt to adapt and implement standardized oral tests in speaking classes. A sample of 3rd year EFL students were in a position to compare the common differences among individual and paired interviews in assessing oral proficiency through undertaking one particular testing method within each semester, and then answering a questionnaire. The results revealed better performances within paired interviews among the participants who admittedly enjoyed interacting with their peers rather than being alone in front of the teacher.

Key words: paired interviews; individual interviews; oral proficiency; the speaking skill; interaction; assessment.

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ملخص باللغة العربية:

تقارن هذه الورقة البحثية استعمال طريقتي المقابلات الفردية و المقابلات المزدوجة في تقييم الكفاءة الشفاهية لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة قسطينة 1. كذلك ترصد الدراسة تصورات الطلاب ومواقفهم تجاه خوض كل من التقييمين المذكورين أعلاه. وعليه فإن هذا البحث يأتي كمحاولة تحديثة فردية لتكييف وتنفيذ الاختبارات الشفوية في أقسام المحادثة والتحدث. تم إخضاع عينة من طلاب السنة الثالثة إنجليزية لطريقة اختبار واحدة بنهاية كل سداسي لتقييمهم من رصد الاختلافات الشائعة بين المقابلات الفردية والمزدوجة، ثم الاجابة على استبيانة، لتكشف النتائج عن أداء أفضل للطلبة خلال المقابلات المزدوجة نظرا لنجاعة وسلاسة تفاعلهم مع أقرانهم بدلا من مواجهة الأستاذ الممتحن فرديا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقنية المقابلات المزدوجة؛ تقنية المقابلات الفردية؛ الكفاءة الشفاهية؛ مهارة التحدث؛ التفاعل؛ التقييم.

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1. Introduction

The world has witnessed rapid social changes in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Those changes are encapsulated in two words, globalization and internationalization, which generated increased mobility and frequent interactions among people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Backed up and supported by the developments in the field of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the need for international communication has increased. English has set itself as a 'global lingua franca' (Corbett, 2003, p. 207), an 'international gatekeeper' (Pennycook, 1994, p. 12), or simply a language for international communication (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 1) during and directly after World War II due to political and economic reasons. It has, since then, been taught as a second language (SL) or as a foreign language (FL) all over the world.

As a matter of fact, a good command of English has always ensured accessing international market and policy, as well as gaining membership in international academia. As far as communication is concerned, the speaking skill has gained increasing interest among English as a foreign language (EFL) scholars, and it has often been considered as the most important of all the skills for many reasons. First of all, speaking is seen as the 'key manifestation' of ability in a FL (Pawlak 2016, p. 89), the most vital tool in communication, or as the central skill in knowing and using a FL because we usually ask people 'Can you speak French? Can you speak Japanese?' and likewise (Nation 2011, p. 444). Undoubtedly, achieving a higher level in oral proficiency is a daunting task which requires considerable efforts in

addition to using a variety of teaching techniques, resources and materials both inside and outside speaking classes. Hence, designing a speaking course usually comprises several steps starting with assessing the needs of the target population of students, selecting instructional contents and materials, and then determining a specific and appropriate teaching methodology.

In addition to the aforementioned stages of designing courses for classroom instruction, the effectiveness of a particular course is judged in terms of the students' achievements after a specific period of instruction. In this respect, assessing students' achievements appears to be a highly important factor in the teaching and learning process. Arguably, assessment ensures determining the students' weaknesses and strengths in terms of oral language production, and thus delimiting what aspects to focus on (pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, discourse management, turn-taking, etc.) in subsequent speaking classes. Therefore, a careful decision making about adopting, adapting or developing an oral test seems critical at this stage. Teachers should take into account the general objectives of the speaking course itself, the current level of the target population of students as well as the desirable outcomes.

Within the EFL Department at Constantine-1 University, teachers of speaking have long resorted to one-to-one interviews to assess their students' oral proficiency. Regarding the existence of a wide range of oral assessments, both standardized and non-standardized, those individual interviews are said to be outmoded and ineffective. Accordingly, the teacher acts as an examiner who strictly controls all the phases of the assessment session. On the other hand, the student is the examinee who usually responds to the teacher's questions. Evidently, individual interviews have been criticised for they have revealed a number of weaknesses. First of all, they are costly in terms of the examiner's time and effort. Second, one of the central weaknesses of one-to-one tests, in accordance with Bachman (1988), Lazaraton (1992) and Luoma (2004), is the interviewer's considerable power over the examinee. More specifically, the examiner, i.e. the teacher, initiates all phases of the interaction and asks the questions, whereas the role of the examinee (the student) is just to comply and answer. Furthermore, within individual tests the major purpose is certification or granting a good grade, and therefore anxiety is always there on the part of the student being worried about the expected mark.

The current study illustrates the most common differences between individual and paired interviews in assessing EFL students' oral proficiency from the perspective of the students themselves. This is through administering a one-to-one speaking test on a sample of 3rd year EFL students at Constantine-1 University by the end of the first semester of the academic year 2017-2018. Afterwards, the same sample undertook a paired-interviewing assessment method by the end of the second semester of the same year. Finally, a questionnaire was administered and delivered to the participants so as to yield data which would reveal those participants' perceptions and attitudes towards the two assessment methods. Arguably, the paired interview, adapted and implemented by the researcher, represented an individual renewal attempt to give up the constraints of classical and outdated methods of assessing speaking in the aforementioned EFL Department.

2. Speaking Defined

In the literature on the subject of teaching the four language skills, the simplest definition of speaking is probably that delimiting it as a process of producing 'oral language' (Tarone, 2005, p. 485) or generating 'verbal utterances' (Bailey, 2003, p. 48). However, in an attempt to highlight the difficulty of this skill, some specialists argue that speaking is not merely "…the ability to form grammatically-correct sentences and then to pronounce them" (Thornbury, 2005, p. iv), but also a complex process that is made up of a variety of sub-processes. In considering this argument, speaking is seen as "an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information" (Brown, 2001; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Regarding the latter conceptualization, the complexity of speaking is acknowledged, and it stems from plenty of factors. First of all, producing oral language is not an easy task due to the severely limited speech planning time. Here, orally responding to an interlocutor is usually 'spontaneous', and takes place in 'real-time' (Thornbury, 2005, p. 2). Moreover, spoken language is difficult for it has to be understood immediately, i.e. at the moment of speaking, contrary to written language whereby one can read a text again and again to infer the meaning.

In a similar context, Levelt (1989) sees that speaking is one of our most complex skills, if not the most complex at all, because speech production in conversational settings involves multiple simultaneous sub-processes such as anticipating, listening, thinking, articulating, pausing,

rephrasing, and so on. Following the same line of thought, Thornbury (2005, p. 11) justifies that speaking is complex because it requires a great deal of 'linguistic knowledge' (grammar, phonology, vocabulary, discourse knowledge, genre knowledge...), and 'extra-linguistic' knowledge. The latter encompasses all sociocultural, contextual and topical knowledge that shapes the conversational routines and conventions of people in the target language (TL) society. Those sociocultural aspects of the FL determine, to a great extent, the success of a conversation. Therefore, within speaking classes teachers must keep an eye on the cultural dimension of language.

3. Is Speaking in a Native Language the Same as Speaking in a FL?

The above question is quite common among FL teachers and practitioners, whereby one main concern is to unveil the differences between speaking in a learner's mother tongue and speaking in a FL, if any. Thus, an often quoted answer to such a question is a big 'No', in the sense that speaking differs from one language to another. To begin with, Thornbury (2005, p. 27) outlines that even among the same speech community individuals could demonstrate wide variations and degrees of fluency, let alone when those individuals have to use another language. He (*ibid.*) considers the lack of fluency for FL learners, especially at their early stages of instruction, to be quite natural and inevitable. This can directly be linked to psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of self-confidence.

Following the same line of though, several empirical studies have addressed the most common problems encountered by EFL university students when they interact with their English-native speaking peers in classroom activities. Cheng, Myles and Curtis (2004), for instance, address the skill(s) that non-native English-speaking students found difficult to master beyond the basic language skills necessary for enrolment at the graduate level in Canadian universities, namely speaking. The findings of their study suggest that ongoing FL support is still needed by non-native English speaking students even after they get admission into the different graduate programs (Cheng, Myles & Curtis, 2004). As another example, a qualitative study targeting English-speaking students and how they are expected to speak following two graduate TESL program courses at a Canadian university was conducted by Morita (2000). The participants were questioned about the ways they acquired the oral academic discourses necessary to perform successful oral academic presentations. The findings revealed that most English-speaking students (especially non-natives) gradually polished their speaking skill and became apprenticed into the

different oral academic discourses through ongoing negotiations with instructors and peers.

All in all, speaking in another language than one's own mother tongue represents a real challenge for FL learners, especially for beginners. This is arguably because manipulating and using a FL for authentic or real-life communication requires knowledge about all the aspects of that FL, both linguistic and extra-linguistic, in addition to the ability of appropriately using that vernacular in different contexts and to fulfil a variety of functions such as apologizing, asking for information, agreeing/disagreeing, giving directions, inviting someone, and so forth.

4. Assessing Spoken Language in Individual and Interactional Settings

The difficulty of analysing and assessing spoken language is another topic that is worth discussion. One reason why assessing the speaking skill is a daunting task stems from the fact that it takes place immediately and in real-time, in the sense that assessors have to listen, analyse and evaluate that learner's performance simultaneously. In this respect, some teachers prefer to have enough time to analyse their students' spoken performances before providing underlying feedback and giving a score. Accordingly, those teachers resort to delayed assessment than immediate evaluation. This is usually done through recording the students' oral performances, and reviewing them later on. In fact, this reflects the indispensability of technology in language teaching and assessment, the thing which had not existed half a century or so before.

4.1. Assessing Individual Learners' Performances

Assessing individual oral language production has long been opted for among EFL teachers for its feasibility and ease of administration. Accordingly, a face-to-face brief presentation occurs between two interlocutors: a teacher (the examiner), and a learner (the test-taker). The former assesses the learner's performance in terms of several aspects such as fluency, accuracy and vocabulary use, and finally rewards a score that reflects the learner's level in oral proficiency. Additionally, assessing individual oral language production is believed to be less challenging for the teachers than analyzing and assessing students' performances in interactional settings. In this specific context, speaking can be tested by means of authentic assessments such as progress checklists, analysis of taped speech samples, or anecdotal records of speeches in classroom interactions and discussions. Inside academia, a variety of standardized and

non-standardized speaking assessments have been developed and used to assess individuals' oral language proficiency. The *Basic English Skills Test (BEST)* and the *English as a Second Language Oral Assessment (ESLOA)* represent good examples of standardized speaking tests (Early & Swanson, 2008). On the whole, regardless of the test type, its criteria and scoring methods should be clearly defined for both teachers and test-takers.

4.2. Paired Interviews: Assessing Speaking in Interactional Settings

Another reason why assessing speaking is difficult is the fact that spoken language is produced for purely communicative and interactional purposes. Therefore, recently there have been many recommendations to make a shift towards assessing students' oral proficiency in interactional settings rather than in individual performances (Bailey, 2003; Thornbury, 2005). As a matter of fact, assessing speaking in interactional settings seems to have been disregarded among EFL teachers in the Algerian university. This is probably because EFL teachers prefer administering individual interviews for their feasibility and applicability, as disclosed earlier.

Nevertheless, paired interviews represent one possibility to assess students' oral production while interacting with one another. This effective method has been used as a part of large-scale international standardised oral proficiency tests since the late 1980s and early1990s. As an example, following the *University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES)*, there are several oral proficiency tests which all use paired interviews as a mode of examination, including the *Key English Test (KET)*, the *Preliminary English Test (PET)*, the *First Certificate in English (FCE)*, the *Certificate in Advanced English (CAE)*, and the *Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)* (Saville & Hargreaves, 1999; Luoma, 2004, p. 36). Contrary to classical one-to-one interviewing methods, within paired interviews the students are assessed in pairs while interacting with one another or with the teacher. Arguably, this method enables the examiners carefully observe and analyse the student-student and student-teacher interactional patterns. Furthermore, the students' performances are being assessed while those students employ all what they have internalized in terms of the FL linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge in order to make and make out meaning.

4.3. Technology in Teaching and Assessing Speaking

As a matter of fact, the widespread of technology has brought with it a variety of language assessment solutions, inside and outside academia.

Nowadays, even common people have the opportunity to learn and assess their own language proficiency in a simplified and interactive way as they use their smartphones. Thousands of applications are available for free on online stores such as Google Play Store and Apple Store. As far as teaching speaking is concerned, most oral-aural classes at the university level usually take the form of interactive (interviews, role-plays, discussions, debates, etc.) or responsive (question/answer, giving instructions and directions, paraphrasing and summarizing, etc.) sessions. Hence, for a good and successful classroom instruction, adapting and administering any of the aforementioned tasks requires the use of some tools and technologies such as video projectors, loud-speakers, computers, tape-recorders and the Internet. Such tools and technologies are nowadays paramount in oral-aural classes for they provide more opportunities to bring a variety of realia and real-life chunks into the classroom. Other tools, however, are useful in assessing students' oral proficiency: many devices are there for recording the students' performances for later analysis and evaluation.

In most spoken interactions among EFL learners both speaking and listening are governed by means of a reciprocal (a two-way) relationship, and both skills cannot be apprenticed without one another because interlocutors first listen to each other, and then respond (Thornbury, 2005). Based on this interactional nature of spoken language, recent advances in computer science have offered so many solutions with various applications in language teaching and assessment. As an example, there are different software and applications dedicated to recognize human speeches and correct them. By using such computer-mediated communication learners usually respond to some questions or engage into a virtual and interactive conversation with the computer. Then, the produced speech could be analysed, corrected and finally marked. Also, those learners would get feedback on which aspects to practice and improve in the future. Having all of this in mind, one can grasp that it is indispensable for EFL teachers to use technology in teaching and assessing the oral-aural skills in classroom settings.

5. Methodology

By reviewing the literature on the subject of assessing speaking, we decided to collect sound and relevant data which would reveal the perceptions and attitudes of EFL students at Constantine-1 University towards implementing both individual and paired interviews to assess oral

proficiency. In the following is an illustration of the major data collecting methods and the target sample of participants involved in the current study.

5.1. Sampling

3rd year EFL students at Constantine-1 University constituted our target population of learners in the current study. This is because of their familiarity with current testing methods, on top of their fairly good command of English in interactional settings. During the academic year 2017-2018 (just like in the beginning of each year), the aforementioned population was assigned into nine (9) groups (clusters) by the Department administration, all with roughly the same number of students (between 35 and 38). Thus, it could be said that each cluster was representative, i.e. constituted itself a mini-representation of the larger population, and then randomly selecting one particular cluster would support the validity of the research findings.

Thirty-six (36) students were randomly selected as our sample given the fact that we were preassigned to teach this particular cluster (group) the oral/aural skills following the oral comprehension/expression subject (OCE) at the Department of English, Constantine-1 University. Supposedly, those 36 students had to undertake both tests, and finally answer the survey questions. However, 12 of them were dropped off the final sample for the reason that they missed either the first speaking assessment, the second or both. We ended up with 24 participants who answered the survey questionnaire and constituted the final sample.

5.2. Data Collection

As far as data collection is concerned, the participants had to undertake two different tests to assess their oral proficiency. The first, an individual interview, was administered by the end of the first semester (February 2018). Accordingly, the 24 participants had to individually express their viewpoint towards a particular topic in a four-minute period of time in front of their teacher of speaking who acted as an examiner. Finally, each student was granted a mark which could range from 0 to 20 based on his/her performance. Here, the students were familiar with this first test because it was the same they used to undertake in previous semesters.

Within the second test, however, we opted for adapting and implementing an upper-intermediate version of the widely recognized Cambridge's First Certificate in English (FCE), also referred to as 'Cambridge English: First.' We chose this specific test for three main

reasons: for its applicability in our university settings, for its ease of administration, and for its credibility because more than 8 million exams of this specific assessment are taken in over 160 countries around the world every year. Accordingly, the 24 participants undertook this adapted innovative speaking test for the first time in the aforementioned department by the end of the second semester (mid-May 2018). The FCE speaking test suggests assigning test-takers (students) into pairs. Assessing each pair takes a duration of 14 minutes. The test consists of four parts, each of which focuses on a different type of interaction: between the interlocutor and each candidate, between the two candidates, and finally among all three (see Appendix 1). Following the different parts of the test the candidates are given several spoken instructions along with written or visual stimuli including photographs, video recordings, and so on. The following table illustrates the different parts of the FCE speaking assessment, along with its stages, task types as well as the focus and timing of each stage:

|	Task Type	Focus	Duration
Part 1	Conversation (spoken questions) between the interlocutor and each candidate.	General interactional and social language.	3 minutes.
Part 2	An individual long-run presentation for each candidate, with a brief response from the second. Then, the candidates are given a pair of photographs to talk about.	- Organising a large unit of discourse. - Comparing - Describing - Expressing opinions	1 minute for each candidate's long-run presentation, and 20-second response from the other candidate.
Part 3	A two-way conversation between the two candidates. They are given spoken instructions with written/visual stimuli, which are used in a decision-making task.	- Sustaining an interaction. - Exchanging ideas. - Expressing/justifying opinions. - Agreeing/disagreeing. - Suggesting. - Speculating. - Evaluating. - Reaching a decision through negotiation.	3 minutes.

Part 4	A three-way discussion on topics related to the collaborative task (spoken questions).	- Expressing and justifying opinions. - Agreeing/disagreeing.	4 minutes.

Table 1: The FCE Test Stages, Task Type and Duration

As could be grasped from the above table, each part of the test focuses on a wide variety of functions. Those latter range from comparing and describing to expressing opinions, justifying, agreeing/disagreeing… By considering this latter point, it could be stated that the FCE speaking test gives an opportunity for the candidates to demonstrate their ability to use spoken English so as to accomplish a variety of tasks, contrary to the prevailing outmoded one-to-one interviews whereby the students have to adhere to the teacher's questions by answering and giving long-run presentations.

Apart from the stages and duration of the aforementioned assessment, it is worth mentioning that this sort of paired interviews is undertaken in two pairs: a pair of candidates, and a pair of assessors. The examinees (test-takers) are assessed by two examiners (teachers). The following figure illustrates the participants and their interactional patterns within the FCE s
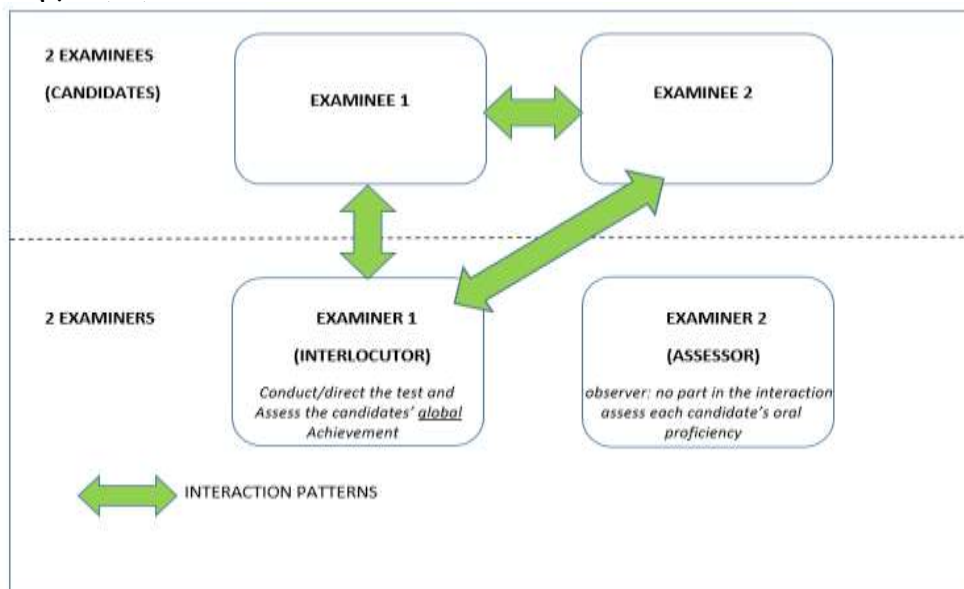
Figure 1: Participants (Examiners-Examinees) of the FCE Speaking Test

As represented in the above figure, the first examiner (the interlocutor) interacts with the students, assesses each student's global achievement and

finally gives a mark which could range from 0 to 5 based on the adapted
FCE Global Achievement Rating Scale (see Appendix 2). On the other
hand, the second examiner, the assessor, does not take part in the
interaction. His/her role is just to assess the candidates' oral proficiency in
terms of 4 aspects, namely 'Grammar and Vocabulary', 'Discourse
Management', 'Pronunciation' and 'Interactive Communication', all at
once. Then, a mark which could range from 0 to 20 is granted to each
individual student following the adapted FCE Analytical Assessment Scale
(see Appendix 3). Within the current research the two examiners were
belonging to the same Department were the study took place: the
interlocutor is the researcher himself, and the assessor was another teacher
of the speaking subject with a doctorate degree in English and a seven-year
teaching experience on the day of the FCE assessment. By the end of the
test, the marks of both the assessor and the interlocutor are summed up
together. Finally, each candidate in the assessed pair is awarded a score
which could range from 0 to 25 (see Table 2).

Examiner	Focus	Mark Range
Examiner 1 (Interlocutor)	Global Achievement	0-5
Examiner 2 (Assessor)	Grammar and Vocabulary	0-5
	Discourse Management	0-5
	Pronunciation	0-5
	Interactive Communication	0-5
	Final Score	0-25

Table 2: The Final Mark Range in the Adapted FCE Test

As far as the participants are concerned, the sample of 24 EFL
students was randomly assigned into 12 pairs. Here, pairing candidates for
the assessment can usually be done by the teacher, or by the students
themselves. In this specific context, FCE test designers insist on the fact that
candidates should be pre-assigned into pairs randomly. However, some
scholars like Ikeda (1998, p. 93), Galaczi (2008) and Norton (2005)
emphasize that candidates could be allowed to select their own partners to
diminish anxiety level or reduce it to a minimum. This is certainly true
because when students are paired with close friends, they would certainly be
at ease as they joke, refer to each other by nicknames, banter… (Norton,
2005, p. 292). The adapted FCE speaking assessment is practicable and
feasible in a bare classrooms for it does not require sophisticated materials.
All that is needed is a computer to be used to project some written or visual

stimuli (photographs, video recordings…) while giving instruction to the candidates. If not available, the computer can be replaced with printed photographs and other forms of visual stimuli or video players; even the tablet computer or the smartphone can help in this case.

Finally, after undertaking the two speaking assessments, the 24 participants had to answer a questionnaire by mid-May 2018. Accordingly, the aim was to compare individual and paired interviews from the perspective of EFL learners. More particularly, we targeted unveiling those students' perceptions and attitudes towards undertaking one innovative assessment method, namely the FCE standardized speaking test, for the sake of measuring students' oral proficiency. The questionnaire contained several direct and indirect questions, most of which were about comparing/contrasting the two oral proficiency assessment methods. It is worth mentioning that the informants' responses to the questionnaire were of extreme importance to the current research. This is because the grasped data would help in determining the students' willingness to undertake paired interviews rather than individual ones as an oral proficiency test. On the whole, a copy of the students' questionnaire is attached within the 'Appendixes' section (see Appendix 4).

6. Results and Discussion

The current section presents and discusses the results of the study under three main headings: the individual interview assessment results, the paired interview assessment results, and finally the student-questionnaire survey results. As a matter of fact, the central focus of the current research is not to compare participants' performances as measured by means of two different assessment methods. Conversely, greater attention is paid to the students' perceptions and attitudes towards undertaking the newly adapted and implemented paired-interviewing speaking assessment method.

To begin with, the norm among Algerian university teachers is to adopt the criterion of 20 as the total possible marks (100%) which can be granted by a student in a particular test. The same criterion was employed in scoring the participants based on their oral proficiency level within the one-to-one speaking assessment. The results of the first speaking test, i.e. the one-to-one interview, are summarised in the table below:

Students	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Mark	12	11.5	15.5	14.5	12.5	14	13	13	11.5	12.5	12.5	13.5

%	60	57.5	77.5	72.5	62.5	70	65	65	57.5	62.5	62.5	67.5
Students	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Mark	13.5	13	14.5	16	12.5	13.5	10	11.5	10.5	11.5	15	13
%	67.5	65	72.5	80	62.5	67.5	50	57.5	52.5	57.5	75	65

Table 3: Results of the Individual Interview Speaking Assessment

Statistically speaking, data in the above table indicate that the students' marks ranged from 10 (50% of the possible marks) to 16 (80% of the possible marks), with a mean score $M_1 = 12.93$ (64.65%). This means that all students succeeded in their oral proficiency test for the simple reason that every individual participant got a mark that equals or exceeds the minimum success rate, i.e. 50% of the possible marks (10/20 in this case).

As disclosed earlier in this paper, the second test was an adapted FCE speaking test which aimed to measure the participants' oral proficiency level in interactional settings, i.e. as those latter were engaged in interaction with their peers and with examiner 1 (the interlocutor). This has enabled for examining the students both linguistic knowledge (grammar, phonology, vocabulary, discourse knowledge, genre knowledge...), and extra-linguistic knowledge. More specifically, the test permitted us perceive how the students employed their body, gestures, in addition to their sociocultural, contextual and topical knowledge to successfully interact with other individuals. The second test was administered by mid-May 2018. Within the following table the results of the 12 pairs (i.e. 24 participants) are provided, whereby each total score is obtained through the summation of the five test sub-marks. The latter represent the different assessed aspects of oral proficiency.

Test	Students	Sub-marks					Total
		Grammar & Vocabulary	Discourse Management	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication	Global Achievement	
FCE 1	1	4	4	3	4	3	18
	2	4	4	3	4	4	19
FCE 2	3	3	4	4	3	4	18
	4	5	4	4	3	5	21
FCE 3	5	4	3	2	4	3	16
	6	3	4	4	3	4	18
FCE	7	3	4	3	3	4	17

4	8	4	4	4	3	5	20
FCE 5	9	4	3	4	4	4	19
	10	3	4	3	4	3	17
FCE 6	11	4	3	4	4	2	17
	12	4	3	3	4	4	18
FCE 7	13	4	4	4	4	4	20
	14	3	3	4	2	3	15
FCE 8	15	4	4	5	3	4	20
	16	4	5	3	5	5	22
FCE 9	17	3	3	3	4	4	17
	18	3	3	2	3	3	14
FCE 10	19	3	2	3	3	2	13
	20	3	4	3	3	3	16
FCE 11	21	4	3	4	5	5	21
	22	3	3	4	2	3	15
FCE 12	23	4	3	4	3	3	17
	24	2	4	3	4	3	16

Table 4: Scores of the FCE Speaking Assessment

To start with, the above table summarises the scores awarded by both the assessor ('Grammar and Vocabulary', 'Discourse Management', 'Pronunciation' and 'Interactive Communication') and the interlocutor ('Global Achievement'). The total score is indicated in the right row, and it is obtained through the summation of the 5 sub-marks. The latter could range from 0 (null) to 5 (perfect). The criterion which represent the total possible scores within the paired interviewing method is different from the aforementioned one-to-one assessment (25 for the former and 20 for the latter). Thus, it is quite noticeable that within the above table that the participants' scores ranged from 13 (52% of the possible scores) to 22 (88% of the possible scores). Moreover, by considering this criterion the mean score for this second test $M_2 = 17.66$ which is equal to the rate of 70.64% of the possible scores.

Nevertheless, by comparing the participants' oral proficiency levels following the two speaking assessments, a relatively positive change in the overall class performance could be noticed. More particularly, if we

calculate the difference between the two tests means M_1 and M_2, a variance of +5.99% (≈6%) is obtained:

$$M_V = M_2 - M_1 = 70.64 - 64.65$$
$$M_V \cong 6\%$$

The above equation indicates that the participants' oral proficiency level improved on the whole following the paired interview assessment method, namely the FCE speaking test. Besides, another sign of improvement is related to the range of the participants' scores within the two tests. In this specific point it was disclosed earlier that the 24 students granted scores which ranged from 10 to 16 on 20 (i.e. between 50% and 80% of the possible marks) within the individual interviewing method. However, within the paired interview the granted scores ranged between 13 and 22 on 25 (i.e. between 52% and 88% of the possible scores).

Regardless of the fact that the current paper does not take the students' performances within the two tests as a central focus, the positive variance, i.e. the students' overall improvement in oral proficiency within the FCE speaking test is questioned. One assumption has to do with the participants' level of self-confidence and the extent to which they felt at ease while interacting with their peers following the paired interviewing method. Another assumption is related to the participants' anxiety levels following the two assessment settings, whereby one central weakness of one-to-one tests is the examiner's considerable power over the examinee, the thing which could have disappeared within the FCE speaking assessment. On the whole, the act of either confirming or rejecting these assumptions, and thus exploring the students' perceptions and attitudes towards the two speaking assessment methods was fulfilled by means of the student-questionnaire based survey.

As far as the survey is concerned, a questionnaire was administered and delivered for the 24 participants the day after undertaking the FCE speaking assessment. A variety of questions (direct, indirect, reflectional, rating scales…) were included for the sake of gathering sound data which would enable us achieve our research objectives. To begin with, the participants were directly asked about their preference in terms of the two speaking tests. The results are outlined in the following table:

	N	%

The 1st testing method (one-to-one interviews)	3	12.5
The 2nd testing method (paired interviews)	21	87.5
Total	24	100

Table 5: Participants' Preference of Speaking Assessment Method

Apparently, the vast majority of the respondents preferred having their oral proficiency level assessed through undertaking the newly adapted and implemented paired interviewing method rather than the prevailing classical one-to-one tests. To know about the reason behind this specific choice, the 21 respondents who opted for the 2nd testing method, i.e. the paired interviews, had to answer a complementary question whereby the reasons for their preference would be revealed. The results appear in the following figure:
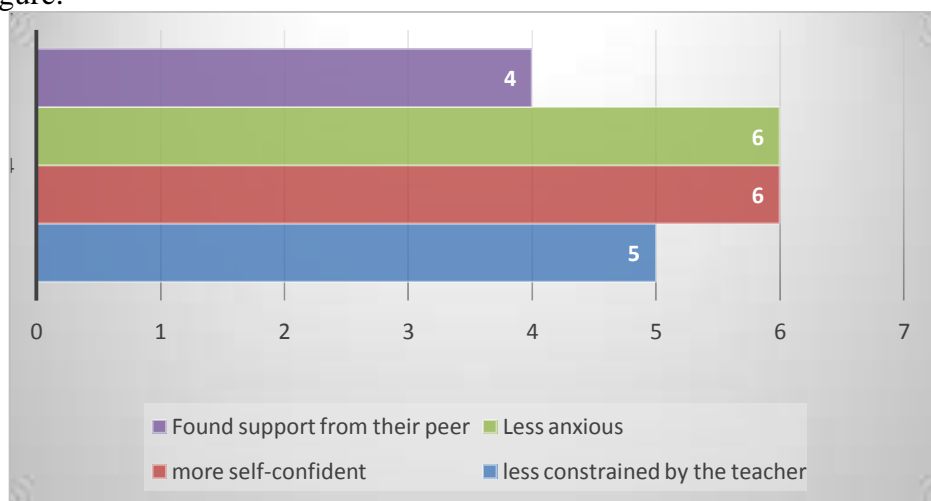
Figure 2: Participants' Justifications for Choosing Paired Interviews

As clearly elucidated from the above chart, the participants' motives varied within four major reasons. First, 4 of the 21 participants who opted for paired interviews think they found support from their peer within the interaction. As a matter of fact, during an interaction the interlocutors mutually assist one another using several strategies such as backchannels, gestures, facial expressions and so on. This discourse management ability, or discourse competence, has long been the subject of language teaching

theorists and, especially those with functionalist perspectives. Additionally, 5 participants identified freedom from the constraints of the teacher as one major reason behind choosing paired interviews. In fact, this specific point has already been highlighted as one weakness of the prevailing individual interviews due to the interviewer's considerable power over the examinee (Bachman, 1988; Lazaraton, 1992; Luoma, 2004). Accordingly, the teacher strictly controls the assessment session by initiating all phases of the interaction and asking questions, whereas the role of the student is just answering. Furthermore, the participants pointed to increased self-confidence and reduced anxiety levels as two major reasons behind choosing the FCE speaking assessment (6 students each). On the whole, it could be grasped that the adapted paired interviewing method was preferred by the majority of the respondents due to purely psychological and extra-linguistic factors.

In another context, the 24 participants were asked to express themselves about the main shortcomings of the one-to-one interviewing methods to test speaking. Accordingly, four major limitations were identified:
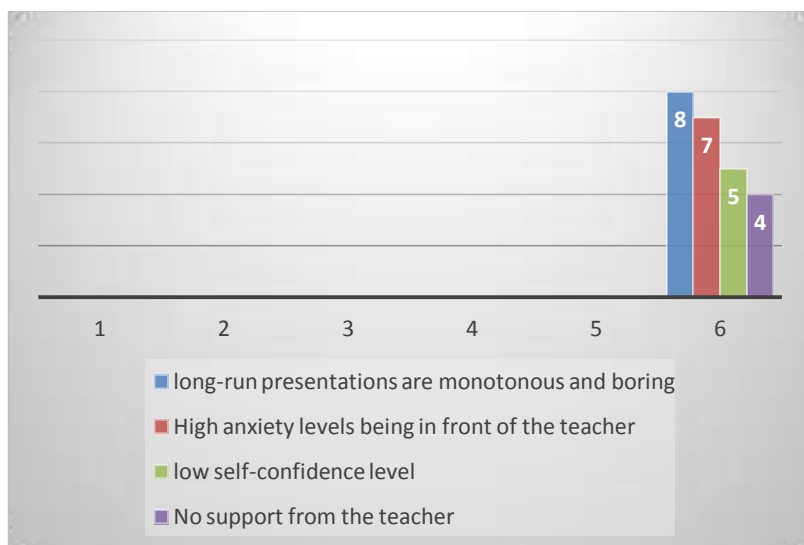
Figure 3: Limitations of Individual Speaking Assessments

Following the results outlined in the above figure, the majority of the informants (N = 8, i.e. 33.3%) pointed to one factor that led to their dissatisfaction with the implemented individual speaking assessment. This

factor is the students' engagement in relatively long-run presentations following the examiner's question. Those presentations are believed to be monotonous and boring, and they can even be memorized at home and drilled on the assessment day. Therefore, it could be concluded that such a method does not really reflect a student's level in oral proficiency. Similarly, some limitations that are psychological in nature were identified, including the examinees' high levels of anxiety being in front of the teacher, and those examinees' low self-confidence levels.

Another reason why the informants admitted their dissatisfaction with individual interviews is the absence of a support from the teacher while a student is engaged in oral language production. This specific reason was outlined as a drawback by 4 informants (16.66%). Contrary to paired interviews in which students assist one another to produce a joint meaningful interactional event, within one-to-one interviews the examiners just ask a question and listen to the examinee's long-run presentation. As a matter of fact, extra-linguistic knowledge is of great importance when interacting with people. In many occasions this extra-linguistic knowledge compensates, for instance, for the lack of appropriate lexical items or for communication breakdowns, and thus prevents conversation failure. Thus, the lack/inexistence of such a supportive knowledge might lead to incomprehensible communication among the interlocutors. All in all, there are apparently no motives which stimulated the informants to opt for individual interviews as a method of assessing their level in oral proficiency.

Following another question, the respondents had to contrast the task types following the two speaking assessments. Accordingly, one-to-one speaking tests were criticized for the fact that they comprised a unique task type, namely drilling or rehearsing a long-run presentation in response to a teacher's question. On the other hand, there was a mutual agreement that paired interviews were fun for the variety of task types. The latter for instance, include:
- ✓ A conversation between the interlocutor and each candidate
- ✓ An individual long-run presentation for each candidate
- ✓ A brief response from a candidate to the presentation of the second which involves comments, questions, notes, and so on.
- ✓ A two-way conversation between the two candidates who are given spoken instructions with written/visual stimuli to be used in a decision-making task.
- ✓ A three-way discussion on topics related to the collaborative task.

Moreover, within each task the focus is different, and all the language functions are stressed, including, for instance, describing, agreeing/disagreeing, asking for/giving information, justifying, etc. (see Table 1 for the detailed task focus within paired interviews). With regard to the factors listed above, one can conclude that paired interviews ensure interactive and fun assessment sessions as the learners' oral proficiency level is being assessed.

Finally, the respondents were left free to add further suggests or comments that would enrich the discussion on the subject of assessing oral proficiency. Among other things, some students suggested that their oral proficiency should not be measured based on merely classroom assessment sessions. Instead, incorporating homework and outside-class activities in a kind of an ongoing evaluative framework would keep those students motivated along the academic year. Additionally, other respondents went further to suggest enabling them interact with native English-speaking individuals in classrooms by investing in the availability of the Internet and other technologies such as the computer and video projecting devices. Following this particular suggestion, the informants were convinced that getting engaged in communicative and interactional events with native speakers of English would sharpen their oral proficiency level in a variety of aspects, including fluency and accent.

7. Conclusion

The current paper has established a comparative framework between two speaking tests, namely individual and paired interviews, from the perspective of EFL learners at Constantine-1 University. More particularly, the aforementioned assessments were administered, each at the end of one semester during the academic year 2017-2018, whereby a sample of twenty-four 3rd year EFL students undertook the aforementioned oral proficiency tests. Students within the same sample participated in a survey whereby they had to answer a questionnaire. The aim was to explore those students' perceptions and attitudes towards undertaking a new standardized test for the sake of assessing oral proficiency in interactional settings. The survey results revealed the students' satisfaction with the newly adapted and implemented FCE speaking assessment for a variety of reasons. Among other factors, within paired forms of interaction the participants' roles and responsibilities to take the initiative to speak are more balanced. On the whole, the motives for choosing paired interviews are related mainly to the students' psychological domain. Conversely, the informants expressed their

resentment and dissatisfaction with the classical one-to-one speaking tests which have dominated EFL speaking classes for centuries. Finally, within the current study an individual renewal attempt was made for the sake of updating the so-called outmoded oral proficiency assessment method in the EFL Department at Constantine-1 University. Accordingly, an international widely recognized test, namely the FCE speaking assessment, was adapted and administered. With regard to the students' satisfaction of such a test, teachers of the speaking subject are therefore invited to make other attempts for the sake of modernizing their oral proficiency assessment methods and techniques.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Structure and Tasks of the FCE Speaking Assessment

General description

PAPER FORMAT	The Speaking test contains four parts.
TIMING	14 minutes.
NO. OF PARTS	4.
INTERACTION PATTERN	Two candidates and two examiners. One examiner acts as both interlocutor and assessor and manages the interaction either by asking questions or providing cues for the candidates. The other acts as assessor and does not join in the conversation.
TASK TYPES	Short exchanges with the interlocutor and with the other candidate; a 1 minute 'long turn'; a collaborative task involving the two candidates; a discussion.
MARKS	Candidates are assessed on their performance throughout.

Structure and tasks

PART 1

TASK TYPE AND FORMAT	A conversation between the interlocutor and each candidate (spoken questions).
FOCUS	General interactional and social language.
TIMING	3 minutes.

PART 2

TASK TYPE AND FORMAT	An individual 'long turn' for each candidate with a brief response from the second candidate. In turn, the candidates are given a pair of photographs to talk about.
FOCUS	Organising a larger unit of discourse; comparing, describing, expressing opinions.
TIMING	A 1 minute 'long turn' for each candidate, plus 20-second response from the second candidate.

PART 3

TASK TYPE AND FORMAT	A two-way conversation between the candidates. The candidates are given spoken instructions with written and visual stimuli, which are used in a decision-making task.
FOCUS	Sustaining an interaction; exchanging ideas, expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing, suggesting, speculating, evaluating, reaching a decision through negotiation, etc.
TIMING	3 minutes.

PART 4

TASK TYPE AND FORMAT	A discussion on topics related to the collaborative task (spoken questions).
FOCUS	Expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing.
TIMING	4 minutes.

Appendix 2: The Adapted FCE Global Achievement Rating Scale

FCE GLOBAL ACHIEVEMENT SCORING SHEET

Date	
Time	
Candidate	
Gender	
Observation	

Global achievement Score

Dear examiner, kindly put (√) in the right box so that the candidate can be awarded a mark based on his/her performance.

Global Achievement

Score	√	Performance descriptors
5		Handles communication on a range of familiar topics, with very little hesitation. Uses accurate and appropriate linguistic resources to express ideas and produce extended discourse that is generally coherent.
4		*Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.*
3		Handles communication on familiar topics, despite some hesitation. Organises extended discourse but occasionally produces utterances that lack coherence, and some inaccuracies and inappropriate usage occur.
2		*Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.*
1		Handles communication in everyday situations, despite hesitation. Constructs longer utterances but is not able to use complex language except in well-rehearsed utterances.
0		*Performance below Band 1.*

Appendix 3: The Adapted FCE Analytical Assessment Scale

FCE ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENT SCORING SHEET

Date	
Time	
Candidate	
Gender	
Observation	

Grammar & Vocabulary	
Discourse Management	
Pronunciation	
Interactive communication	
Global achievement	
Total	

Dear examiner, kindly put (√) in the right box so that the candidate can be awarded marks based on his/her performance.

Subscale: Grammar & Vocabulary

Score	√	Performance descriptors
5		Shows a good degree of control of a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on a wide range of familiar topics.
4		Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.
3		Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms, and attempts some complex grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on a range of familiar topics.
2		Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.
1		Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about everyday situations.
0		Performance below Band 1.

Subscale: Discourse Management

Score	√	Performance descriptors
5		Produces extended stretches of language with very little hesitation. Contributions are relevant and there is a clear organisation of ideas. Uses a range of cohesive devices and discourse markers.
4		Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.
3		Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation. Contributions are relevant and there is very little repetition. Uses a range of cohesive devices.
2		Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.
1		Produces responses which are extended beyond short phrases, despite hesitation. Contributions are mostly relevant, despite some repetition. Uses basic cohesive devices.
0		Performance below Band 1.

Subscale: Pronunciation

Score	√	Performance descriptors
5		Is intelligible. Intonation is appropriate. Sentence and word stress is accurately placed. Individual sounds are articulated clearly.
4		Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.
3		Is intelligible. Intonation is generally appropriate. Sentence and word stress is generally accurately placed. Individual sounds are generally articulated clearly.
2		Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.
1		Is mostly intelligible, and has some control of phonological features at both utterance and word levels.
0		Performance below Band 1.

Subscale: Interactive communication

Score	√	Performance descriptors
5		Initiates and responds appropriately, linking contributions to those of other speakers. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome.
4		Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.
3		Initiates and responds appropriately. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support.
2		Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.
1		Initiates and responds appropriately. Keeps the interaction going with very little prompting and support.
0		Performance below Band 1.

Appendix 4: Students' Questionnaire

Students' Questionnaire

Dear student,

This questionnaire is part of a research project which aims at investigating your perceptions and attitudes towards undertaking individual (one-to-one) and paired interviews as two major methods to assess your oral proficiency. Your answers will help us compare the two speaking assessments and then determine your preference in terms of oral language testing. You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire by ticking the box (√) matching the appropriate answer. Justify your choice with full statements and express your opinion where necessary.

We appreciate the time and effort you devote to this questionnaire.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Q1: You are a: male ☐   female ☐

Q2: Among the two oral proficiency assessments, which one did you prefer?

a. The 1st testing method (one-to-one interviews) ☐
b. The 2nd testing method (paired interviews) ☐

Q3: If you answered with "b" in the previous question, the reason was:

a. You found support from your peer ☐
b. You were less (or not) anxious while undertaking the test ☐
c. You were self-confident while undertaking the test ☐
d. You felt less constrained while interacting with your peer during the test ☐
e. Other: ....

Q4: Based on your experience with individual interviews to testing speaking, what are the major limitations (if any) of this method of assessing oral proficiency?

....
....
....
....
....

Q5: By considering the variety of task types within the two tests, which one did you prefer?

a. The individual-interview speaking test ☐
b. The paired-interview speaking test ☐

Q6: Please, tell us why:

....
....
....
....
....

Q7: If you have further comments or suggestions on the subject of teaching speaking, and particularly on assessing oral proficiency, please, feel free to write them down:

....
....
....
....
....