

Speaking to Learn”: The Role of Oral Exams in Higher Education Assessment

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Abstract

Oral final exams remain an underused yet promising assessment method in higher education. This presentation draws on findings from a two-year study at a small Icelandic university, investigating how students experience oral exams in terms of stress, fairness, and learning outcomes. Based on both quantitative survey data and qualitative responses, the study examines how factors such as gender, prior experience, and perceived anxiety shape students' attitudes and performance. Results show that oral exams can support deeper learning, encourage reflection, and reduce surface-level memorization. Students also highlighted the value of real-time dialogue and interaction with the examiner, which is especially important in distance learning environment. However, the format also raised concerns about performance pressure and consistency in evaluation. The study suggests that while oral exams may not suit all learners equally, they can be a meaningful complement to written assessments when implemented with transparency and support. This presentation offers practical recommendations for educators interested in developing more authentic and inclusive assessment practices in higher education.

Keywords: assessment methods; anxiety; higher education; student experience; pedagogy