TESTING ORAL COMMUNICATION: WHY AND HOW?
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ABSTRACT
This paper discusses the issue of oral communication tests and gives an account of an oral test administered at Yarmouk University Language Centre to nearly one thousand students on average. The widespread neglect of oral testing as a component of formal course evaluation forms the background against which the authors explain the decision to test, the design of the test, the methods employed to standardize assessment, and the results of test validation. Special prominence is attached to the washback effect on classroom teaching and learning. The authors maintain the view that if the ability to converse in English is an aim of the teaching, it should form part of the assessment. They suggest that reliability can be raised to acceptable levels without trading off content and construct validity. Of special relevance here are the methods of training interviewers and the development of a clear and usable assessment instrument for evaluating level of student performance, based on appropriate and clear-cut communicative criteria. The paper thus aims to provide one institution's attempt to overcome the problems of feasibility, validity and reliability in communicative oral testing.