

## Analyzing Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Peer Assessment in EFL Teaching

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### ABSTRACT

The use of peer assessment in EFL teaching is increasing due to the focus shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approach. However, factors such as attitudes, motivation, language proficiency and relationship bias are believed to contribute to the effectiveness of peer assessment. This paper aims to analyze how the factors affect the effectiveness of peer assessment implementation in EFL teaching. The method used to analyze is a literature review by examining fifteen prior studies of peer assessment use in EFL context. It is found that there are three factors that affect the effectiveness of peer assessment implementation in EFL setting, which are students' attitude and motivation, students' English proficiency, and students' relationship-bias. All these three factors can be interfered with teacher supports such as by describing the benefits of peer assessment to students, pairing the students with same-level of English proficiency, and applying anonymous evaluation. It is suggested that these three factors need to be carefully considered by teachers in EFL context in order to achieve the success of peer assessment implementation.

### Introduction

One alternative assessment method that is increasingly used in educational activities, including language teaching and learning, is peer assessment. The transition from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach in teaching and learning has an impact on the evolution of peer assessment. The current method calls for active participation from students in all aspects of the assessment process, and it is thought that this criterion can be met through peer assessment (Chong, 2017). Nevertheless, the likelihood that students will voluntarily participate in evaluating their peers depends on a variety of variables. According to Azarnoosh (2013), friendship bias, language competency, and student attitudes and motivation can all have an impact on how effective peer assessment is.

Specific to EFL environments, due to the strong teacher-centered approach used and the students' limited English ability, students in this context, particularly in Asia, have a negative perception of peer assessment and do not always believe their peers' feedback (Azarnoosh, 2013). Zhao (2014) adds that effective teacher assistance is necessary for peer assessment to be effective. She claims that teachers in EFL settings do not always provide constructive remedies for potential peer feedback difficulties, which could discourage the use of peer assessment. Not only in Asia, students in other EFL settings, such as Africa and South America, also reveal low ability to perform peer assessment either caused by a strong teacher-centered applied or students' low English ability (Msiza et al., 2020; Sosibo, 2019) and requires teacher support to optimize the implementation of peer assessment (Cadena-Aguilar & Álvarez-Ayure, 2021; Sará, 2016).

The implementation of peer assessment actually holds some benefits to the students' English learning process. One key advantage of peer assessment is the capacity to evaluate students' learning processes. Peer assessment can be used as a useful assessment tool because of the requirement to focus on language learning's processes as well as its outcomes (McGarr & Clifford, 2013). Peer assessment is said to allow teachers to see how well their pupils comprehend the learning materials (McGarr & Clifford, 2013). The students are required to evaluate and comment on the work of their peers while considering how well they have mastered the language-related material. For instance, pupils should first be familiar with the principles of comparative usage before evaluating their peers' proficiency with them. As a result, teachers can indirectly learn how well their students are grasping the subject being taught in the classroom by using peer assessment.

Peer assessment is also believed to increase the accuracy of learning about students' individual performance. This benefit is especially noticeable in large classes because it is challenging for teachers to evaluate each student individually. Teachers can understand each student's ability more precisely by asking pupils to evaluate their peers' performance in groups (Van Zundert et al., 2010). Additionally, teachers can better understand their students' needs and adjust their teaching methods and directions to fit the students' needs by understanding the feedback that their students give (Chong, 2017). Peer assessment could therefore benefit teachers in terms of both practicality and washback when it comes to evaluating their students and enhancing their instruction.

Peer assessment adoption can provide benefits for student side as well. Peer assessment can inspire students to develop their metacognitive skills by helping them to understand the lesson and learn it more deeply. The students must consider what they have learned and get ready to evaluate their classmates with the necessary knowledge, which will lead to better learning management (McGarr & Clifford, 2013). Not only increasing the students' cognitive and metacognitive knowledge, peer assessment is highly recommended owing to its effectiveness in enhancing social ability, which is achieved by promoting interaction, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Allen & Mills, 2016; Chong, 2017; Ghahari & Farokhnia, 2017). During the assessment processes, the students are encouraged to interact with one another. They are also obliged to critically examine the work of their classmates and, where necessary, to negotiate when there are differences. Thus, it is demonstrated that the development of students' cognitive, metacognitive, and social skills is significantly impacted by peer assessment.

Peer evaluation has many potential benefits, but educators and teachers are still unsure whether these benefits can actually be realized, particularly in EFL environments. The subjectivity and unreliability of the feedback given as a result of student-relationship bias and limited English proficiency, as well as students' lack of attitudes and motivations toward peer assessment, may all contribute to this concern (Allen & Mills, 2016; Azarnoosh, 2013; Chong, 2017; McGarr & Clifford, 2013; Van Zundert et al., 2010; Zhao, 2014). This paper then attempts to analyze prior studies of peer assessment application use in EFL contexts to understand how the factors affect the effectiveness of the implementation of peer assessment and what are the solution to implement it effectively.

## Method

This is a literature review paper. Fifteen research studies of peer assessment application in EFL contexts from 2010 to 2021 were reviewed to find out what the factors, how the factors affect the peer assessment implementation, and what solutions towards the problems. We chose the studies by searching on the university repository with the keyword of "peer assessment EFL" and determined whether they provide good research execution and explanation of the factors affecting the success of peer assessment. Three categories of factors were then found: student's attitude and motivation, student's English proficiency, and student-relationship bias, which are discussed in detail in results and discussion section.

## Results and Discussion

### Student's Attitude and Motivation

The students' unfavorable attitudes and motivation toward peer evaluation should be the first thing that teachers consider when implementing an effective peer assessment. These unfavorable views and a lack of enthusiasm may be caused by students' unfamiliarity with formative assessment in EFL environments. According to McGarr and Clifford (2013), students' practice with summative evaluation shapes their perception that the most significant assessment of their learning is the one that comes from teachers and takes place at the conclusion of the course. Peer assessment is not seen by them as being a part of their learning processes or as having the potential to improve learning.

As a result, the factor of negative attitude and motivation makes it difficult for the students to perform their function as peer assessors. According to Azarnoosh's (2013) research of Iranian students, it is uncomfortable for students to act as teachers when grading their peers. The students exhibit doubt about the standards and advantages of peer assessment as well as concerns about their ability to judge their friends' works. These problems, including the students' lack of knowledge with peer evaluation and their uncertainty about their ability to serve as competent assessors, may lead to their unfavorable attitudes and lack of

enthusiasm toward peer assessment, which has an impact on the implementation of peer assessment. As a comparison, South African students in (Sosibo, 2019) also shows insufficient ability to perform independent assessment which may result to negative attitude towards peer assessment.

In EFL settings, students' negative attitudes and lack of enthusiasm toward peer assessment may also be a direct outcome of their belief that they are unable to evaluate works or performances. Due to this issue, students not only hesitate to provide feedback to their classmates, but they also do not fully believe the comments they receive in return. This unfavorable attitude is revealed in Kaufman and Schunn's (2011) study, which reveals that students believe their peers are unable to evaluate their work because they are still independent learners. The lack of trust is also found in Ghahari and Farokhnia (2017) as a significant worry when applying peer assessment for Iranian students, who exhibit skepticism toward the expertise and ability of their peers in providing feedback. Gielen et al. (2010) assert that this issue arises as a result of the disparity in assessment expertise between teachers and pupils. After all, according to Azarnoosh (2013), the issues raised are the outcome of teacher-centered cultures that are prevalent in EFL environments and view teachers as the only providers of knowledge.

The solution that teachers can do for students' negative attitude and motivation to do peer assessment is by providing them knowledge of the advantages of peer assessment and instructing them on how to accurately evaluate their friends' work. This could be a way to increase their desire for and positive attitudes toward this kind of formative assessment. According to McGarr and Clifford (2013), students who recognize the value of peer evaluation as a means of enhancing their learning approach assessments more effectively than those who do not. These students have more favorable sentiments toward its implementation because they see peer assessment as a crucial component of their learning process.

Additionally, after receiving training on how to conduct peer evaluation properly, students' attitudes and motivation toward peer assessment improve, according to Azarnoosh's (2013) study. When asked to evaluate their friends' writing without knowing the marking criteria, the students initially shown less agreement. However, the students' attitudes toward peer assessment have improved when they were taught how to use the marking criteria. After learning how to do peer assessment, the students describe it in detail as simple, practical, engaging, and motivating. Sará (2016) in her study with Colombian teachers also show good peer assessment impacts after the teachers are appropriately trained with the concept of peer assessment. Therefore, teaching students about the advantages of peer assessment as well as the correct way to conduct it could change their attitudes and motivation for using it.

### **Student's English Proficiency**

The second thing that teachers need to be aware of is the impact that students' limited English proficiency has on their ability to provide accurate peer evaluations. This element has been identified as a potential threat to the process of peer feedback (Allen & Mills, 2016; Chong, 2017; Zhao, 2014). According to Allen and Mills (2016), a student's unique learning will be influenced by their degree of English proficiency when providing feedback. They demonstrate that Japanese students who are more proficient in English will be able to offer higher-quality feedback than those who are less proficient. This phenomenon is thought to be caused by the ability of students with greater skill levels to provide more feedback as a result of the students' increased knowledge of the language's features. Students who are more proficient in the language are also able to engage in more discussions and interactions while providing feedback. Therefore, the students' English language level may have an impact on both the feedback's quality and the interactions used to negotiate it.

Chong (2017) also concerns about the role that students' linguistic correctness knowledge plays in giving appropriate peer feedback. He contends that pupils' feedback to their peers will be more accurate if they are aware of linguistic accuracy. He asks Hong Kong students to evaluate the grammatical features of their friends' work for his study. He demonstrates that students with greater levels of English proficiency give more accurate comments than do students with lower levels. Furthermore, Zhao (2014) claims that Chinese students in her study have worry over their incapacity to provide appropriate criticism because they believe they have poor English language skills. Otherwise, the students are unwilling to evaluate one another's work and instead rely on their teachers to do so. The accuracy of feedback offered would then depend on the students' language competency, and the usefulness of peer assessment would depend on how insecure low-

English proficiency students felt. In addition, in the context of South Africa, it is noted that linguistic diversity may become a problem in implementing peer assessment (Msiza et al., 2020)

Carefully matching the students is one way to address the issue of the kids' low English proficiency while implementing peer evaluation. According to Allen and Mills (2016), matching higher proficiency students with lower proficiency students would disadvantage the former since they would receive less feedback from their lower proficiency peers; however, the latter would experience the opposite impact. Thus, it is advised that students be paired according to their level of English ability in order to provide equal learning opportunities for both the reviewee and the reviewer. Mixed proficiency pairings can be a possibility, though, if the goal of the lesson plan is to help the students with lower proficiency levels catch up to those with greater competence.

A further factor to increase the caliber of peer evaluation is teacher assistance in reviewing student responses and then providing more detailed feedback on it (Zhao, 2014). With the right explanation, teacher involvement in peer evaluation could allay worries about the caliber of peer feedback and promote its utilization. Such assistance is also highlighted in a study in Colombia, (Cadena-Aguilar & Álvarez-Ayure, 2021), that teachers are supposed to provide better understanding when students face difficulties in performing peer assessment. In short, in order to undertake effective peer evaluation in EFL situations, pairing techniques should be taken into account, as well as providing the necessary assistance.

### **Student-Relationship Bias**

The student-relationship bias is the third component that may have an impact on the efficacy of peer assessment. The assumption is that the intimate relationships between students lead to the delivery of arbitrary and erroneous feedback. According to Azarnoosh (2013), she is equally concerned that the study's participants would experience anxiety if they give their peers' work a poor mark. Panadero et al. (2013) made the same comments, pointing out that the friendship aspect could result in over-scoring as a result of people's propensity to not severely evaluate their friends, which could also result in people not taking the peer assessment seriously. In their research, they discovered that students with strong friendships were more willing to overlook the evaluation criteria and give their peers higher scores. Meanwhile, students with medium or low levels of friendship would provide more accurate comments as a result of adhering to the assessment standards. Due to the close relationships between the students, the problem of overscoring peers' work has the effect of decreasing the validity and reliability of peer evaluation.

Giving multi-peer assessments and anonymous marking are two recommendations made to mitigate the influence of student relationship bias on the efficacy of peer evaluation. Multi-peer assessment may lessen the impact of personal bias because there are numerous agreements involved in the assessment process (Wang et al., 2016). Because of the opinions of other students, a student may be dissuaded from assigning a personal grade to a classmate, and this circumstance may force pupils to adhere to the evaluation criteria.

In addition, requesting students to complete peer evaluations anonymously can be a solution if it is thought that the group of peer-reviewers has a high level of general friendship (Wang et al., 2016). Students are demonstrated to do peer assessment more accurately when the owner of the work being evaluated is unknown. Azarnoosh (2013) also emphasizes the requirement for instructor supervision to ensure that the peer evaluation is carried out as planned. The influence of unreliable and incorrect feedback resulting from student-relationship bias could then be lessened by offering several and anonymous peer assessments while keeping an eye on the process. The implementation of peer assessment may be more successful if these variables are carefully taken into account.

## **Conclusion and Suggestions**

### **Conclusion**

Peer assessment is believed to be able to offer significant advantages for both teachers' efficiency in evaluating students' learning processes and enhancing instructional strategies and students' development of metacognitive and communicative abilities. The students' low English proficiency, student-relationship bias, and lack of attitudes and motivation toward peer assessment can all be barriers to achieving these advantages, particularly in EFL environments. Some considerations, such as explaining the advantages of peer assessment and how to conduct it, pairing students carefully, and giving multiple anonymous peer reviewers,

are thought to be able to overcome the aforementioned obstacles. Then, carefully taking into account the considerations and advice provided may be a way to implement peer assessment in a successful manner.

### Suggestions

It is recommended for teachers in EFL contexts who are willing to implement peer assessment to first consider the factors that can inhibit its success. The teachers are also recommended to apply the suggestions conveyed to solve such problems occurring in peer assessment implementation.

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