Enhancing EFL Speaking Skills through Peer Assessment: A Case Study at Tay Nguyen University

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of peer assessment in developing English speaking skills among second-year English majors at Tay Nguyen University. Using surveys for 80 students and interviews with 12 students, the research gathered insights into students' experiences and perceptions towards peer assessment. Findings indicate that peer assessment enhances self-awareness, motivation, and key speaking components such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. However, challenges emerged, including unclear rubrics, unhelpful feedback, and hesitation in peer interaction. To address these issues, the study suggests applying well-defined criteria, offering training in peer evaluation, and fostering a supportive classroom environment. These results provide practical implications for EFL educators seeking to promote communicative competence through collaborative learning. Additionally, the study highlights the need for continued research into the long-term effects of peer assessment and its relevance to other language skills to help educators refine strategies that support both individual progress and peer-based learning.

Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, speaking skills are regarded as one of the most difficult, yet crucial for students to learn (Ork et al., 2024). Speaking is an active, productive skill that demands advanced cognitive effort, making it particularly challenging as compared to other skills such as listening, reading and writing skills (Ismatullayeva & Zubaydova, 2024). Educators are constantly looking for methods and approaches to enhance and evaluate the speaking skills of their learners, given the increased focus on functional use of language (Adem & Berkessa, 2022). Therefore, specific forms of alternative assessment may be more appropriate for such situations, in this case peer assessment.

Peer assessment by students in terms of their interactivity performances within a provided framework has recently received much attention as a means of improving student learning and collaboration in the classroom (Alt & Raichel, 2022). The purpose of this article is to establish the place and functionality of peer assessment in the development of speaking skills among 2nd-year students of English in Tay Nguyen University, Vietnam. The study seeks to examine what students feel about it, how peer assessment is implemented, and if it is effective in enhancing students' speaking skills.

Literature Review

Speaking Skills in Language Education

Students in the language learning process regarded speaking as the most important aspect as it had the most direct bearing on communication with others. Also, it was the process of producing thoughts in spoken language and had nonverbal gestures (Fajar, 2019). Speaking was a highly complicated skill for EFL learners because of its intricacies in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and interaction (Ghafar & Raheem, 2023; Thornbury, 2005). From mastering speaking skills, one was able to succeed academically, professionally, and socially; for this reason, it received utmost attention in language teaching. The following figure illustrates the significance of speaking skills in English learning contexts from Rao (2019).

As shown in Figure 1, the responses indicated that most students perceived peer assessment as beneficial.

Figure 1

The Importance of Speaking Skills in English learning classrooms (Rao, 2019)
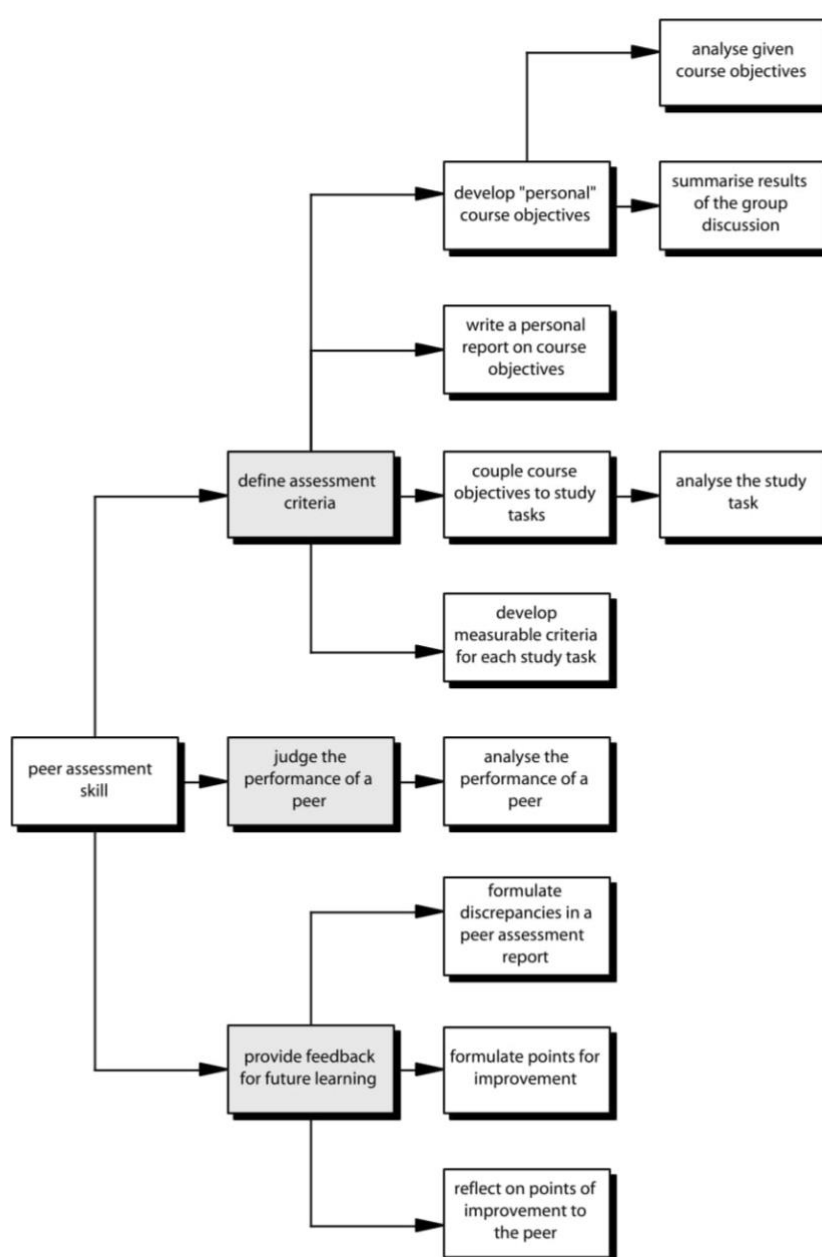

Peer Assessment in Language Learning

In the educational framework where students assessed their colleagues based on predefined criteria, peer assessment was an approach encompassed within it. Its purposes were twofold: it served as a tool to assess one's performance and as one that facilitated the learner to acquire

knowledge and hone self-assessment skills (Topping, 2017). One significant advantage of peer assessment was its ease of application in language learning as it promoted critical thinking, reflection, and learning together (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Dang & Le, 2023; Ha & Ho, 2025). Findings suggested that peer assessment could alleviate anxiety, increase motivation, and enhance the performance of learners in speaking tasks by offering timely and appropriate feedback (Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2012).

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework used to analyze how peer feedback mediated speaking development through interaction and self-reflection.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework of Peer Assessment

Benefits and Drawbacks of Peer Assessment

As noted in the ultimate goals of peer assessment, students could be able to enhance their learning through self-reflection and critical thinking as they thought about the assessment criteria (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Ha & Ho, 2025; Saito & Fujita, 2009). Additionally, peer assessment helped to instill responsibility, ownership, and accountability in students for their learning as well as their peers' (Gielen et al., 2010a; Kumar et al., 2023). Thirdly, it promoted engagement through sustained interaction among students, thus enhancing social and communication development (Alzubi et al., 2024). In addition, peer assessment filled learning gaps between students during the process where students were allowed to individually assess their peers' performances (Sadler, 1989; Yan et al., 2022), and taught students real-life experiences of evaluation and giving constructive feedback in a professional setting (Topping, 2010).

Although peer assessment brought some advantages, it contained significant shortcomings. Gender, friendship, and other personal relationships could lead to biases that might compromise the accuracy and equity of evaluations (Azarnoosh, 2013). Also, peer grading was often unreliable because different peers had different understanding levels, which might result in inconsistent instruction or bias (Strijbos & Sluijsmans, 2010). Additionally, some students might be doubtful of their peers' judgment and knowledge, creating skepticism towards the feedback received (Kaufman & Schunn, 2010). Considerable effort was also necessary to train the students on how the exercises were assessed (Cheng & Warren, 1997). Additionally, since effective implementation required substantial training, implementation, and assessment of performance, peer grading was often regarded as looking less effective. Because of these limitations, educators had to set criteria and when possible, influence the teachers' professional development to address them (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000).

Types of Peer Assessment

Peer assessment could be implemented in various forms, including qualitative comments (peer feedback), quantitative ratings (rubrics), and hybrid evaluations that combined both (Gielen et al., 2010b; Mphahlele, 2022). Each type had its own strengths and limitations. Qualitative feedback fostered deep learning and reflection, while quantitative ratings provided structured and standardized evaluation. The hybrid approach sought to balance these elements, offering comprehensive feedback while maintaining reliability and validity (Ashton & Davies, 2015).

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are second-year English major students' perceptions regarding the role of peer assessment in developing speaking skills at Tay Nguyen University?

2. What are the methods and criteria applied by lecturers when integrating peer assessment into Speaking 2 classes?

3. How effective is the peer assessment in enhancing the speaking performance of second-year English-majored students?

4. What are the challenges and proposed strategies for improving the implementation of peer assessment in EFL classrooms?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure familiarity with Speaking 2 peer assessment activities. 80 students aged 19–21 were selected to complete the questionnaire and 12 students (7 females, 5 males, aged 19–21) were interviewed in face-to-face, semi-structured sessions lasting approximately 30 minutes each. The survey instrument was piloted and had acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81). The university's Research Board granted ethical approval. Informed consent and anonymity were maintained.

Design of the Study

The study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, focusing on the phenomenon of peer assessment in Speaking 2 classes. The quantitative data were gathered through a structured survey questionnaire using Google Forms, which aimed to track discrepancies in perceptions, practices, and problems. Selected participants were subsequently interviewed to gather insights into their experiences.

Data collection & analysis

This survey was divided into three sections that would correspond to the research objectives of the study:

1. The first section was concerned with how students viewed peer assessment, focusing on their perceptions of peer assessment and its potential to aid learning processes.

2. The second section focused on the students, aiming to identify the measures and procedures lecturers adopted for peer assessment and the didactic strategies they employed.

3. The last section evaluated research questions 3 and 4, regarding the effectiveness of peer assessments and problems encountered by students.

Trends and patterns identified on the survey were evaluated using descriptive statistics. The qualitative interview data was analyzed using a thematic approach to gain a deeper understanding of lecturer's techniques, students' experiences, and how the challenges were sought out.

Findings

Students' Perceptions of Peer Assessment

The data showed that most students (75.55%) had a positive attitude towards peer assessment and its role in developing their speaking skills. Out of the 80 participants, 65.55% reported that peer assessment enabled them to self-reflect and enhance their performance, while 34.45% held sentiments that were somewhat negative to positive, mainly because of problems connected with giving or receiving constructive feedback.

Moreover, the in-depth data gathered in the interview provided further details. Many students reported that peer assessment provided avenues for collaborative work and improved their confidence when speaking in English, as one participant put it:

> "Peer assessment helps me identify my mistakes and learn from my friends' strengths. It makes me feel more involved in the learning process."

The quote above suggested that students were more willing to participate in the process of assessment and learning through their peers. Unfortunately, reluctance to provide constructive comments appeared in students' interviews. Another participant stated:

"I'm afraid that my comments might hurt my classmates' feelings, so I tend to only say positive things."

This statement indicated that fear of providing constructive feedback stemmed from not wanting to offend classmates. The avoidance of participating in peer assessments appeared among students with no prior experience of peer assessment. In addition, some participants noted the challenges of providing detailed critical feedback in English. On the other end of the spectrum, one participant said:

"I find it hard to explain what needs improvement in English without sounding too critical or unclear."

In either case, students recognized the prospect of utilizing peer assessments as motivational tools to foster interaction and practice speaking skills due to their previous experiences. The issue that emerged was the lack of adequate training on how to give and receive feedback in a constructive manner.

In conclusion, the results highlighted that learners' perceptions were predominantly influenced by their self-esteem, language proficiency, and prior experience with the peer assessment process.

Table 1

Students' Perceptions of Peer Assessment

Perception Category	Percentage (%)	Key Insights from Interviews
Positive Perception	75.55	Students appreciate collaborative learning and self-reflection.
Recognizing Significant Improvement	65.55	Peer assessment helps identify mistakes and strengths.
Mixed Feelings	34.45	Hesitation to provide feedback due to fear of offending others.
Difficulty in Providing Constructive Feedback	N/A	Challenges in articulating feedback in English without sounding critical.

Application of Peer Assessment by Lecturers

The results of the survey revealed a divergence in views regarding the processes and standards of peer assessment allocation as undertaken by the lecturers. Out of the sample, 43.33% of students felt that the assessment criteria were not adequately communicated to them. On the other hand, 38.89% reported that they were active and participative in their Speaking 2 classes because peer assessment was used in the class. Of these students, a large proportion, 33.33%, expressed their concern over the disparity in marks awarded by peers and attributed it to the absence of set grade standardization policy.

The interviews shed further new light on the issues. Most students mentioned that although the

lecturers spoke about peer assessment having some value, they did not always provide proper instructions or proper illustrations on how to effectively assess a peer's work. One student made the following observation:

"We received the criteria, but we didn't get much explanation on how to use them. I think having examples or practice sessions would have been very helpful."

Another common issue was the absence of proper training to apply the criteria. Insufficient training made students feel shy to attempt to evaluate their colleagues as one of the participants stated:

"I didn't fully understand how to use the rubric. Sometimes, I wasn't sure if my feedback was accurate or helpful."

Nonetheless, some students mentioned being able to work through these barriers because their instructors attempted to get students interested and involved in learning. For instance, many participants valued the class discussions led by the lectures, during which students were allowed to give their comments and critiques to one another. One student said:

"Our teacher encouraged us to talk about our feedback in small groups. This helped me see different perspectives and understand how to assess better."

To sum up, the study argued that, although peer assessment was a constructive approach, its implementation was often hindered by teachers' attempts to put it into practice within lessons without providing comprehensive explanations of criteria and guidance. Such gaps hindered them from making meaningful and thorough evaluations.

Table 2

Application of Peer Assessment by Lecturers

Feedback Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Key Insights from Interviews
Clear Communication of Assessment Criteria	34.45	22.22	43.33	Students felt unclear about expectations and lacked guidance.
Encouraging Active Engagement	38.89	27.78	33.33	Group discussions helped improve understanding of peer assessment.
Consistency in Grading Across Peer Assessors	33.33	34.44	32.23	Lack of standardized criteria led to inconsistencies.
Need for More Training	N/A	N/A	N/A	Students highlighted the importance of practice sessions for better preparation.

This section underscored the importance of clearer communication, standardized criteria, and hands-on training to enhance the effectiveness of peer assessment in Speaking 2 classes.

Effectiveness of Peer Assessment in Enhancing Speaking Performance

According to the survey, 65.55% of students claimed that their speaking performance improved greatly owing to the peer assessment component of the course. Students stated that they became

more aware of their strengths and weaknesses through the feedback giving and receiving process. However, 34.45% were skeptical and indicated that there was room for improvement in the effectiveness of the process used in peer assessment.

The data collected through interviews corroborated the reviewed literature by providing rich accounts on the effect of peer assessment on the students' speaking skills. Many reported that consistent practice and feedback helped them improve specific areas of their speaking like fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. One participant said:

> *"When my classmates point out my mistakes, I can focus on fixing them, especially with pronunciation. It's different from a teacher's feedback because it feels more relatable."*

Another student talked about how student assessments help increase the effort put forth in a task.

> *"Knowing my peers will assess me makes me put in extra effort. I want to show improvement so I can get good feedback."*

As much as there were positive benefits, some students pointed to challenges. Some students highlighted that the feedback was at times too vague or poorly focused which made it difficult to be useful. For example, one student remarked:

> *"Sometimes the feedback is just 'good job' or 'improve fluency.' It doesn't help me understand what to work on specifically."*

The qualitative results also underscored the need for some level of supervision by the lecturers to ensure that the feedback given was useful and appropriate. Most students felt they would benefit from the peer assessment process if they received clear instructions on how to provide effective speaking performance feedback.

Table 3

Effectiveness of Peer Assessment in Enhancing Speaking Performance

Feedback Aspect	Percentage (%)	Key Insights from Interviews
Significant Improvement in Speaking Skills	65.55	Feedback helps identify strengths and weaknesses in speaking.
Challenges in Feedback Quality	34.45	Feedback is often general or inconsistent, reducing effectiveness.
Motivation to Improve Performance	N/A	Peer assessment fosters accountability and effort.
Importance of Structured Guidance	N/A	Clear instructions improve the quality and usefulness of feedback.

This finding highlighted that peer assessment was an effective tool for improving speaking performance when accompanied by clear criteria, structured guidance, and constructive feedback. While the majority of students found the process beneficial, addressing challenges such as inconsistent feedback and lack of specificity could further enhance its effectiveness.

Identifying Challenges and Proposing Strategies for Improving Peer Assessment Implementation

Survey and interview data revealed several challenges students encountered during the peer assessment process, along with potential strategies for addressing them. Key challenges identified included a lack of clarity in assessment criteria, inconsistencies in feedback, and students' hesitance to provide constructive criticism.

Challenges Identified

(a) **Lack of Clarity in Assessment Criteria:** From the survey data, over 43% of the respondents highlighted that they were not able to interpret the assessment measures distinctly. This misinterpretation often led to confusion about what was required of them and how to grade their colleagues at a peer level. During the interviews, students kept saying that there is a need for more definite descriptions and examples of the criteria. One participant had this to say:

"The examples could assist in understanding the use of rubrics. Rubrics are never self-explanatory."

(b) **Inconsistencies in Feedback:** Approximately 33.3% of learners acknowledged that they faced gaps or errors in their received feedback from classmates. Students lacked adequate knowledge of the peer evaluation process, leading to these gaps. One of the interviewees highlighted:

"Different people have different styles of marking, which is a major problem. Some exaggerated assessments while others far too watered down."

(c) **Hesitation to Provide Constructive Criticism:** A number of students indicated that they would shy away from providing critical feedback when it was necessary due to fear that they would offend their colleagues. This challenge appeared particularly among students with little experience advocating their peers. One comment from students was:

"I don't want to offend the feelings of my friend. This is why I only provide positive comments, even when there are things that can be improved."

Proposed Strategies

Based on the findings, the following strategies are suggested to improve the implementation of peer assessment in EFL classrooms:

(a) **Enhance Clarity of Assessment Criteria:** Teachers need to provide proper rubrics for each level of feedback. Exemplary student peer feedback should have clarifying guides for students' expectations. Students should have workshops or practice that teaches them how to work with the criteria effectively.

(b) **Standardize Feedback Practices:** Feedback inconsistency is a widespread problem and is better solved through the standardization of such guidelines. Students can be taught how to provide peer evaluations through lectures that emphasize balanced feedback.

(c) **Create a Supportive Feedback Culture:** Students' reluctance to seek feedback can be alleviated by clarifying the intention behind the feedback. Students should actively engage in learning the art of using criticism in low-stress environments to ensure they provide meaningful evaluations.

(d) **Integrate Gradual Implementation:** For students to build confidence in peer

assessment, introducing it gradually by starting with simple tasks and advancing to more complex ones is helpful.

Table 4

Challenges and Proposed Strategies for Peer Assessment Implementation

Challenge	Percentage (%)	Proposed Strategy
Lack of Clarity in Assessment Criteria	43.33	Provide detailed rubrics, examples, and practice sessions.
Inconsistencies in Feedback	33.33	Standardize feedback practices through training and guidelines.
Hesitation to Provide Constructive Criticism	N/A*	Build a supportive feedback culture with low-pressure activities.
General Inexperience with Peer Assessment	N/A*	Gradually introduce peer assessment with scaffolded tasks.

*Note: Insights marked as **N/A** were derived qualitatively from interview data, as these aspects were not directly measured in the survey.

This finding highlighted the challenges faced by students during peer assessment and provided potential strategies to address these issues, ensuring a more effective and consistent implementation in EFL classrooms.

Discussion

These findings align with sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), affirming the importance of scaffolding and interaction in peer learning. Additionally, the results support formative assessment principles (Sadler, 1989), emphasizing student-centered feedback and the co-construction of knowledge.

Students' Perceptions of Peer Assessment

The findings indicted that any students who had experienced peer assessment claimed it helped improve their speaking skills. This is in line with earlier works such as those of Topping (1998), which explore the motivational and collaborative aspects of peer assessment. Nevertheless, in agreement with Azarnoosh (2013), many students voiced some skepticism regarding the dependability of peer evaluations. Such unreliability, as Strijbos & Sluijsmans (2010) and Kaufman & Schunn (2010) have shown, may result from friendship biases, gender differences, and varying standards of marking.

However, collaboration among students during peer assessment activities was perceived as demotivating by most participants. This may result from cultural or contextual variations on how peer assessment is done. Most students, however, confessed that in one way or the other, their peers' assessments tended to lack coherence, thereby further corroborating Kaufman & Schunn's (2010) work.

Application of Peer Assessment by Lecturers

The results revealed variability in implementation approaches and challenges. Some instructors introduced peer assessment as a formal requirement, while others used it more flexibly. This inconsistency aligns with Strijbos and Wichmann (2018), who emphasized the critical role of teacher training and institutional support in standardizing peer feedback practices. Participants noted that unclear rubrics and insufficient preparatory guidance hindered effective engagement. Such a finding aligns with Kaufman and Schunn's (2011) assertion that peer assessment must be scaffolded through proper modeling and transparent criteria. Furthermore, contextual factors such as classroom size, time constraints, and traditional attitudes toward assessment influenced how lecturers implemented peer strategies. These findings underscore the importance of professional development programs to equip instructors with effective strategies for integrating peer assessment into their pedagogy. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure familiarity with Speaking 2 peer assessment activities.

Effectiveness of Peer Assessment

The research demonstrated that peer assessment improves speaking skills, especially in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use. Specifically, students perform better when assessed by peers as they are motivated to improve, indicating positive accountability, in line with Topping's 2017 study. Nonetheless, the variability in the quality and specificity of feedback received limited overall effectiveness. These observations highlight the comments made by Ashton & Davis (2015) which indicated the need for elaborate training in giving instructions and feedback.

Challenges and Strategies for Improvement

The challenges noted—poor specifications of criteria, lack of uniformity in the evaluation instruments, as well as the unwillingness of students to evaluate their colleagues—are consistent with what Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) found regarding peer evaluation reliability and biases. Moreover, the unwillingness to provide feedback, especially in the EFL context, resonates with Gielen et al. (2010a) findings, which imply that such students face language barriers which make the situation worse.

In light of these obstacles, several actionable strategies are recommended to enhance implementation.:

- ***Enhanced Clarity of Assessment Criteria****: Providing learners with illustrated rubrics is likely to assist students in meeting requirements.

- ***Standardized Feedback Practices***: Students can be taught how to provide constructive and balanced feedback to achieve greater consistency throughout their work.

- ***Supportive Feedback Culture***: Opening discussions about feedback guided by set objectives can aid in reducing fear of judgement.

- ***Gradual Implementation***: Starting with basic tasks, peer evaluation can be introduced incrementally, increasing student comfort and competence.

These findings reinforce the need for structured support and clear guidelines to ensure that peer assessment is both reliable and impactful.

Conclusion

Peer assessment presents a useful alternative to traditional assessment methods in an EFL context (especially for speaking). The results of this study indicate that learners generally positively evaluate peer assessment as it could help them enhance self-reflective, collaborative learning and speaking abilities. However, effective peer assessment depends on clear guidelines, proper training, and regular usage of the techniques.

Even though students appreciated the value of peer assessment in the study, there were some challenges such as lack of clear criteria, insufficient comments, and reluctance to provide any criticism at all. As these sounds of concern are more critical than they look, there is a challenge of purposeful examination that needs to be addressed. If addressed effectively, these problems can make constructive peer assessment possible and more useful for learning vocabulary.

For maximum impact in the process of peer assessment, the following changes are suggested:

1. ***Enhance Teaching Training Activities:*** The training should be intense enough to ensure learners and trainers utilize the peer assessment framework as intended.

2. ***Design Standardized Assessment Criteria:*** Marking guides that take away subjectivity with clearly defined descriptors for a given task would assist in the evaluation process.

3. ***Encourage Constructive Evaluation:*** An approach that encourages senior students, along with an example, will enable learners to practice evaluation and offer constructive feedback aligned with clear learning objectives.

4. ***Integrate Peer Assessment Gradually:*** This approach allows learners to do more complicated assessments after completing simple tasks, which in turn builds confidence and capability for the student.

5. ***Conduct Further Research:*** Further research should investigate the impacts of peer assessment on the students' speaking skills over the years, as well as their prospective benefits for other skills and for other educational scenarios.

To conclude, this study endorses the proposition that peer assessment can significantly improve speaking skills in EFL classrooms when proper procedures and adequate assistance is given. By trying to meet such challenges and implementing the suggested solutions, teachers can utilize peer assessment more effectively. These results aid in the understanding of how peer assessment can be used in EFL instruction to facilitate more comprehensive and effective learning of the target language.

Implications for Practice

This study suggests that peer assessment can contribute to the development of speaking skills if thoughtfully designed and executed. Teachers must pay closer attention to the design of rubrics, provide clear instructions, and create a feedback environment that is supportive and focuses on constructive criticism.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the insightful contributions of this study, its limitations stemmed from the scope of a single institution and self-reported documented information. Future studies could focus on assessing peer assessment's impact on speaking proficiency over an extended duration in a larger scale with more diverse participants, consider the influence of cultural aspects, and analyze its applicability in various educational contexts.

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Biodata

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