



Indonesian Novice EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of Peer Assessment in Speaking Class

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Abstract

There is convincing evidence of the potential advantages of peer assessment. Yet, earlier studies on peer assessment in the learning process have largely focused on students' views on it. Though much can be inferred from the students' views about peer assessment in the learning process, there is a limited empirical study on the practical use of peer assessment by teachers and their responses. This study attempts to offer salient information for educational institutions concerning the importance of peer assessment as a part of their instructional design for novice EFL teachers. This qualitative study aims to investigate Indonesian novice EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of peer assessment in a speaking class as well as its' benefits and challenges. Data was obtained from six Indonesian novice EFL teachers through a semi-structured interview. Findings revealed the two groups of teachers' different perceptions, benefits, and challenges of peer assessment which were affected by their understanding of peer assessment and undergraduate study experiences. Hence, educational institutions for pre-service EFL teachers should take peer assessment into account to be integrated into their instructional designs to enable them to experience and perceive peer assessment as a valuable alternative of language assessment.

Keywords:

peer assessment, speaking class, novice EFL teachers' perceptions, language teaching

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INTRODUCTION

Peer assessment as one type of authentic assessment is described by Topping (2009) as a process in which learners consider and identify the level, amount, value, quality, or success of learning products or performances from their peers of similar status. In a simple term, peer assessment is an assessment that is done by learners in judging and making decisions of their peers' works based on several particular criteria. Peer assessment is being used widely in higher education, particularly to help assign grades of learners' works and to help learners learn more effectively. Nevertheless, in many references, self and peer-assessment are frequently and potentially intertwined with each other as they both need judgments from learners, yet the subject of the judgments is different (Adachi, Tai and Dawson, 2017).

Peer assessment includes the grading process of the performances or works of peers by the utilization of suitable standards (Falchikov, 2001). It can also be perceived as a cooperative and engaging learning activity that enhances learners' performance, motivation, knowledge, and self-efficacy (van Zundert, Sluijsmans and van Merriënboer, 2010; Hsia, Huang and Hwang, 2015). Moreover, learners who engage actively in peer assessment gain benefits by learning through receiving comments from their peers as well as giving comments to them (Li, Liu and Steckelberg, 2010). Hence, peer assessment is regarded as a valuable instrument in language teaching that can improve not only the process of teaching and learning but also the quality of instruction.

Studies on peer assessment suggest that it contains numerous advantages. Findings of several studies reveal that the use of peer assessment develops learners' feedback skills and critical thinking (Topping, Smith, Swanson and Elliot, 2000; Sluijsmans, 2002), facilitates learners' learning process and classroom interactions (Wen, Tsai and Chang, 2006), and raises learners' awareness of the learning strengths and improvements (Al-Barakat and Al-Hassan, 2009; Bay, 2011; Ashenafi, 2015). In addition, more importantly, by giving learners the essential criteria about their expected works, peer assessment needs them to think critically on performances or works they produce, accordingly, results in an improved contribution towards their endeavors (Hall, 2000).

There is compelling evidence from the aforementioned researches on the potential advantages of peer assessment; however, earlier studies on peer assessment as an effective tool in the learning process have largely focused on the students as the subject of investigation. Many of them emphasize the students' perceptions and views on the implementation of peer assessment in a wide range of aspects (Hanrahan and Isaacs, 2001; White, 2009; Patton, 2012; Lladó et al., 2014; Siow, 2015; Buana, 2016; Wanner and Palmer, 2018; and Gaynor, 2019). Additionally, some others examine the students' responses and participation in online peer assessment (Zou, Schunn, Wang and Zhang, 2017; Seifert and Feliks, 2018; Yang, 2019). Although much can be inferred from the students' views about peer assessment in the learning process, there is a limited empirical study on the practical use of peer assessment by teachers and their responses, particularly in a speaking classroom. It is crucial to understand teachers' views on peer assessment to obtain a positive change in the classroom (Adachi et al., 2017). Thus, this study attempts to fill in these gaps by investigating Indonesian novice EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of peer assessment in a speaking class as well as its' benefits and challenges.

Speaking is one of the most pivotal skills in learning English. It is an ability that should be mastered by EFL learners to communicate and exchange information with one another. Moreover, speaking deals with an interactive process in constructing meaning to

produce and receive meaning (Brown, 2004). Therefore, one's speaking skill can be measured from how far she/he can deliver and obtain information precisely to others. This skill includes monologue, dialogue, conversation, speech, presentation, public speaking, etc.

Peer assessment is "another vital component of helping students to develop a clear image of their learning goals compared to their present performance" (Fulcher, 2010, p. 70). This type of assessment, which is often linked to self-assessment, is defined as an arrangement that requires learners to give feedback or even grades to their peers on a particular product or performance, according to the standard criteria for that product which learners may have been incorporated in determining (Falchikov, 2001).

Miller and Ng (1994) asserted that peer assessment in speaking skills aims to alter passive learners to active ones in language learning. In peer assessment, EFL learners are trained to be not only a recipient but also an assessor. The teachers teach them how to apply a specific marking system and criteria towards their friends' speaking ability so that they also learn something valuable from each other. Additionally, White (2009) stated that one of the purposes of this assessment in speaking is to enhance learners' speaking skills. Through this type of assessment, learners are expected to improve their speaking ability, especially in presenting and sharing information.

Previous researches have predominantly scrutinized peer assessment from students' perspectives in terms of their views, attitudes, and perceptions towards its implementation. Students have been perceived to provide positive responses to the utilization of peer assessment due to its potential effectiveness and benefits offered in it (White, 2009; Siow, 2015; Buana, 2016; Malan and Stegmann, 2018). Furthermore, in some other studies, students have been observed to reveal positive attitudes and active involvement in online peer assessment as they significantly benefited from its process (Zou et al., 2017; Seifert and Feliks, 2018; Yang, 2019).

Even though the large body of literature and enormous studies on peer assessment has been manifested, research that concentrates on teachers' perceptions of the use of peer assessment in the speaking class is relatively still limited. Especially, the teachers' perceptions not only on the use of peer assessment itself, but also the benefits and challenges during its implementation in the classroom. In Hogg's (2018) study, the implementation of peer assessment in an undergraduate education course conducted by the author was examined through a self-study. The findings suggested that the success of peer assessment concerned with learners' ideas about its value, stressing the significance of motivation in engaging them as peer assessors. Correspondingly, Rotsaert, Panadero and Schellens (2018) reported that teachers were slight to moderately conscious of their learners' concerns about the effect of interpersonal processes in peer assessment as well as their attribute to anonymity within the process of peer assessment.

Besides, in Liu and Carless's (2006) study where eight teachers had been interviewed, the results concluded that several factors, such as the unreliability of peer assessment and time constraints, became the reasons why teachers have driven away from using this assessment as a means of their instruction. Likewise, Adachi et al. (2017) conducted interviews with 13 Australian academics to reveal their perceptions of peer assessment's challenges. They, eventually, identified five challenges in using peer assessment, including learners' superficial engagement, time constraints, insufficient feedback skills, lack of learners' and teachers' involvement, and technical difficulties. Nonetheless, further research from diverse educational fields and contexts is necessary to

do to shed light upon EFL novice teachers' views on the utilization of peer assessment in EFL settings. The notion and findings of this study offer salient information for educational institutions, especially on the importance of peer assessment as a part of their instructional design for novice teachers. This study attempts to figure out how teachers' knowledge about peer assessment is reflected in their perceptions and teaching process. Therefore, this paper documents an investigation on Indonesian novice EFL teachers when applying peer assessment in teaching speaking that covers: (1) How do they perceive and experience it? (2) How frequently do they implement it? (3) What are the benefits of it? (4) What are the challenges that they encounter when practicing it?

METHOD

Research Design

This study applied a qualitative research approach. Qualitative inquiry is inductive and exploratory in nature (Creswell, 2012). This study is conducted qualitatively to examine the phenomenon and gain meaningful information towards the issue thoroughly to report a holistic image and depth of understanding in forms of narrative description.

Participants

Six Indonesian novice EFL teachers participated in this current study. Three of them were male and the rest were female. They were all pseudonyms and chosen for certain reasons. First, they were fresh graduates and were in the very first year of teaching career; thus, they were regarded as novice teachers. Second, they graduated from two different universities. They were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of three teachers who were graduated from a public university in Surabaya and categorized as T1, T2, and T3. Meanwhile, the second group consisted of three teachers who were graduated from a private university in Surabaya and categorized as T4, T5, and T6. Currently, they all teach English in private junior and senior high schools in Surabaya and Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia. The data was collected in June, 2020.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview was used to collect and explore in-depth data on teachers' perceptions and experiences in implementing peer assessment in their teaching and learning process. It is utilized to gather data about people's feelings, opinions, and beliefs in a particular situation in their own words. It is also used to help understand people's experiences and the meaning they make towards an issue (Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen, 2010). The researcher made use of the interview to investigate the two teachers' perceptions and experiences on the use of peer assessment in their speaking classroom practice as well as to reveal their benefits and challenges from its implementation.

The interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes for each teacher. Furthermore, all the interviews were audio-recorded to make the process of data collection more effective as well as to avoid distractions in taking notes during the interview process. Subsequently, the data were transcribed and analyzed to interpret them inductively. Meaning that the researcher reflected on the words, phrases, or sentences produced by the participants in the relevant data, related them to the research questions, summarized important understandings from them, and eventually, concluded from the results and discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

How do the Indonesian novice EFL teachers perceive and experience the use of peer assessment in their speaking class?

The first group had similar perceptions and experiences dealing with the implementation of peer assessment for their speaking classes. They were reflected from their answers as follows:

T1: I perceive peer assessment as an interactive kind of assessment. My students become very enthusiastic and active in assessing their friends' oral performances. I experience the same thing a few years ago when I was still learning this at college.

T2: Peer assessment is not merely about grading each other's works. More than that, in assessing their peers' speaking skills, students will not only learn how to grade and evaluate their peers' works but also learn how to interactively engage in the process of assessment as well as to provide meaningful feedback for others' speaking improvements. Moreover, I apply what I have got from my undergraduate study. My lecturer explained and utilized peer assessment in almost every meeting. He asked his students to assess others' written works and presentation performances after giving certain criteria. Then, the classroom became more interactive and alive as the students were actively involved. And now, I want to apply it to my students.

T3: Peer assessment is an alternative assessment that my students and I always integrate into our speaking activities. I try to create such an enjoyable and exciting atmosphere by always encouraging and appreciating them in the process of assessment. I also tell them to respect each other's evaluations and feedback. I think English teachers should try it in their speaking classes.

The second group asserted contrasting perceptions and experiences about peer assessment. These can be reflected from their excerpts below:

T4: Peer assessment is a kind of assessment in which students simply evaluate their peers' works. They grade each other's works when the teacher tells them to do so. I hardly apply it in my speaking class but sometimes I use it merely in my writing class.

T5: Actually, I do not know much about it previously; I had very limited knowledge and hardly ever practiced it in my undergraduate education. In reality, I have just known about it recently from the books I read. Therefore, I do not have enough experience in applying it in my speaking class. I mostly assess the students' works and abilities by myself.

T6: I have heard about peer assessment in my undergraduate degree, but I frankly say that my lecturer never elucidated more about it. So, I never apply it to assess

my students' speaking skills. However, I use assessment rubrics for speaking performances through observation.

The data collected from the interviews revealed the two groups' different perceptions of peer assessment. The first group fully understood, acquired several potential benefits, and enjoyed their experiences in employing peer assessment as a part of their teaching speaking process. The teachers' perceptions of peer assessment were not restricted to a single understanding as a process of grading peers' works. They expressed that it was also related to the interactive processes in peer assessment and improvement in the students' speaking and feedback skills. Interestingly, their acknowledgments came from the knowledge and practices that they have got from their undergraduate institution. The lecturer had fulfilled them with a tremendous amount of comprehension and practices on peer assessment as an alternative assessment previously. As a result, they later tried to apply peer assessment in the speaking class and discovered some potential benefits from it. They also experienced so much fun and enjoyment in instructing peer assessment to the students.

The findings from the first group were similar to several studies that reported the participants' in-depth perceptions of peer assessment (Bay, 2011; Gielen, Dochy and Onghena, 2011; Rotsaert et al., 2018). It supported the findings by Bay (2011) that teachers believed they gained professional skills from peer assessment. They also realized that peer assessment improved the learning quality, supplied constructive feedback, and enabled them to acquire democratic values in the learning process. Correspondingly, the first participant of this study recognized worthy benefits of peer assessment that her students obtained after employing it in the speaking classroom.

On the contrary, the second group's perceptions of peer assessment were narrower than the first group's. It was because they viewed it as solely students' evaluating and grading other peers' works. Their lack of understanding of peer assessment primarily resulted from their former undergraduate study. They received very limited knowledge and training about the employment of peer assessment in the EFL classes during their undergraduate years. They, conversely, preferred to assess and score the students' works and oral performances traditionally. Accordingly, they did not have any significant experience in the use of peer assessment in their speaking class.

These results showed the teachers' limited understanding and narrow perceptions of peer assessment that generally did not go beyond a process of peer grading. It came from their lack of knowledge and experience in accepting the value of peer assessment. Zhao (2018) also revealed that teachers had a narrow perception of peer assessment which was confined in terms of grades without any feedback reference. Similarly, teachers' lack of instruction in using peer assessment that led to their restricted understanding and perception of peer assessment was also described by Harris and Brown (2013). Besides, regarding the two groups' different understandings of peer assessment, it seemed that their instruction of peer assessment during the undergraduate degree gave a significant impact and contribution to their comprehensive perception of peer assessment in their teaching career as a language assessment in their speaking classrooms.

How frequently do the Indonesian novice EFL teachers implement peer assessment in their speaking class?

The first group compactly expressed they habitually employed peer assessment for their speaking classes, as mentioned in these comments:

T1: I apply it many times when I want to assess my students' speaking performances. By doing so, my students learn not only to assess their peers' works but also to avoid the same mistakes their peers' have done previously.

T2: I often use it not only in my speaking class but also in my writing class. I want to create a more student-centered class and all of them get involved actively during the lesson. During the student's oral performance in front of the classroom, the other students grade and give comments on their peers' works. I believe that by frequently practice it, the students will gain many benefits as I have got from my earlier study.

T3: Peer assessment is one of the most enjoyable activities in my speaking class, therefore I frequently implement it in assessing my students' speaking performances.

In contrast, the second group seemed reluctant to use peer assessment in their speaking classes, as indicated in the excerpts below:

T4: Since I do not know much about this assessment, I never apply it in my speaking class and only use it in writing class when I feel I need to save my time on scoring students' written tasks. I never use it for speaking as I doubted the students' ability in evaluating and grading their peers' oral skills. They may not have sufficient ability to do that.

T5: For me, teachers are supposed to have, at least, experience and sufficient knowledge about a method they are going to practice in the classroom. In the case of peer assessment, I do not belong to that type of teacher, so I never practice it in my speaking class.

T6: Just to be honest, since I have never learned about it before, so I never apply it in my teaching and learning process in the classroom.

It can be seen that the first group frequently used peer assessment in their speaking classrooms. One of them utilized it mostly in the speaking and writing classes. As supported by Topping (2009) who claimed that a wide variety of outputs or products can be possibly peer-assessed, such as oral presentations, writing tasks, test performance, portfolios, and so forth. The teachers also promoted the students to be actively engaged in the lesson through the utilization of peer assessment. Also, they strongly believed that the use of peer assessment served many advantages for the students.

Unfortunately, all teachers in the second group never applied peer assessment in the speaking class. This is due to their lack of knowledge and understanding of peer assessment. However, one of them still used it several times in her writing class to save

her time in scoring the students' works. Another interesting fact was she claimed that she did not utilize peer assessment in her speaking class as she thought that the students may not have sufficient ability to do the assessment effectively. It is because she took into account that their evaluation and grading to their peers was crucial. Nevertheless, peer assessment is more than that matter. The embedded teacher-centered learning culture leads to a high requirement of accuracy and mistakes are less tolerated in the classroom (Zhao, 2018). As a consequence, teachers were more concerned about inappropriate grading and feedback that prevent them from implementing and appreciating peer assessment. Furthermore, this finding was also relevant with some studies which concluded that teachers' positive attitudes led to increased implementation of peer assessment in the classroom and vice versa (Panadero and Brown, 2017; Zhao, 2018).

What are the benefits of using peer assessment in a speaking class?

The first group revealed several major benefits during the implementation of peer assessment in their speaking classes, as follows:

T1: I use peer assessment in my speaking class since it creates an interactive atmosphere so that the class becomes more alive. The students will actively engage more to cooperate and learn from each other.

T2: By using peer assessment, it promotes the students' better understanding of assessment criteria. They often ask me the standards of good works or performances when they do peer-assessment. This helps them reflect and improve their works as well.

T3: Peer assessment can increase the students' active participation and improve their feedback skills. They will learn how to provide appropriate and worthwhile feedback for their peers in which they should give neither too harsh nor too pleasant comments.

Conversely, all teachers in the second group did not comment much because they did not have any experience in utilizing peer assessment in their speaking class. This can be seen from the excerpt below:

T4: I do not gain any benefit from peer assessment in my speaking class as I never implement it. However, since I perceive that the students' task in peer assessment is just scoring their friends' works, so I think the only benefit of peer assessment is that it can help me to save my time in scoring and grading the students' written tasks as I do not have to spend much time on scoring by myself.

The first group gained three paramount benefits in using peer assessment for their speaking classrooms. The first benefit was creating cooperative learning in the classroom. As Brown (2004, p. 270) stated that "peer assessment possesses the most obvious principle of cooperative learning. It is simply a large number of procedures and tasks within the area of learners-centered and collaborative education". Mixed-method research has also reported that peer assessment stimulated collaborative learning, which impacted

the students' lifelong learning skills for their future academic development (Malan and Stegmann, 2018).

The second benefit was promoting the students' better understanding of assessment criteria or standards. One of the main advantages of the peer assessment process is promoting learners to be more aware of learning goals and standards/criteria for judging their learning quality (Douglas, 2010). Additionally, Adachi et al. (2017) found out that one of the prominent aspects as a value of peer assessment was the importance of learners' understanding of standards and assessment criteria. The participants suggested that their learners' engagement with standards and rubrics was enhanced by peer assessment.

The third benefit was enhancing the students' feedback skills. Topping (2009) argued that one of the benefits and goals of peer assessment is enhancing learners' feedback skills. The feedback can be suggestive, confirmatory, or corrective. Moreover, peers' feedback can be more individualized and instantaneous than feedback from the teacher. Adachi et al. (2017) also noted that the learners' feedback skills development is a positive attribute of peer assessment.

However, the second group did not gain meaningful benefits from peer assessment as they never practiced it in their classes. They merely thought from the surface. One of them stated that it could save her time in scoring each student's works. This is relevant to Topping's (2009) statement that peer assessment possibly saves teachers' time. It has been proposed that this alternative assessment is not costly concerning teachers' time.

What are the challenges that the Indonesian novice EFL teachers encounter when practicing peer assessment in their speaking class?

All teachers in the first group expressed the only challenge they had was its very time-consuming process. It is mentioned in this excerpt below:

T2: If you ask me the challenge, well honestly, I just feel that it is very time-consuming. While my students and I are still in process, time flies so fast. Since the classroom atmosphere becomes alive, each student expresses their feedback and tons of questions both to their friends and me. Unexpectedly, we have spent approximately one-hour doing peer assessment. Therefore, I need to think of another way to make it more efficient so that it won't take much time.

Meanwhile, the second group asserted more challenges than the first group did. It can be found out in these excerpts:

T4: I think the students' assessment is not quite accurate and maybe too subjective as I'm not sure that the students can provide correct and appropriate judgment and score for their peers' works.

T5: I think the challenge that makes me unable to run peer assessment effectively is because I feel that my students are not motivated in conducting peer assessment, but I never blame them. I realize that it is my fault as I have little knowledge about it so that I cannot run the instruction properly.

T6: Honestly, I do not have an idea about the subsequent process after the students evaluate and score their peers' works. It is simply because I never learn about peer assessment comprehensively before.

The first group clearly explained that the major challenge of implementing peer assessment was their inability to manage the time efficiently as they thought that the process was very time-consuming. This notion was not in line with the previous statement from Topping (2009). Nonetheless, Falchikov (2001) cautioned that there can be no saving time for teachers because establishing a good quality of peer assessment requires such amount of time for organization, training as well as monitoring. If it becomes supplementary rather than substitutional to teachers' feedback, no time saving is likely, otherwise, extra time will be needed for the teachers to train the students on how to give constructive feedback.

Meanwhile, it is seemed genuine if the second group revealed more challenges in using peer assessment than the first group did. These challenges might also be barriers that caused them to barely conduct peer assessment in the speaking class. There were three noteworthy challenges in the use of peer assessment argued by the second group; the first was the students' low motivation to take part in peer assessment. Motivation in understanding why learners need to engage with peer assessment plays a crucial role. This leads to the challenge of low motivation by the learners to engage in peer assessment when they do not understand the rationale of doing it (Adachi et al., 2017).

The second challenge was subjectivity and accuracy on the students' judgment skills. It is supported by Brown (2004) who asserted that subjectivity is a major obstacle to overcome in peer assessment. Learners may be too harsh or too kind to their peers, or they may not own the applicable tools to provide an accurate assessment. Douglas (2010) also mentioned that to diminish the subjectivity issue, it is crucial to give learners practice in peer assessment before judging their peers' works. They can be given such an example of conducting this assessment and work in groups to accomplish it together.

Finally, the last challenge was the lack of teachers' experience and expertise in conducting peer assessment. Liu & Carless's (2006) study also reported that four challenges for teachers to employ peer assessment, including lack of teachers' expertise, time and resource constraints, power relations' disruption, and reliability of learners' judgment skills.

CONCLUSION

This current study revealed the two groups of Indonesian novice EFL teachers' different perceptions of the use of peer assessment in speaking class which were affected by their understanding of peer assessment and undergraduate study experiences. The first group asserted comprehensive understanding, fruitful benefits, and few challenges in employing peer assessment. While, the second group showed a narrower understanding, fewer benefits, and more challenges than the first group. From these findings, educational institutions for pre-service EFL teachers should take peer assessment into account to be integrated into their instructional designs. It is vital to building up novice EFL teachers' positive perceptions towards peer assessment and as a foundation to implement peer assessment in EFL classrooms.

Regarding its benefits, novice EFL teachers who have not had an in-depth understanding of peer assessment need to develop a comprehensive knowledge of peer

assessment and a notion of how it may facilitate language learning. This can be done not only by emphasizing knowledge and practice of peer assessment during the undergraduate study but also by encouraging them to implement peer assessment in the speaking class and experience its benefits as well as challenges firsthand. Simply perceiving peer assessment as merely peer grading may severely underestimate the significant benefits of peer assessment for EFL learners. Suggestions abovementioned, moreover, can be used to overcome the upcoming challenges. Hence, novice EFL teachers should be motivated to design a creative peer assessment to experience and perceive peer assessment as a valuable alternative way of language assessment.

This research has a limitation deals with the small number of participants. Thus, the findings still cannot be generalizable. This study is solely limited in revealing novice EFL teachers' perceptions of peer assessment in speaking class; accordingly, further researches may include a larger number of participants from different institutions and levels. Eventually, investigating teachers' motivations and learners' learning outcomes through the use of peer assessment in the classroom will also be interesting future research topics.

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