

# STUDENT OBJECTIVITY IN PEER ASSESSMENT IN AN EFL SPEAKING CLASS

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## ABSTRACT

This research was aimed to investigate to what extent students doing peer assessment can be objective when they assess their friends in speaking and to find out their perceptions toward peer assessment. Peer assessment is an interesting teaching and learning technique. Teachers rarely use it as a final assessment because of doubts about the objectivity of peer assessment itself. Thus, the writer was interested to find out the objectivity of peer assessment. The subjects were students in a Public Speaking Class at UIN Ar-Raniry in Banda Aceh. The results from document analysis showed that peer assessment was objective as proven by the SPSS analysis. There was no significant difference between the results from peer assessment and the value assessed by the teacher which proved that the peer assessment done by the students was objective. In addition, the interview results showed that the students supported doing peer assessment in the classroom. As a result of this research teachers are recommended to implement peer assessment in their classrooms as a teaching technique as well as doing it for final assessments.

Keywords: *Objectivity, Peer Assessment, Speaking, Alternative Assessment.*

## INTRODUCTION

Assessment is one of the crucial components in the process of teaching-learning. It is a process to gather and discuss information in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge. Herman et al. (1992, p. 56) have said that assessment of learning is a process to gain information related to important variables in learning as a basis for decisions that teachers take in order to improve the teaching-learning processes and to evaluate the achievements of students. It has goals to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses and to plan appropriate future programs and instructions. Teachers need to understand where the students are getting it right and where they are going wrong, teachers need to assess the process as well as the product, of their activities. Students' achievement is the goal of teaching-learning processes and one way to find out the ability of students is by using assessment. Peer assessment is a formative assessment that can promote student involvement, responsibility and excellence, focus attention on skills and learning, and provide improved feedback (Weaver, 1986, as cited in White, 2009, p. 2).

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This means that peer assessment can be applied as a technique in the teaching- learning process to involve students directly and to increase their ability in the form of peer feedback. Peer assessment is an evaluation that is made by classmates of their peer performing an activity. After looking at the peer assessment, a student is expected to improve her performance using the assessment as feedback. Here, the teacher only provides guidance to the students in his classroom and the students become the evaluators of their friends' work based on agreement. Therefore, the students learn how to assess the work of their classmates based on agreed upon criteria and learning by themselves how to do assessments while still under the control of the teacher.

White (2009, p. 2) has also said that peer assessment is a formative assessment that has vital role to play by involving students in judging the work of their colleagues, and, with careful implementation, can also be used as a component in summative assessments. Peer assessment can also be one of the components in summative assessments by teachers in assessing the work of students. From White's statement, peer assessment shows it has benefits, not only to increase the ability of students in the teaching-learning process, but also, as a final evaluation that helps the teacher in assessing the work of their students.

In a final evaluation, objectivity becomes a vital problem in assessing students' work. Flachikov and Goldfinch (2010, p. 302) say that fears of teachers about the lack of reliability or validity of peer assessment may act to restrict its use and, thus, deprive many students of its learning benefits. Rarely do teachers implement peer assessment in the classroom because of the supposed problem of objectivity which means the students are not able to get the benefits of peer assessment.

Accordingly, the writer was interested to find out the objectivity of students doing peer assessment of classmates when assessing their speaking, also she wanted to find out the perceptions of her students towards peer assessment in an EFL speaking class at UIN Ar-Raniry in Banda Aceh.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the background above, this study was guided by the following two questions:

1. To what extent can peer assessments be objective when classmates assess their peers in speaking classes at UIN Ar-Raniry?
2. What will be the perceptions of the students in the speaking class to peer assessments?

### **Objectives of the Study**

In accordance with study problems above, the objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate to what extent peer assessment can be objective when classmates assess their peers in a speaking class at UIN Ar-Raniry.
2. To find out what the perceptions of the student will be to peer assessment in their speaking class.

In this research, the writer focused on the implementation of peer assessment of oral presentations. The aspects assessed were two categories: organization and delivery. The organization category includes the purpose of the speech, the introduction, body and transitions, supporting ideas and the conclusion. In the delivery category, the students were assessed for their eye contact, volume of voice, vocal quality, posture and/or gestures ie. body

language and their preparedness and polish. Moreover, it is important to note that this study was not designed to observe the implementation of peer assessment in the classroom, but it was limited to find out the objectivity of peer assessment. The researcher also analysed the students' perceptions of peer assessment gained through interviews.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Assessment**

Assessment is one of the most important tools in the teaching-learning process, because it can be used to measure the ability of students receiving knowledge and ability of teachers in transferring knowledge. In addition, Arends (2004, p. 217) has expressed the same ideas about the definition of assessment. According to Arends, assessment can not only be used to measure students' ability in receiving knowledge and teachers' ability in transferring knowledge, but it can also be used for the purpose of making decisions about instructions through the process of collecting information from the students in the classroom.

Based on the above definitions, assessment is a process of gaining information about the achievements of students in a subject based on the judgment of a teacher through the grading, marking, measuring or ranking of work done/presented by students.

### **Types of Assessment**

According to Brown (2004, p. 6), assessments can be divided into two types, namely: summative assessments and formative assessments. The differences between these assessments lie in the process of grading work done or performances made by students.

Summative assessment is also known as traditional assessment. Brown also states that summative assessment aims to measure, or summarize, what a student has grasped, and this typically occurs at the end of a course or unit of instruction.

However, Brown (*ibid*, p. 6) has also stated that formative assessment or alternative assessment is used to evaluate students during the process of forming their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue the process of development. In addition, Asian (2000, p. 8) has said that formative assessment is used to improve instructions while work/performances are still ongoing. Moreover, formative assessment pays attention to the process of getting knowledge. This type of assessment focuses on students' needs rather than on the teacher's wants or needs. According to White (2009, p. 2), peer assessments are a part of formative assessments.

### **Peer Assessments**

Peer assessments are one form of formative assessments, because they have a purpose to improve/further develop the progress of students in the teaching-learning process. Hattie (2009, p. 34) has said that peer assessment is formative in nature, it has a clear potential for developing the subsequent teaching-learning process. Spiller (2012, p. 10) has also stated that peer assessment involves students providing feedback to their classmates on the quality of their work. Apart from them, Strijbos and Sluijsmant (2010, p. 266), have written that peer assessment is an educational arrangement where students judge the performance of a peer quantitatively and/or qualitatively and which stimulates students to reflect, discuss and collaborate. The important note is that peer assessment is a process whereby pupils assess

the work of a classmate. At the end of the class, the performance or score of a student can be given by her classmates or by a combination of scores from both the other students and their teacher.

### **Peer Assessment Procedure**

According to White (2009, p. 16), for implementation of peer assessment, students must understand the technique of peer assessment which must be explained by the teacher. Students are instructed to fill out the rubric sheets for peer assessment that are distributed for each student. Each speaker gets assessments from all their classmates in the classroom. These rubric sheets are then collected and given to the teacher. At the end of the class, the rubric sheets are returned to each student to help them develop their skills based on the comments of their peers.

Okuda and Otsu (2010, pp. 43-44) have also set out procedures for peer assessment. First, assessing criteria and format of rubric. The teacher may take the rubric from an expert or adapt one based on the type of performance, the skills of the students and the classroom situation. Second, explain the criteria of the rubric to the students. It is a crucial thing to explain the criteria of the rubric to the students. Teacher must give clear explanations about the rubric and on how the students must assess their peer. Third, training for assessment. Before applying the peer assessment in the classroom, it is better to make a simulation in implementation of peer assessment. Fourth, last but not least, for the procedure of peer assessment is that each classmate fills out a rubric sheet for the performance of each of their peers.

### **Advantages of Peer Assessment**

Peer assessment gives positive effects for students and for teachers. According to Boud et al. (2009, p. 416) the advantages of peer assessment include that it necessarily involves students working together and developing skills of collaboration. It gives them practice in planning and teamwork and involves them as part of a learning community in which they have a stake. In peer assessment, there are increased possibilities for students to engage in reflection and exploration of ideas when the authority of the teacher is not an immediate and omniscient presence. Whether these possibilities are realized however depends on the way in which peer assessment and learning is established and the context in which it operates. Boud et al (ibid) also found another advantage in peer assessment, which was that students gain more practice in communicating in the subject area than is typically the case in learning activities when the teaching staff are present. They are able to articulate their understanding and have it evaluated by their peers as well as to learn from adopting the reciprocal role. Furthermore, peer learning involves a group of students taking collective responsibility for identifying their own learning needs and planning how these might be addressed. This is a vital learning-how-to-learn skill as well as providing practice for the kinds of interaction needed in future employment. Learning to co-operate with others to reach mutual goals seems a necessary prerequisite for operating in a complex society.

On the other hand, according to White (2009, p. 6), peer assessment also has some disadvantages, namely: students may lack the ability to evaluate each other. They may not have enough ability to assess their friends and the implementation of peer assessment may be hard to apply. Besides, students may not take it seriously, allowing friendship,

entertainment value, etcetera, to influence their marking. Some may worry that students may feel that assessment is a teacher's job, so they may not be serious in assessing their peers. Others may think that friendships could influence a student's assessment so that they could give a good score to a close friend and a bad score to an enemy. White (ibid) has also stated that another possible disadvantage of peer assessment could be that students may not like peer marking because of the possibility of being discriminated against, being misunderstood, etc. Being misunderstood about what students say and do could become a fear for students in implementing peer assessment. The fear of their peers misunderstanding what they have said may make the students have doubts about the results from peer assessment. The last possible disadvantage raised by White is that students may misinform each other. Here, teacher intervention about the objectivity of peer assessment becomes a crucial part of applying peer assessment. Teachers must inform students to ignore any personal relationships between them and be strictly objective.

### **The Objectivity of Peer Assessment**

There has been considerably debate about the objectivity of peer assessment. Topping (2003, p. 26) has pointed out widespread discussions about objectivity, comparing peer assessment to assessment by teachers, he stressed that the assumption that assessment by a teacher is more reliable and more valid than the assessment by the peer can be doubted in some contexts. Freeman (1995, p. 298) has concluded that there was no significant difference in the overall mark averages given by peers and that given by their teachers. Campbell et al. (2001, p. 40) have also stated similar conclusions - that peer assessment can be a relevant substitute for assessment by a teacher. They affirm that peer assessment can be as objective as teacher assessment. In addition, Kappe (2008, p. 56) has stated that students are able to provide a reliable overall assessment but needed additional training to provide reliable marks on specific criteria for oral presentations.

From those various experts above we can conclude that the objectivity of peer assessment can be achieved as long as the students get clear instruction from their teacher on how to conduct peer assessment properly.

The criteria for the objectivity of peer assessment that was done by some researchers were:

First, De Grez (2012, p. 87) compared the mean score from peer assessment to that from the teacher and found no significant difference. Second, Onyia (2014, p. 3) summed all the scores from the students and divided by the number of students (ie. the mean score) and then compared the result to that from the teacher and found the same value. Third, Strang (2015, p. 6) used SPSS version 14.1 for the statistical test. He used the t-test to compare the students' score with the lecturer's score and found that the values were the same at the 95% confidence level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) ie. they were objective. All these researchers found that peer assessments were objective when compared to scores from their teachers.

### **Peer Assessment in Speaking**

Using peer assessment in speaking is a very useful way for students to respect the efforts of their peer who stands in front of them to make a presentation. Goh and Burns (2012, p. 273) have stated that peer assessment where students assess the performance of their classmate is increasingly being used, in speaking classrooms, as a supplement to teacher

assessment; enabling students to get a more rounded picture of their achievements. Peer assessment allows students who are not involved in the speaking task to become more experienced in listening to spoken English, to engage more deeply with the learning goals and expected outcomes of the speaking course, and to learn from each other.

For this research the writer used a specific type of speaking, namely oral presentation. According to Ming (2005, p. 118), oral presentation is communication which is designed for a purpose and for an organization in a specific setting at a specific time. It is presented in front of an audience that comes for a specific purpose. An oral presentation can be made at any event such as a seminar or for teaching or for a presentation about a product or a company or a program, etc.

### **Perception of Students towards Peer Assessment**

Some studies have been done about the perceptions of students towards peer assessment. Topping (1998) as cited in White (2009, p. 8) briefly reported that students expressed their dislike of peer assessment due to the possibilities for being embarrassed by their weaknesses. Another study conducted by Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) reported that the students studied had had positive effects due to students learning from the peer assessment processes.

A study which focused on the perceptions of students to the process was done by Ballantyne et al. (2002) who found there were some who liked and some who disliked peer assessment. On the positive side, those students felt that peer assessment encouraged them to get feedback from their peers and that they can then develop their skill for further progress. The views from students who disliked peer assessment included: they were doubtful about the competency of their peers to assess their work; they doubted the reliability of the peer assessment and it was too time-consuming.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The researcher used a combination method for this research. The methods used were both quantitative and qualitative. Creswell and Clark (2010, p. 307) have stated that the combination method is used as a procedure for the researcher to integrate quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive analysis of the research problems. A quantitative method is used to answer the question about the objectivity of peer assessment by using the average score from peer assessment calculated by the SPSS program. Meanwhile, the qualitative method was used to explain the perspective of the students to peer assessment in speaking by asking for their opinions in an interview.

### **Data Collection Technique**

To collect the data, the writer used documentation from the scoring rubrics and the interview transcripts.

### **Documentation**

In order to answer the first research question, the writer collected the rubric sheets that the students completed to assess their friends. The researcher then calculated the average

score for each student who spoke. This average was compared to the score from the teacher to assess the objectivity of the peer assessment.

The objectivity of peer assessment was seen after the writer calculated the average values and compared the data by using the SPSS package. This program allowed the writer to see the objectivity of peer assessment automatically by using the formula of means.

### **Interview**

The writer used interviews to get information from the students about their perceptions toward peer assessment. The interviews were conducted in the classroom, after the Public Speaking class ended. Every respondent was interviewed for 5 minutes to answer all the interview questions. The writer interviewed the students orally and recorded the interviews. The interviews were transcribed later to get the final data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Rubric Result**

The researcher calculated the scores for each student who was assessed by all the other students in the class, and the results from the highest to the lowest score are tabulated below:

**Table 1. Student's Assessment Results**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Student Identifier</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1	A	27
2	B	26
3	C	26
4	D	25
5	E	25
6	F	24
7	G	23
8	H	23
9	I	23
10	J	23
11	K	23
12	L	22
13	M	22
14	N	21
15	O	21
16	P	21
17	Q	21
18	R	20
19	S	20
20	T	20
21	U	17

Based on the table above, the researcher classified the students' score into three categories. At the top there were students A, B and C with scores of 27, 27 and 26. In the middle were students J, K, and L with scores of 24, 23, and 22 and at the bottom were students S, T, and U with 20, 20, and 17.

The average (mean) score for student L that was given by their peers; students 1 to 21 was 22. This score was obtained after calculating all the average collected scores and dividing by the total number of students in the class.

The researcher also made an individual assessment for for each student in the class. This observer's assessment was taken as a comparison score to the student's assessment in order to look for the objectivity in the peer assessment. The researcher's assessments are set out in the table that follows:

**Table 2. Observer's Assessment Result**

Number	Identifier as in Table 4.1	Score
1	A	27
2	B	27
3	C	26
4	D	25
5	F	25
6	E	24
7	J	24
8	K	24
9	I	24
10	H	24
11	L	23
12	G	23
13	N	22
14	O	22
15	P	22
16	R	21
17	M	21
18	R	21
19	S	21
20	T	20
21	U	17

From the observer's assessment above depicts that, the three top scorers were students A, B, and C with score of 27, 27, and 26. In the three middle scores are students J, K, and L with 24, 23, and 23. The three bottom scorers were students S, T, and U with 21, 20 and 17. There were no significant differences between the students' assessments and the researcher's assessments. The score from the student's were then compared to the scores from the researcher to get the result for objectivity using the SPSS program.

### Objectivity Result

The researcher used the SPSS technique to test the objectivity of the peer assessment. Using SPSS the average score from student's assessments (mean) was compared with the average score from the observer (test value). If the value in column Sig. (2-tailed) in the SPSS result was above  $\alpha = 0.05$ , then it was deemed accurate to consider it as objective.

**Table 3. SPSS Result for Student K**

Name	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
K	20	22.20	2.419	0.541

**Table 4. One-Sample Test**

Name	Test Value = 23					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
K	-1.479	19	0.156	-.800	-1.93	.33

To test the objectivity of peer assessment on student K presentation, the mean on the table of "One-Sample Statistic" compared to the test value on table of "One-Sample Test". Mean for peer assessment is 22.20 and the total value of observers' assessment is 23. From the comparison of the result from SPSS Program was obtained in "Sig. (2-tailed)", 0.156, which is above 0.05 that means objective. The researcher tabulated the result of SPSS program for all the students, as follows:

**Table 5. Objectivity Result for Peer Assessment**

Name	Mean	Test Value	Sig(2-tailed)	Result
A	27.00	27	1.000	Objective
B	26.90	27	0.716	Objective
C	26.40	26	0.322	Objective
D	25.95	25	0.130	Objective
E	25.20	24	0.155	Objective
F	24.50	25	0.126	Objective
G	23.95	23	0.078	Objective
H	23.90	24	0.649	Objective

I	23.80	24	0.640	Objective
J	23.75	24	0.666	Objective
K	23.35	24	0.247	Objective
L	22.20	23	0.156	Objective
M	22.15	21	0.099	Objective
N	21.40	22	0.403	Objective
O	21.25	22	0.325	Objective
P	21.15	22	0.132	Objective
Q	21.15	21	0.577	Objective
R	20.95	21	0.938	Objective
S	20.20	21	0.130	Objective
T	19.65	20	0.664	Objective
U	17.35	17	0.090	Objective

From the table above, we can see that the Sig. (2-tailed) for each student is above  $\alpha=0.05$ . For an example, student E has the Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.155 which is above  $\alpha=0.05$ , that means the result is objective. Even student U who has the lowest value of Sig. (2-tailed) 0.090 is above  $\alpha=0.05$ . We can conclude that the result of SPSS for the peer assessment in that the class peer assessment was objective.

## Discussion

### The Objectivity of Peer Assessment Conducted by the Students in Speaking Class at UIN Ar-Raniry

The finding for my first research question, “Can peer assessment done by students in a speaking class at UIN Ar-Raniry be objective?”, it was found that the significant values for the students were in the range of 0.078 – 1.000. These were more than 0.05, so they were considered objective. This means that the students were able to objectively assess their classmates presentations based on their performances. It also means that peer assessment can be objective there will be no significant difference from assessment by the teacher.

This finding is also supported by Cheng and Warren (1997) who concluded that both teacher and peer assessment for language were not noticeably different. It means, peer assessment can be applied in the classroom because there is no significant difference with teacher assessment. Qu and Yang (2010) have also said that teacher and peer assesment can be interchangeably used in the classroom. It can be inferred that Qu and Yang found that peer assessment was as objective as teacher assessment.

### Perceptions of Students to Peer Assessment in a Speaking Class

The researcher used interviews to answer the question about the perceptions of students to peer assessment in a speaking class. Five students were interviewed to find out their perceptions about peer assessment.

From the five respondents that were interviewed, all of them knew what peer assessment was. When asked about the choice between peer assessment and teacher assessment, one student preferred to combine both teacher and peer assessments for the class. He thought that

it would be fairer to combine both assessments than to just use peer assessment. Meanwhile, other respondents preferred peer assessment to be applied in their classroom.

Actually, the debate that has occurred about the application of peer assessment is located in the results from peer assessment itself. Peer assessment is considered doubtful because students are being assessed by their friends. But in reality, four from five students believe in the results from peer assessment. The result is reliable as long as the students can be objective in assessing their friends. The students have to believe in each other to make peer assessment better.

The respondents had their own problems in facing peer assessment. Two of them felt there was no obstacle when they assessed their friends. One respondent said that he was afraid to give a wrong score to his peer. According to Cheng and Warren (1997) most of the students felt unqualified to assess their peers' language proficiency. This happened to Student 3 who said she was afraid of giving an inappropriate score to her friends (Student 3, 2015). This problem can appear because of the personal relations between the peer assessors which can influence the score they give. Nevertheless, the results showed that personal relations did not have much influence on the results from peer assessment. Since, the average from the students and that from the observer was almost the same.

The last question in the interview was about the implementation of peer assessment. From the five students who were interviewed, four students agreed with the application of peer assessment, as well their opinion about peer assessment was that it was an interesting and good method. Aoun (2008) has stated that students also felt personally motivated as a consequence of being involved in peer assessment and saw it as an incentive to perform well hence it was also effective in improving the quality of their individual work and in developing their own personal skills. One of the respondents had the same idea as Aoun, he said that peer assessment helps them to know their own mistakes so that they can develop their own performance for their next presentation (Student 5, 2015). For this question, only one student was doubtful about the use of peer assessment. He thought it better to combine it with teacher assessment.

From the results from the interviews it can be concluded that the perspective from the students about peer assessment was positive. These students want to apply peer assessment because it provides a lot of advantages. As long as the students follow the rules of instruction given by the lecturer in order to get objectivity, peer assessment can be implemented in the classroom. This was also supported by White (ibid) who has said that students had positive perception towards peer assessment. He has also said that this kind of assessment can be a part of the lesson that supports and promotes students to learn about constructing, delivering, and judging.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusions**

Based on the results of this research into the objectivity of peer assessment and the perceptions of students about the application of peer assessment, several conclusions can be drawn.

The first conclusion is that the peer assessment that was done by the students at UIN Ar-Raniry was objective. This is because the comparison of the peer assessment with the observer assessment using SPSS turned out to give a positive result (significant).

Second, this study found that the students' perception towards peer assessment in speaking was positive. The peer assessment helped them to develop their skills in presentation through assessing their peers. This method is also an interesting method for getting the attention of students.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the evidence from this research, the researcher has the following recommendations for improving ELT (English Language Teaching).

First, teachers do not have to worry about the objectivity of peer assessment. This is because students unconsciously can be objective. The students have to get a clear explanation by the teacher about the important things and the advantages of using peer assessment in the classroom to develop their skills in assessing. Teachers can engage students in evaluating their work, so that they can then learn how to assess or evaluate their peers. Therefore, peer assessment can be applied in the classroom.

Second suggestion is that peer assessment can be implemented as an additional method to improve the teaching of speaking. The students also learn how to respect their classmates when they are performing in front of class and do not talk amongst themselves while their peer is speaking because they are concentrating on their evaluation of what is being said and how it is being delivered.

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