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Implementation of peer-assessment system in speaking courses

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Abstract

The ability to speak effectively refers to an individual's capacity to convey thoughts and ideas orally. Various teaching strategies are employed to enhance speaking skills, with traditional methods primarily relying on teacher-driven assessments. However, incorporating peer assessment has emerged as a valuable approach that enables students to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, promoting the development of language proficiency, metacognitive awareness, and related skills. This study aims to implement peer assessment as an alternative evaluative method in the Speaking in Academic Contexts course, which includes both informative and persuasive speech tasks. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, with mean and standard deviation calculations comparing peer assessment scores to those assigned by the instructor. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was applied to determine statistically significant differences between the two sets of scores. Qualitative data, derived from students' reflections, were analyzed using thematic analysis. Overall, students in the Speaking in Academic Contexts course reported positive perceptions of peer assessment, recognizing its potential to enhance their language skills and foster learner autonomy.

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academic context; informative; peerassessment; persuasive; speaking

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INTRODUCTION

Reading, listening, writing, and speaking are regarded as the four essential language skills that must be mastered by students pursuing English Language Education or English Literature. These skills are developed through intensive learning activities within academic settings. The learning process unfolds through various stages, each requiring assessment to gauge the students' level of achievement and mastery.

Among these four language skills, speaking is defined as the ability to articulate thoughts and ideas orally. Effective communication requires learners to understand both linguistic and pragmatic expressions (Abbaspour, 2016). In mastering speaking skills, one of the key competencies for students is the ability to communicate within academic contexts. The "Speaking in Academic Contexts" course aims to equip students with the necessary skills to express their ideas verbally and functionally in academic settings. During the learning process, students are typically assigned various speaking tasks designed to reflect different academic contexts.

Learner autonomy

Learner autonomy, particularly in the field of education and foreign language learning, has been extensively discussed and researched to explore ways in which language learners can engage in selfinstruction, self-access learning, self-direction, and individualized instruction. Self-instruction refers to a scenario in which learners are able to undertake language tasks with minimal direct control from



the teacher. Self-access learning describes a situation where learners utilize various materials and technologies as independent resources for language learning. Self-direction denotes a condition in which learners take full responsibility for their decisions and actions throughout the language learning process. Lastly, individualized instruction involves both teachers and learners adapting the learning environment to suit the individual characteristics of the students, creating a tailored and effective learning experience (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

In a more constrained view, learner autonomy involves providing learners with opportunities and the necessary tools to independently acquire the target language. This type of autonomy emphasizes learning how to learn, where learners develop competencies in decision-making, critical thinking, and independent action. It also requires learners to recognize their learning potential and take responsibility for the decisions and strategies they implement to meet their learning objectives. Additionally, cultivating self-discipline and self-regulation is critical in fostering learner autonomy, helping learners build confidence in their ability to learn the target language. While this narrow perspective emphasizes academic autonomy, a broader view of learner autonomy focuses on *liberatory autonomy*, encouraging learners to become critically aware of obstacles in their learning journey and to develop intellectual strategies to overcome these challenges (Kumaravadiyelu, 2003).

Numerous studies have investigated learner autonomy in language learning. For instance, Shen et al. (2020) examined learners' perceptions and attitudes toward autonomy. Their findings revealed that the majority of participants not only gained knowledge from textbooks but also accessed various sources such as articles, eBooks, and the internet, demonstrating their ability to manage their own language learning process. Another study by Ashraf and Mahdinezhad (2015) assessed EFL learners' readiness for autonomous learning, focusing on three key aspects: learners' perceptions of educational responsibility, their ability to learn the target language independently, and the autonomous language learning activities they engaged in within the classroom. The study concluded that encouraging learners to utilize diverse resources both inside and outside the classroom can significantly enhance their ability to become autonomous language learners.

The utilization of peer assessment in speaking courses

Peer assessment, also referred to as peer evaluation, peer feedback, peer review, or peer critique (Martinez & Uso-Juan, 2006), is defined as the process through which learners engage in evaluating the level, value, or quality of a peer's product or performance. This process extends beyond mere evaluation by facilitating feedback and discussions among students, ultimately leading to mutually agreed outcomes. The types of products assessed can range from written assignments and oral presentations to portfolios and other performances (Topping, 2010). The emphasis in peer assessment is often on formative assessment, whereby students collaborate to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, with the goal of enhancing their language proficiency, metacognitive abilities, and other related skills.

Within the context of teaching and learning, peer assessment offers several pedagogical advantages. First, it serves as a motivational tool in language learning (Shen et al., 2020). By having their work assessed by peers, students are encouraged to improve their skills and take ownership of their learning process. Second, peer assessment promotes the development of critical thinking skills (Davidson & Lloyd, 2015), as students are required to analyze and evaluate their peers' work, which fosters deeper understanding of the task's requirements. Third, peer assessment enhances collaboration skills, as students must reach a consensus on the criteria to be assessed, necessitating discussion and cooperation.

Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of peer assessment on learner autonomy. For example, Puspasari and Hudayani (2018) found that peer assessment fosters greater independence among students by reducing reliance on instructors and boosting self-confidence, although it does not significantly alter students' expectations of the teacher's role or their use of learning strategies. Furthermore, Eliyasun and Salam (2018) demonstrated that peer assessment can significantly enhance students' speaking skills by providing opportunities for students to evaluate both their peers' performances and their own, thereby fostering improvement through feedback.

Despite its benefits, peer assessment presents certain challenges. One notable limitation is the inconsistency of the method, particularly when compared to summative assessment, as peer assessment can be more time-consuming and less effective in preparing students for exams. Additionally, the language proficiency of some students may not be sufficient for effective peer evaluation (Panadero, 2016). Other concerns include the possibility that students may not take the process seriously or may not fully engage with the task (Liu & Carless, 2006). Moreover, peer assessment can sometimes conflict with teacher-based practices, leading to a lack of confidence in both the assessment process and its results.

Despite these challenges, peer assessment remains a valuable tool in diversifying assessment methods. It also serves as a mechanism for developing students' critical thinking and fostering a sense of responsibility. The process of peer assessment can be conducted in pairs (Topping, 2018), wherein students are divided into pairs to evaluate one another's work. In the context of speaking skills, instructors may explain the speaking tasks, outline key assessment criteria, and provide rubrics to guide the evaluation process (Abbaspour, 2006).

Nevertheless, preliminary studies indicate that many students encounter obstacles when completing speaking tasks. Two significant factors contributing to these difficulties are the need to understand the linguistic features of a text and the requirement to produce a cohesive text that adheres to genre-specific conventions (Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015). These complexities suggest that, to effectively communicate in different contexts, students must not only master core speaking skills such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Black et al., 2003; David & Pearse, 2000) but also understand the conventions that govern various types of texts in specific communicative settings. Therefore, employing effective teaching strategies is critical to achieving successful language learning outcomes (Ganna et al., 2018; Haryudin & Jamilah, 2018; William & Burden, 2003).

Various strategies have been employed by educators to teach speaking, including discussions, simulations, communication games, elicitation, role play, interviews, picture description, storytelling, show-and-tell activities, presentations, drama, and question-and-answer sessions (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Zuhriyah, 2017; Brown, 2004; Brown, 2007). These strategies primarily aim to enhance students' speaking skills, with the assessment process typically led by the teacher. However, it has been demonstrated that peer assessment is equally important for helping students identify their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, thereby promoting the development of linguistic, metacognitive, and other skills (Topping, 2010; Luoma, 2009). To ensure a comprehensive evaluation of students' oral performance in academic contexts, a variety of assessment methods should be utilized (Leahy et al., 2005). This approach not only helps students achieve satisfactory academic outcomes but also provides them with opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment, including peer evaluation.

Moreover, while the benefits of peer assessment in language learning have been well documented, there remains a gap in understanding how peer assessment interacts with other forms of evaluation, such as teacher-led assessments. The existing literature does not adequately address how peer assessment can be used in conjunction with teacher-based assessment to create a more holistic and comprehensive approach to language evaluation. There is also limited research on the effects of peer assessment on learner autonomy, particularly in terms of how it shapes students' critical thinking and self-regulation skills over time. In summary, although peer assessment has been widely studied and shown to benefit learner autonomy and language development, significant gaps remain in the literature. There is a need for further research to explore how peer assessment can be integrated more effectively into language learning curricula, addressing concerns about its reliability, student engagement, and its interaction with teacher-led evaluations. Consequently, this research seeks to implement peer assessment as an alternative method for measuring students' speaking abilities in the "Speaking in Academic Contexts" course. By engaging in peer assessment, students will have the opportunity to interact with their peers, better understand the assessment process, and apply the principles of assessment for learning and assessment as learning. Specifically, this study will provide a deeper understanding of how peer assessment can be effectively integrated into language curricula to enhance learner autonomy, critical thinking, and speaking proficiency.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The present research utilized the descriptive approach. Descriptive research refers to an activity identifying features of a phenomena through observation. This form of study involved describing and interpreting facts using proper hypotheses. Descriptive study focused on the current circumstance, utilized one or more variables, and explored the facts. This research study was considered as descriptive research since it aimed to describe the peer assessment carried out among students and compare the results with the lecturer's assessment to improve the students' learner autonomy.

Research subject

This study included two classrooms of the Speaking for Academic Context course. Each class included 28 students. Thus, a total of 56 students participated in the current study. Cluster sampling was used to choose participants from six different classes in an English Language Education study program at one Indonesian institution. Since the participants were sought out using a cluster sampling approach, all of the selected group members were included as participants in the research.

Research procedure

The present study included a number of activities. Firstly, this study carried out data collection through conducting speaking assignments within the speaking course especially Speaking for Academic Context course. The students were divided into several pairs. Each pair was expected to assessed their partners' speaking skill in accordance to the provided speaking assessment rubric. Moreover, the lecturer also assessed the students' speaking skills using similar assessment rubric. Then, the scores obtained from the peer-assessment results were compared to the scores given by the lecturer.

Data collection technique

The quantitative data were collected through tests using assessment instruments consisting of speaking assignments and peer assessment rubric. The speaking assignments involved graded tasks form informative and persuasive speeches. The speaking skills assessment rubric included several necessary aspects, namely language appropriateness, vocal variety, pitch, intensity, pronunciation and articulation, as well as gestures supporting verbal messages. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were collected through reflective writing assignments during the implementation of peer assessment in the Speaking for Academic Context course in order to increase their language skills.

Data analysis technique and reliability

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' level of independent learning

This section presents the results of the quantitative descriptive analysis of speaking performance scores, derived from both informative and persuasive speech tasks, evaluated through peer assessment and lecturer assessment. The consistency of scoring across each component of the speaking assessment rubric—including language appropriateness, vocal variety (in terms of rate, pitch, and intensity), pronunciation, articulation, and the use of gestures to support verbal messages—is demonstrated by the reliability index, calculated using Cronbach's Alpha. Descriptive statistics such as minimum and maximum scores, along with the mean and standard deviation, are reported to

provide a comprehensive view of the score distribution. Additionally, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is employed to assess the normality of the score distribution, while Levene's test is used to evaluate the homogeneity of variance.

To determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the scores from peer assessment and those from lecturer assessment, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test is applied. This non-parametric test is used to compare paired data and assess whether discrepancies exist between the two scoring methods. Alongside the quantitative analysis, this section also includes qualitative findings from students' reflections, which provide insights into their experiences and perceptions of the peer assessment process.

The analysis reveals that students' assessments of their peers' speech performances tend to be consistent across the evaluated components. This consistency is reflected in the reliability index, which exceeds the threshold of 0.70 (Table 1), indicating strong internal consistency in the assessment. The index value above 0.70 suggests that students were evaluated highly and reliably across all aspects of the rubric, thereby supporting the validity of the peer assessment process.

Table 1. Reliability Index for Speech Tasks from Peers

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	Reliability Statistics		
	Informative Speech	Persuasive Speech	
Cronbach's Alpha	.661	.584	
N of items	4	4	

The lecturer's assessment of speech tasks tends to be consistent seen from the value of each component. The results can be seen from the reliability index that is above 0.07 (Table 2) indicating that the students are rated highly in each speaking aspects by the lecturer. The index that is above 0.07 indicates internal consistency.

Table 2. Reliability Index for Speech Tasks from Lecturer

	Reliability Statistics		
	Informative Speech	Persuasive Speech	
Cronbach's Alpha	.822	.822	
N of items	4	4	

The analysis results in Table 3 show that there is a tendency for students to rate their peers higher than the grades given by the lecturer. The results can be seen from the minimum score, maximum score, as well as average score of both assessments shown in standard deviation results.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Speech Scores

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
INF_PEER	56	13.00	20.00	16.2143	1.64830
INF_LECTURER	56	14.00	20.00	17.5714	1.47534
Valid N (listwise)	56				

Normal distribution is one of the requirements for parametric statistical test. However, Table 4 shows that the speech scores from lecturer have a distribution that is considered not normal. This is indicated by a significance value of $0.000~(p\,{<}\,0.05)$. Thus, the statistical tests are used to determine differences in peer scores and lecturer scores using a non-parametric statistical test, namely the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

Table 4. Distribution of Speech Scores

Tests of Normality							
	INIE SCORER	Kolmogor	ov-Smir	nov	Shapi	ro-Wil	k
	INF_SCORER	Statistics	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
INF_SCORE	PEER	.159	56	.001	.959	56	.057
	LECTURER	.171	56	.000	.909	56	.000

In addition to normal distribution, parametric statistical test also requires homogeneity of variance. Table 5 shows that the speech scores from peers and lecturers have homogeneous variance. This is indicated by the significance value 0.581 (p>0.05).

Table 5. Homogeneity of Variance of Speech Scores

Test of Homogeneity of Variance					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
	Based on Mean	.306	1	110	.581
	Based on Median	.126	1	110	.723
INF_SCORE	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.126	1	109.870	.723
	Based on trimmed mean	.309	1	110	.579

To find out the comparison of peer scores and lecturer scores, information in Table 6 shows the frequency of higher and lower scores. *Negative Ranks* or negative differences between lecturer and peer assessments is 8 indicating that the lecturer scores for 8 students are lower than the peer scores. *Positive Ranks* or positive differences between peer and lecturer assessments are 34 indicating that the lecturer scores for 34 students are higher than the peer scores. Meanwhile, *Ties* is the similarity of lecturer scores and peer scores of 14 indicating that the lecturer scores for 14 students are equal to peer scores.

Table 6. Comparison of Speech Scores from Peers and Lecturers

Ranks				
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
INF_LECTURER - INF_PEER	Negative Ranks	8a	15.19	121.50
	Positive Ranks	34 ^b	22.99	781.50
	Ties	14c		
	Total	56		
a. INF_LECTURER < INF_PEER				
b. INF_LECTURER > INF_PEER				
c. INF_LECTURER = INF_PEER				

To find out whether the peer assessment results are statistically and significantly different to lecturer assessment, the Wilcoxon Sign Ranks Test is used. The test results in Table 7 shows that there are differences between peer assessment and lecturer assessment, with the tendency for the lecturers to be rated higher. This is indicated by a value of $0.000 \, (p < 0.05)$.

The peer assessment results and perspectives can be considered dependent on and regarded beneficial when the learners can evaluate their peers objectively since they are required to engage one another to conduct peer evaluations. According to investigations carried out in two classrooms, Table 7. Test of Differences in Speech Scores from Peers and Lecturers

Test Statistics				
	INF_LECTURER - INF_PEER			
$\overline{\mathbf{Z}}$	-4.154 ^b			
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test				
b. Based on negative ranks.				

the learners experienced no issues providing assessments to their peers. They may also offer objective feedback and thoughts on the performance of their peers. Some instances of comments and opinions given include:

- (1) He delivers the speech fluently. The speaker also explains the topic clearly. He is also good at demonstrating the whole context of the topic.
- (2) She is so expressive. She is discussing the topic in the most relatable way for me. The speaker sounds kind of rushed in delivering the topic.
- (3) She delivers the speech clearly. She is confident enough. She pays attention to the articulation and it is good.
- (4) *She is brave enough to talk in front of the others. She needs to pay attention to her pronunciation.*
- (5) The materials are useful and comprehensive. She needs to use more gestures when explaining the material.
- (6) The slides are informative. He is very confident, and he speaks loudly and clearly.

The findings revealed that personal connections had little to no impact on peer evaluation outcomes. This can possibly be demonstrated through offering objective comments and thoughts. For example, in the research study, a learner stated that his peer was able to deliver a speech clearly, directly, and fluently. It was also suggested that his peers might provide background relevant to the issue being discussed. In another example, the learner noted that his peer was highly expressive yet straightforward in expressing the content of the speech. However, the learner also stated that his peer was too hustled in giving his remarks. Other comments and opinions provided include:

- (1) She chose an interesting topic. She explained her ideas clearly. Her pronunciation was good.
- (2) She needs to use more body language. Her pronunciation is quite good, but I don't really get her points.
- (3) I agree with her point about our class chairs and tables. She uses appropriate language. She needs to use more body language.
- (4) Her articulation is good, but she reads too much of the text.
- (5) The topic is quite interesting, but he was too focused on the text.
- (6) I like how he delivers his presentation because he knows when to pause in between utterances. Yet, his intonation is too monotonous.

The findings of this study provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into the effectiveness of peer assessment in evaluating speaking tasks in an academic context. Through reflective feedback, one student highlighted that a peer delivered a speech with excellent articulation and appeared confident. In contrast, another student noted that, despite their peer's confidence, improvement was needed in English pronunciation. A third student suggested that the use of body language would enhance an otherwise satisfactory speech, while a fourth student praised a peer's effective use of visual aids, particularly a PowerPoint presentation, and noted their clear and confident delivery. Another reflection emphasized a peer's ability to maintain excellent pronunciation and select engaging topics, but recommended more persuasive body language. Although a student's pronunciation was commended, some points in their speech were not fully grasped by their peer.

Other students provided feedback emphasizing strong articulation, but suggested reducing reliance on pre-prepared text and employing more varied vocal tones. These reflections underscore the diverse aspects of speaking performance that students consider in peer assessment.

The findings support the notion that peer assessment offers significant benefits to language learning. First, peer assessment can enhance motivation in learning English, as students feel motivated to improve their skills when their work is evaluated by peers (Adachi et al., 2018). Second, peer assessment fosters critical thinking, as students must critically engage with their peers' work to provide constructive evaluations (Joordens et al., 2009). Third, peer assessment promotes collaboration skills, encouraging students to work together in the assessment process. Finally, it has been shown to improve specific skills being assessed, particularly speaking ability. Research conducted at a university in the Netherlands confirmed that peer assessment positively influenced language proficiency, with students improving their speaking skills through both providing and receiving feedback. Moreover, peer assessment helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to address their deficiencies, particularly in speaking (Zuhriyah, 2017).

However, the quantitative analysis revealed a tendency for students to assign higher scores to their peers compared to those given by lecturers, suggesting potential reliability issues in peer assessment. This discrepancy echoes concerns raised by assessment scholars about the validity, reliability, and practicality of peer evaluations. Despite evidence supporting the effectiveness of peer assessment (De Grez, 2012; Pope, 2001), questions remain regarding its accuracy. In a meta-analysis comparing peer and teacher assessments, Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) expressed skepticism about peer assessment's reliability and validity, attributing the inconsistencies to several factors that require closer examination. Not all students may be adequately equipped to assess every aspect of their peers' performance, further complicating the reliability of peer evaluations.

Qualitative data analysis revealed generally positive outcomes for students engaging in peer assessment. Researchers argue that involving students in the assessment process can enhance learning opportunities (Leahy, 2005; Black et al., 2003). Peer assessment, in particular, encourages students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, integrates learning with assessment, and engages students in authentic activities that sharpen their evaluative judgment (Hargreaves et al., 2002). This aligns with broader efforts to shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogical models. Similarly, Shen, Bai, and Xue (2020) found that peer assessment enhanced learner autonomy in English classes, significantly reducing students' dependence on teachers and increasing their confidence in language learning. However, peer assessment may not have a direct impact on the learning strategies employed by students. Puspasari and Hudayani (2018) also identified peer assessment as an effective tool for fostering learner autonomy, particularly in EFL contexts.

While the peer assessments in this study revealed relatively low internal consistency for some components of speaking tasks, lecturer assessments exhibited greater reliability. Nevertheless, students generally expressed positive attitudes toward peer evaluation in the "Speaking in Academic Contexts" course. They found it beneficial for improving language skills and fostering learner autonomy, despite some challenges in consistency and reliability. These findings contribute to a growing body of literature on the role of peer assessment in language learning, highlighting its potential to enhance learner engagement, autonomy, and critical thinking. Peer assessments often diverge from lecturer assessments due to several underlying factors. One of the primary reasons is the differing levels of expertise and experience between students and instructors. Lecturers, who are more experienced in evaluating language proficiency and have a deeper understanding of assessment criteria, tend to apply these standards more consistently across various performances. In contrast, students may lack the necessary skills to fully comprehend or apply the assessment rubrics, leading to more lenient or inconsistent scoring. For instance, peers may focus more on surface-level features, such as confidence or the use of visual aids, while lecturers are more attuned to linguistic nuances like grammar, articulation, and the structural coherence of the speech.

Another reason for this divergence is the potential influence of personal relationships among students. Peer assessments can be influenced by social dynamics, where students may inflate scores to avoid conflict or maintain positive relations with their classmates. This tendency to assign higher scores, even when performance does not merit it, can distort the true measure of a student's ability.

The social aspect of peer assessment can lead to bias, as students might be less inclined to provide critical feedback to their peers, particularly when it comes to more subjective areas like vocal delivery or body language.

To improve the consistency between peer and lecturer assessments, the peer assessment process needs refinement. First, thorough training for students on how to use assessment rubrics effectively is essential. Educators should dedicate time to explain the criteria in detail, perhaps even engaging students in practice sessions where they evaluate sample performances together. This can help students develop a shared understanding of what constitutes a high or low score across different components, reducing discrepancies. Another adjustment could involve incorporating multiple rounds of peer assessment, where students evaluate the same performance multiple times, allowing for reflection and more informed scoring. Structured reflection sessions after each assessment can also encourage students to critically analyze their peer evaluations, thus reducing impulsive judgments.

Lastly, addressing potential biases in peer assessment is crucial for maintaining fairness and reliability. One approach is to anonymize peer assessments, where students do not know whose performance they are evaluating. This can reduce the impact of personal relationships on scoring. Additionally, educators can implement a combination of peer and self-assessment alongside lecturer evaluation to create a more balanced assessment framework. By triangulating these different sources of evaluation, it is possible to mitigate individual biases and create a more holistic view of each student's speaking abilities.

CONCLUSION

In light of the findings of data analysis and discussion, it is acceptable to conclude that, judged by the speaking task components, the outcomes of the speaking task peer assessment in the Speaking in Academic Context course demonstrate low internal consistency. However, the findings of the speaking task lecturer assessment demonstrate adequate internal consistency. Furthermore, students in the Speaking in Academic Context course experienced generally positive views concerning peer assessment.

In order to ensure the reliability of peer assessment in future research, instructors need to outline each component of peer assessment, including the tasks being assessed, their components, and assessment rubrics. Moreover, to address the issue of students' inability to critically evaluate assignments, lecturers might emphasize metacognitive steps and raise knowledge about their utilization. Then, reflective writing is considered to be necessary to disclose issues about students' attitudes and opinions adjacent to peer assessment.

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