



Exploring Students' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Peer Assessment: A Qualitative Study

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| <p>Received: 2026-04-06 Revised: 2026 04-09 Accepted: 2026 05-18</p> <p>Keywords: Critical Thinking; feedback; peer assessment; qualitative study; student perspective</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10066</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Nabila Chairunnisa nabilachairunnisa.2023@student.uny.ac.id Magister English Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta</p> | <p><i>Peer assessment has been widely implemented as an alternative assessment strategy to promote active learning and student engagement. However, its effectiveness remains debated, particularly from the students' perspectives. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of peer assessment using a qualitative approach. The participants consisted of graduate students who had experienced peer assessment in academic settings. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and analyzed using thematic analysis, including coding, categorizing, and interpreting emerging themes. The findings revealed that peer assessment provides several benefits, such as enhancing critical thinking, promoting collaborative learning, and offering diverse perspectives for improving students' work. However, challenges were also identified, including issues of trust, subjectivity, lack of expertise, and concerns about fairness in evaluation. The study highlights that the effectiveness of peer assessment is strongly influenced by students' confidence in their peers' abilities and the clarity of assessment guidelines. This research contributes to the existing literature by providing in-depth qualitative insights into students' experiences, addressing the gap in understanding the subjective dimensions of peer assessment. It is recommended that educators implement structured guidelines and provide training to optimize the effectiveness of peer assessment.</i></p> |

1. Introduction

Peer assessment has become an increasingly prominent strategy in modern educational practices, particularly in higher education. It shifts students' roles from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in the learning process. Through peer assessment, students evaluate each other's work, provide feedback, and engage with assessment criteria, which can foster deeper understanding and critical thinking. Peer assessment offers several pedagogical benefits. It promotes active learning, enhances students' critical thinking skills, and encourages collaborative engagement. By reviewing peers' work, students are exposed to diverse perspectives, which can enrich their understanding and improve the quality of their own work. Additionally, the process of giving feedback helps students develop evaluative judgment and reflective thinking, both of which are essential for higher-level academic learning.

However, despite these advantages, peer assessment also presents notable challenges. Issues related to subjectivity, bias, and fairness are frequently reported in the literature. Students may feel uncomfortable evaluating their peers, lack sufficient expertise, or be influenced by social relationships, which can affect the objectivity of their judgments. Concerns about trust and reliability further complicate the implementation of peer assessment, raising questions about its effectiveness as an assessment method.

Most prior studies emphasize quantitative outcomes, such as students' scores, reliability measures, and academic performance. While these studies provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of peer assessment, they often overlook the subjective and experiential dimensions of students' engagement in the process. In particular, limited attention has been given to how students perceive issues such as trust, fairness, and emotional responses when participating in peer assessment, especially in graduate-level contexts.

The need for a more in-depth qualitative exploration of students' perspectives is highlighted by this gap. Understanding these experiential dimensions is crucial, given that students' perceptions can significantly influence the success and acceptance of peer assessment practices. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perspectives on the effectiveness of peer assessment using a qualitative approach. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on graduate-level students. It also emphasises capturing rich, subjective experiences. This is in contrast to merely measuring outcomes. A deeper and more nuanced understanding of the role of peer assessment in higher education is contributed to by the qualitative insights that are provided into how it is perceived and experienced by students.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore students' perspectives on the effectiveness of peer assessment. A descriptive qualitative

approach was used to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations in depth. This design is appropriate as the study focuses on understanding subjective meanings rather than measuring variables quantitatively.

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on exploring and interpreting students' experiences with peer assessment. The research emphasizes meaning-making and thematic understanding derived from participants' responses.

Population and Sample

The participants of this study consisted of 15 graduate students enrolled in an English Education program at a public university. All participants had prior experience with peer assessment in academic settings.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide rich and relevant information related to the research topic. The selection criteria included:

- (1) having experienced peer assessment activities, and
- (2) being actively involved in academic coursework requiring peer assessment.

Out of 15 undergraduate students, 7 were selected who were willing to selected criteria. This ensured that participants could provide relevant and meaningful insights into the research topic.

Data Collection

Data were primarily collected through **open-ended questionnaires**, allowing participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely without restriction. The questionnaire included questions related to students' perceptions, experiences, challenges, and opinions about peer assessment.

Although interviews or focus group discussions (FGDs) could provide deeper insights, this study relied solely on questionnaires due to time and accessibility constraints. However, the open-ended format was designed to elicit detailed and reflective responses, partially compensating for the absence of follow-up interviews.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following several systematic steps:

1. Familiarization with the data

The researcher read and re-read all responses to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data.

2. Initial coding

Meaningful segments of data were identified and labeled with codes.

For example:

“I feel anxious to give objective scores” → anxiety in assessment

“It depends on who assesses my work” → dependence on peer competence

3. Generating themes

Related codes were grouped into broader categories and developed into themes.

For instance:

Codes such as anxiety, bias, and lack of confidence were categorized under the theme challenges in peer assessment.

4. Reviewing and refining themes

Themes were reviewed to ensure consistency, coherence, and relevance to the research objectives.

5. Interpreting themes

The final themes were interpreted to represent students’ perspectives on peer assessment in a meaningful and structured way.

This process enabled the researcher to identify patterns and construct a comprehensive understanding of participants’ experiences.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the study, several strategies were applied:

- **Credibility:** The researcher carefully reviewed participants’ responses and used direct quotations to accurately represent their perspectives.
- **Dependability:** A consistent coding process was maintained throughout the analysis.
- **Confirmability:** The researcher minimized personal bias by grounding interpretations in the data.
- **Reflexivity:** The researcher reflected on their own assumptions and potential influence on the research process to maintain objectivity.

Triangulation (limited): Although the study relied on a single data source (questionnaire), triangulation was partially achieved through comparing responses across multiple participants to identify consistent patterns.

3. Result & Discussion

The findings revealed seven major themes related to students’ perspectives on peer assessment: (1) students’ experiences and general perceptions, (2) assessment processes, (3) trust and fairness, (4) impact on learning, (5) challenges, (6) comparison with traditional assessment, and (7) the perceived importance of peer assessment.

1. Students Experience and General Perception of Peer Assessment

Students reported mixed initial reactions to peer assessment. Some expressed enthusiasm due to its novelty and interactive nature:

“I am kind of excited... it is different from general assessment” – Participant

A

However, others described neutral or negative experiences, including confusion and anxiety when evaluating peers:

“It was rather confusing and biased... I feel anxious” – Participant C

Students generally perceived peer assessment as beneficial for understanding course material and gaining new perspectives. However, its effectiveness was often seen as dependent on the competence of peers:

“It depends on who your partner is...” – Participant B

While many participants acknowledged benefits such as improved comprehension and constructive feedback, concerns about subjectivity and fairness remained evident.

Peer assessment is perceived as engaging and beneficial, but its effectiveness is highly dependent on peer competence and students' confidence in the process.

2.Student Processes and Mechanisms of Peer Assessment

Students described structured processes in conducting peer assessment, often using digital platforms such as Google Docs and anonymous systems. These tools were perceived to support more open and honest feedback:

“Anonymous will provide security and enforce neutrality...” – Participant D & E

In addition, students reported using guiding questions or criteria to provide more focused feedback. This helped them identify strengths and weaknesses in their peers' work and revise their own assignments accordingly.

Structured procedures and the use of digital tools play an important role in facilitating clearer, more focused, and less biased peer assessment.

3.Student Trust and Fairness in Peer Assessment

Trust emerged as a central issue in peer assessment. Many students expressed doubts about their peers' ability to provide accurate and fair evaluations:

“I think I do not rely on peer assessment...” – Participant F

Trust was strongly influenced by perceptions of peer competence. Students tended to trust feedback from more capable peers, but overall confidence remained moderate. In contrast, teacher assessment was still considered more objective and reliable.

Social factors also affected fairness. Some students reported pressure to give higher scores, which could compromise objectivity:

“Please give me a good score... that was so unfair” – Participant G

Students' perceptions of unfairness in peer assessment were largely influenced by their lack of confidence in their peers' understanding of the material and their ability to remain objective.

Limited trust in peer competence and social pressure significantly affect perceptions of fairness and reliability in peer assessment.

4. Peer Assessment Improving Student Learning

Despite the challenges, peer assessment was widely perceived as beneficial for learning. Students reported that it helped them gain new insights, improve their work, and develop critical thinking skills:

“It can give me new insights to revise my paper” – Participant A&B

Peer assessment can be a valuable tool in teaching and learning, as it allows students to improve their work through diverse perspectives and constructive feedback.

Providing feedback also encouraged deeper analysis and reflection:

“It enhances me to think critically...” – Participant C

Additionally, peer assessment promoted collaboration by enabling students to exchange ideas and support each other’s learning.

Peer assessment enhances critical thinking, reflection, and collaborative learning through exposure to diverse perspectives.

5. The Challenges in Peer Assessment

Several challenges were identified, particularly related to subjectivity and lack of expertise. Students often struggled to provide objective evaluations and felt uncertain about their judgments:

“Sometimes it’s too subjective...” – Participant E

Emotional factors, such as guilt when giving low scores, also influenced assessment decisions:

“I feel bad if I give small points...” – Participant D&E

These issues highlight the difficulty of maintaining objectivity and consistency in peer evaluation.

Subjectivity, limited expertise, and emotional factors are major barriers to effective peer assessment.

6. The Comparison of Peer to Traditional Assessment

Students generally viewed peer assessment and teacher assessment as complementary. While peer assessment supports learning and reflection, teacher assessment is perceived as more objective and reliable:

“I don’t think it’s better than traditional one” – Participant G

Some participants emphasized the importance of combining both methods to achieve more balanced evaluation outcomes.

“Peer assessment can improve understanding of work; it is not superior to traditional assessment methods. The teacher/lecturer must know if the pupils are

capable of evaluating their friends or not.” – Participant C&D

Peer assessment is valued as a learning tool, but traditional assessment remains preferred for formal evaluation due to its perceived objectivity.

7. The Importance of Peer Assessment

Students expressed mixed views regarding the importance of peer assessment. Some considered it valuable for gaining different perspectives and improving objectivity:

“It can give a fresh perspective...” – Participant B&C

However, others questioned its consistency and effectiveness in certain situations.

“I think yes, sometimes. But, not always” – Participant D

Students have mixed views on peer assessment, recognizing its positive aspects such as added objectivity, different perspectives, and the opportunity for students to help one another. However, they also acknowledge challenges like potential errors and ineffectiveness in certain situations.

Peer assessment is perceived as valuable but context-dependent, with its importance varying based on implementation and student trust.

4. Discussion

Peer assessment exemplifies this shift by positioning students as active participants in their learning, promoting critical thinking, self-reflection, and constructive feedback—key elements of deeper learning. This study highlights that peer assessment functions not only as an instructional strategy but also as a socially embedded practice shaped by students' perceptions, relationships, and levels of competence. While the findings confirm that peer assessment promotes critical thinking, collaboration, and reflective learning, its effectiveness is strongly influenced by how students perceive trust, fairness, and the capability of their peers (Smith et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2020).

The key findings identified the interconnected nature of trust, fairness, and competence in shaping students' experiences. Rather than functioning as separate factors, these elements form a single evaluative framework through which students judge the credibility of peer assessment. When students perceive their peers as lacking sufficient knowledge or expertise, trust decreases, which in turn leads to doubts about fairness and objectivity. This suggests that competence is a foundational factor that directly influences both trust and perceived fairness.

The issue of trust in peer assessment can be further understood through social and psychological dynamics. Students do not operate in isolation; instead, they are influenced by peer relationships, classroom hierarchies, and social expectations. For instance, peer pressure and interpersonal relationships may lead students to give inflated scores or avoid critical feedback to maintain harmony.

Additionally, feelings of anxiety, guilt, and fear of judgment can limit students' willingness to provide honest evaluations (To & Panadero, 2019). These findings indicate that trust issues are not solely caused by a lack of skill, but also by the complex social environment in which peer assessment takes place.

This study also suggests that the perceived subjectivity of peer assessment is closely linked to students' lack of confidence in their evaluative abilities (Johnson et al., 2023). Without sufficient training or clear criteria, students may rely on personal judgment or emotional considerations rather than objective standards. This aligns with previous research highlighting that structured guidance and feedback literacy are essential to improving the quality and reliability of peer assessment. Therefore, the effectiveness of peer assessment depends not only on the method itself but also on how well students are prepared to engage in evaluative practices.

Despite these challenges, peer assessment demonstrates significant value as a learning tool (Martinez et al., 2023). The findings show that engaging in both giving and receiving feedback encourages deeper cognitive processing, reflection, and exposure to multiple perspectives. This reinforces the idea that peer assessment contributes more strongly to learning processes than to summative evaluation accuracy.

In this sense, peer assessment should be positioned as a complementary approach rather than a replacement for teacher-led assessment (Brown et al., 2023). This study contributes to the existing literature by providing **qualitative insights into the subjective and experiential dimensions** of peer assessment, particularly at the graduate level. While prior studies have predominantly focused on quantitative outcomes such as reliability and performance, this research reveals how emotional factors, social relationships, and perceived competence shape students' engagement with peer assessment. This highlights that the success of peer assessment cannot be fully understood through measurable outcomes alone but must also consider students' lived experiences.

The findings also offer several practical implications. For **teachers**, it is important to provide clear guidelines, assessment criteria, and training to help students develop evaluative skills and reduce subjectivity. Incorporating anonymous systems and structured rubrics may also minimize social pressure and bias. For **assessment design**, combining peer assessment with teacher assessment can create a more balanced and reliable evaluation system, where peer assessment supports learning and teacher assessment ensures objectivity.

At the level of **higher education policy**, institutions should recognize the importance of developing students' feedback literacy and provide support for implementing structured peer assessment practices within the curriculum.

Overall, this study emphasizes that peer assessment is not merely a technical assessment tool, but a complex social and cognitive process. Its effectiveness depends on the interaction between students' competence, trust, and social

dynamics, which must be carefully considered in its implementation (Pérez & Juste, 2020).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that peer assessment has significant potential to enhance students' learning by promoting critical thinking, collaboration, and reflective practices. However, its effectiveness is not absolute and is influenced by factors such as students' confidence, clarity of assessment criteria, and perceived fairness. The findings suggest that without proper structure and guidance, peer assessment may lead to subjectivity and mistrust among students.

Therefore, it is essential for educators to implement peer assessment with clear guidelines, adequate training, and supportive mechanisms to ensure fairness and reliability. By addressing these challenges, peer assessment can serve as a valuable complement to traditional assessment methods and contribute to more meaningful learning experiences.

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