The Effect of Peer-Assessment Method in Enhancing Iraqi EFL University Students' Language Ability

اثر استخدام طريقة تقييم النظيرفي تعزيز القدرة اللغوية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين الدارسين للانجليزية بوصفها لغة اجنبية

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Abstract

The present study aims at finding outthe effect of using peer assessment method on enhancing Iraqi university EFL students'language ability. To fulfillthe aim of this study, forty fourth- year students were selected to be the sample of the present study. Twenty students were enrolled in an experimental group that received instruction on peer-assessment. The other twenty students were enrolled in a control groupwhich was instructed on self-assessment. To collect data,apre-posttest technique was used.The findings indicate that the experimental group subjects'performance inspeaking has been found to be better than that of the control group in the post-test.In the light of the results obtained,it is concluded that peer-assessmentis effective inenhancing language ability ofIraqi EFL learners.

Key words: EFL learners, peer-assessment,self-assessment.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem and its Significance

Assessment is considered as any method, strategy, or tool a teacher may use to collect evidence about student progress toward achievement of established goals. It is a process of collecting information and gathering evidence about what students have learned (Chen, 2003: 51)

It is confirmed that, in educational systems, assessment is an inevitable ingredient because it may influence learning, and when made authentic it provides feedback and revision to improve learning. Furthermore, through meaningful engagement of students in the learning

process, assessment can affect motivation. Assessment would also enhance instruction by helping the teacher recognize students' weaknesses and strengths. Assessments can also be made valid, fair, ethical, feasible, and efficient tools for learning using multiple measures (Mousavi, 2012:97).

Indeed, the field of assessment and evaluation witnessed a remarkable progressto shift from the so-called traditional era to the alternative (or authentic) one. As a result, new practices and techniques flourished in the field, aiming at improving the learning and teaching processes. Applying the new assessment practices inside classroom, teachers' role became more cooperative than being controlling in the classroom, and students started to take some responsibility for their learning. The learners' passive roles,as being novices merely receiving knowledge from experts (i.e teachers), have been changed into more interactiveones(Anderson, 1998: 8). Among the new practices of alternative assessment, being focused upon in this study is peer assessment.Besides being an assessment tool, peer assessment is found to be an effective instructional tool as well.

Previous studies (Topping, 1998; Andrade, 2000; Jonsson and Svingby, 2007; Naksuhara, 2007; White, 2009; Reddy and Andrade, 2010; Raza, 2011) found peer assessment practices to be successful in improving both the learning and teaching processes.

In the viewof the positive effect ofpeer assessment in EFL classroom, this study concentrates on the use of peer assessment practicesto see to what extent they are beneficial in developing Iraqi learners' language ability.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The present study aims **atshowing** the effect of peer-assessment method in enhancing Iraqi EFL university students' language ability (speaking skill).

1.3 Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that Peer-assessment does not have any significant different effect on EFL students' speaking skill.

1.4Limits of the Study

This study is limited to:

Iraqi EFL advanced students/ Department of English/ College of Education/University of Al-Qadissiya during the academic year 2015-2016.

The prescribed textbook "A Language Teacher's Guide to Assessment" by NejatAhmed (2000).
The skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

1.5 Value of the Study

It is hoped that this study will be of value in the following aspects:

1. It can be useful in providing Iraqi EFL university students with new strategies and techniques that help them to improve their   oral proficiency and to promote autonomy in language use in speaking classes.
2. It can help the curriculum developers, syllabus designers in general and course designers and university professors in particular to pay more attention to students' needs.
3. In fact, such a study was of primary significance and benefit to the researchers in getting training in the use of rubrics, how peer assessment works and techniques of teaching conversation, in addition to having a close view of students' performance in classroom.
4. It is also expected to help instructors develop appropriate methodologies in teaching English.

1.6   Procedures

To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted by the researcher to collect data:

1. Selecting a sample of fourth year students at the College of Education and dividing them into control and experimental groups.
2. Applying a pre-post speaking test based on IELTS on the sample of the study.
3. Using a suitable rubric.
4. Data collected are analyzed, and suitable statistical methods are used to calculate results.
5. Finding out results and stating conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1Definitions of Peer-Assessment

Peer-assessment can be defined as the process in which the readers critically reflect upon, and perhaps suggest grades for the learning of their peers (Robert, 2006:80).

In the same way, Falchikov (2005: 27) states that in peer-assessment "students use criteria and apply standards to the work of their peers in order to judge that work".

White (2009:4) defines peer-assessment as a process by which learners take the responsibility of evaluatingtheir peers' performance through their own capabilities withregard to assigned goal and its effect on their relationshipwith their peers.

According to Topping (2010: 62), peer-assessment is "an arrangement for learners to considerand specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-statuslearners"

Peer assessment therefore is a process wherebystudents assess assignments or tests of their peers based on teacher's benchmark or instructionalrubrics (Sadler and Good, 2006:20).

2.2 Self-assessment

According to Bound (1995:31),self-assessment is that kind of assessment which requires students to reflect on their own work and judge how well they have performed in relation to the assessment criteria.

ForHedge (2000:94), self-assessment is an attractive alternative to traditional forms of assessment. It is a kind of metacognitive strategy which deserves special attention. Also, it helps students develop the characteristics of the "good language learner, which involves the ability to assess their own performance and the ability to be self-critical"

Moreover,self-assessmentis a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on and evaluate the quality of their work and their learning, judge the degree to which they reflect explicitly stated goals or criteria, identify strengths and weaknesses in their work, and revise accordingly (Andrade and Du, 2007:160).

2.3Traditional Assessment and Alternative Assessment

The term "alternative assessment"can be referred to as any method of examining what students know or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction. It is an alternative to traditional forms of testing, namely multiple-choice test (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996:1).

"Alternative assessment" is interchangeably used by researchers as with the term "authentic assessment". To this point, "alternative assessment" is by definitioncriterion-referenced and is typically authentic because it is based onactivities that represent classroom and life-long settings (ibid: 2).

Lombardi (2008:4).mentions that ashift from traditional assessment to alternativeassessment started in the United States' public k-12 schools as a substitutefor the standardized tests. There, teachers were encouraged to

use thepractices of alternative assessment to evaluate the real learning of thechildren in authentic situations.

Actually,it has been asserted that the need to shift from traditional assessment towards alternativeassessment is being highly appreciated in educational development. Byconnecting teaching, learning, and assessment, alternative assessment isseen to promote students' learning and help teachers to be "fair,thoughtful, and creative when assessing students' work" (Anderson,1998:13). In this regard, Lombardi (2008:3) points out that such a shift occurreddue to several factors, among which he lists "economic conditions, new scholarship on learning, and a student population with new expectationsof educational institutions."

2.4 TheImportance of Peer-assessment

Shepard (2000:6) points out thatpeer-assessmentis one of the effectiveapproaches for classroom evaluation , it is considered as an opportunity for studentsas learning facilitator and also used as a tool for instructors to obtain a more clear andobvious picture of learner's performance.

ForNilson(2003:35), Peer learning and assessment are quite effective in terms of developing students' criticalthinking, communication, lifelong learning and collaborative skills.

Pedagogically, peer-assessment improves learning of student through "a sense of ownership and responsibility, motivation, and reflection of the students 'own learning" (Saito andFujita, 2009: 151).

Additionally,Peer assessment has a vital role in increasing the amount of feedback, promoting higher order thinking and enhancing students' sense of ownership, responsibility and students'motivation (Cheng and Warren, 2005:95; Sivan, 2000:197).

Peerassessment is considered as a very useful techniquesince it can prevent the effect of free-riders; in other words, it is a good way to distinguish individual contributions from group products(Johnston and Miles, 2004:757; Li, 2001:10).

Brown (2004:74) mentions that peer assessment is advantageous to students since it has the most evident characteristic which is cooperative learning.

Concerningthe importance of implementing peer evaluation inEFL classes, Min (2006:118) emphasizes that this has empirically been proven to beadvantageous to EFL learners from "cognitive, affective, social, and linguistic" perspectives. In otherwords, when students are involved in the process of peer evaluation, they get more opportunities to develop

theircritical thinking, enhance their learning and understanding of the criteria of evaluation, and improve their social andcommunicative skills.

It has been asserted that Peer-assessmentserves students by offering opportunity to observe and compare peers' works, emulate the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of other people. It also help students keep track of their fellow students'learning outcomes, providing powerful impetus to make progress and perform better.Moreover, students become aware of the quality of their own work (BouzidiandJaillet, 2009:258; Yang and Tsai, 2010:76).

Barbera (2009:342)emphasizes that peer feedback to some extent is more influential and powerful than teacher feedback; therefore, the integration of self- or peer-assessment will effectively increase students' involvement, motivation and incentives.

3. Methodology

3.1The Experimental Design

An experimental designis the general plan for carrying out a study with an active independent variable. Due to the nature and aim of the present study, the Nonrandomized Control Group Pretest – Posttest Design has been used. Nunan and Bailey (2009:98) show that this design presents the selection of two groups and assigning them to an experimental and a control group. The independent variable is administrated to the experimental group only. A post-test is administrated to both groups to measure the dependent variables.

3.2 Population and Sample of the Study

The population of this study consists of Iraqi Advanced students.The sample is fourth year studentsat the Department of English Language, College of Education, Al-Qadissiya University during the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016.Out of four sections,(40)students are selected randomly to be the sample of the study. They are divided into two groups, one experimentalgroup (applying peer-assessment) and one control group (applying self-assessment).Each group includes(20) students.

3.3The Pilot Test

Prior to the main experimental work of the study, the researcher needed to conduct a pilot study focusing on the application of peer assessment, the analytic rubric inside the classroom of conversation classes with a sample of the target participants andto estimate the time allotted for each student for responding to the test. The

pilot administration of the test has been carried out on 14th of March. It has been applied on (20) fourth- year students/ Department of English/ College of Education/University of Al-Qadissiyah during the academic year 2015-2016. It has been found that the time allotted for answering the test for each student is 14 minutes.

The interview technique was followed along the pilot study for which theresearcher created handouts in different topics (advertisements, sports, fashion, shopping, technology, and liberty).

3.4 The Pre- Test

The t – test formula has been used to ensure whether there is any statistically significant difference between the scores of the experimental and control groups in the pre-test. The mean score is 31.7 for the experimental group, and 30.3 for the control group. The computed t-value is 0.037 which is less than the table t- value 2.000 under48 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in their scores of the pretest (see Table 1).

Table (1) T-Values of the Experimental and the Control Subjects' Performance in the Speaking Pre-test

Groups	No. of Subjects	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degree of Freedom	t-Value		Significance Level at 0.05
					Computed Value	Table Value	
Experimental	20	31.7	2.631	48	0.037	2.000	Not Significant
Control	20	30.3	4.001				

3.5Instruments of the Study

A speaking test based on IELTS (see Appendix A) was used to collect the necessary data at the beginning and at the end of the experiment. The assignments involved in the pre-posttests areactivities such as talking about hometown, animals, travel, and the environment. Data are analyzed by using SPSS system.

To achieve objectivity and reliability, the researcher has adopted a Peer-assessment rating scaleproposed by Patri (2002: 128) (see Appendix B).

The subjects' performance was assessed by two scorers* for both pre and post tests. To ensure the reliability of the rating process, interscorers reliability was computed. It was roughly 0.86 which appeared as an acceptable value of inter-rater reliability.

*The scorers are: 1.The researcher himself.. 2.Assist.prof...SaadiyahWdaahHasan/College of Education/University of Al-Qadissiya

3.6 The Experimental Application

The experiment started on 11th of April, 2015 and lasted for four weeks during the academic year 2015-2016, to end up on the 4th of May, 2016. The lectures have been arranged on Mondays andWednesdays.Two hours a week have been allotted.

3.7 Procedures

At the beginning of the treatment; namely in the first lecture, the researcher (the teacher himself) clarified to the students of the study the procedure they will be enrolled in.The two groups had a pre-test which measured the students' language ability of oral presentation(speaking skill) Then, in the self and peer-assessment groups, the students were trained on how to assess themselves as well as their peers, respectively.While in the peer-assessment group (experimental group), the students were required to listen to their peers, take notes and comment on their speaking(see Appendix C), in the self-assessment group (control group), they were instructed to record their own speaking, transcribe it and comment on it(see Appendix D). After the teaching period, the students in both groups were given a similar version of speaking test as a post-test.

3.8 The Post-Test

At the end of the instruction period, the students of the experimental and the control groups have been post-tested on 9th of May, 2016.The purpose of the post- test was to evaluate the effect of the instructional technique(peer-assessment) on the experimental group subjects' speaking performance in comparison with that of control group subjects who have been instructed to self-assessment.

4 .Results and Discussion

By using t- test for two independent samples, at 0.05 level of significance and 48 degree of freedom, it has been found that the mean score of the experimental group is 42 and that of the control group is

32.7.The computed t-value 3.66is higher than the table t- value 2.000 (seeTable2).

Table (2) T-Values of the Experimental and the Control Subjects'
Performance in the Speaking Post-test

Groups	No. of Subjects	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degree of Freedom	t-Value		Table Value	Significance Levelat 0.05
					Computed	Value		
Experimental	20	42	7.416	48	3.66		2.000	Not Significant
Control	20	32.7	3.279					

This result shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in speaking performance in favour of the experimental group. Thus, the hypothesis which states that "Peer-assessment does not have any significant different effect on EFL Students' speaking skill" is rejected. The results of the present study demonstrate that peer-assessment has a stronger significant effect in enhancing learners' language ability.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded thatpeer-assessment positively effects students' language ability. When Peer-assessment strategy is properly used by teachers, the academic performance of the students will be improved. Moreover, it is evident that peer-assessment has a significant role in promoting autonomy in language use especially in speaking classes.It means that students can learn more from each other than they their own judgment. Moreover, the alternative practices helped creating an interactive student-centered classroom with highly motivated students.

ملخص البحث

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى ايجاد اثر استخدام طريقة تقييم النظير في تعزيز القدرة اللغوية لدى الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين للانجليزية بوصفها لغة اجنبية. ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة،تم اختيار اربعون طالب وطالبة من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة لتكون عينة

الدراسة.انخرط عشرون منهم في مجموعة تجريبية تلقت تدريسا بشان تقييم النظير،بينما انخرط العشرون طالبا الاخرون في مجموعة ضابطة تم فيها استخدام تقييم الذات .ولجمع البيانات،تم استخدام استراتيجيةالاختبار القبلي– البعدي.وقد بينت النتائج بان اداء طلبة المجموعة التجريبية في التكلم اعلى من اداء اقرانهم في المجموعة الضابطة في الاختبار البعدي.وفي ضوء النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها،يمكن التوصل الى ان طريقة تقييم النظير اثبتت اثرها في تعزيز القدرة اللغويةلدى الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين للانجليزية بوصفها لغة اجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: متعلمي اللغةالانجليزية بوصفها لغة اجنبية،تقييم النظير، تقييم الذات .

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Appendix (A)
Speaking Test
PART 1
Time: 4-5 minutes

Now, in this first part of the test I'm going to ask you some questions about yourself.

First I'd like to ask about your hometown.

1. What kind of place is your hometown?
2. Tell me about the most interesting place in your hometown.
3. What changes would you like to make to your hometown?

Now let's move on to talk about animals.

1. What kinds of animals are popular pets in your country? Why?
2. How are animals in your country used for work?
3. Are there any animals in your country that have special significance?

Let's talk about travel.

1. How easy is it to travel in your country?
2. What form of transport is the most popular? Why?
3. Are there any parts of your country that are difficult to travel to? Why / Why not?

PART 2

Time: 3-4 minutes

Now, I'm going to give you a topic and I'd like you to talk about it for 1-2 minutes.

Before you talk you'll have one minute to think about what you are going to say and you can make notes if you wish. Do you understand?

Ok, here's some paper and a pencil to make notes, and here is your topic.

I'd like you to describe an environmental problem that has occurred in your country.

> Describe an environmental problem that has occurred in your country.
> You should say:
> The cause of the problem
> What effect it has had on your country
> The steps, if any, that have been taken to solve this
> Explain why you think this problem is so important to solve.

Follow up questions:
  1. Are other people concerned about this problem?
  2. Do you talk about it with your friends?

PART 3

Time: 4-5 minutes

We've been talking about an environmental problem in your country, and I'd now like to ask you some questions related to this.

First, let's consider global environmental problems.
  1. Tell me about some of the environmental problems that are affecting countries these days?
  2. Do you think that governments around the world are doing enough to tackle the problems?
  3. Why do some people not consider environmental problems to be serious?

Now we'll look at environmental problems and disasters caused by humans.
  1. What do you consider to be the world's worst environmental disaster caused by humans?

2. Why do you think environmental disasters caused by humans happen?
3. Do you think there will be more environmental disasters caused by humans in the future?

Appendix (B)
PEER-ASSESSMENT RATING SCALE

Name: _____

Topic: _____

Date: _____

Rate your colleague by using the scale:

PoorUnsatisfactory Satisfactory GoodExcellent

1 2 3 4 5

A. Introduction

1. Topic sentence - appropriate?   1 2 3 4 5

2. Topic sentence - interesting?   1 2 3 4 5

3. Opinion on the issue - clearly stated?   1 2 3 4 5

B. Body

4. Details supporting the main points - sufficient?   1 2 3 4 5

5. Details supporting the main points - relevant?   1 2 3 4 5

C. Conclusion   1 2 3 4 5

6. The main points - summarized?

        1 2 3 4 5

D. Language use 1 2 3 4 5

7. Grammar - accurate?   1 2 3 4 5

8. Fluency   1 2 3 4 5

9. Pronunciation - words clearly pronounced?

10. Vocabulary - appropriate?

E. Manner   1 2 3 4 5

11. Confidence (not nervous)   1 2 3 4 5

12. Confidence (depended very little on my notes)   1 2 3 4 5

13. Eye contact

F. Interaction

14. Non-verbal interaction with the audience (facial expressions, gestures)   1 2 3 4 5

15. Verbal interaction (involving the audience during the talk by asking 1 2 3 4 5 questions and encouraging them to respond)

Appendix (C)
Sample Lesson Plan-TheExperimental Group

Subject: Peer -assessment
Class: Fourth -Year
Topic: Lack of friends means, stranger in one's own country
Instruction Objectives: The students are required to assess their peers
Procedures:

1. The researcher gives the students the freedom to choose their peers along the empirical study.
2. The researcher enhances the motivation inside the classroom and creates a student-centered class.
3. The researcher creates different topics to be discussed by students.
4. The researcher explains for students how to assess their peers and how to use rubric.
5. In each lecture, a list of strategies is written on the board including statements of how to start and end a discussion, agreeing and disagreeing, asking for and giving opinions.
6. While the students are askedto peer assess their mates, the researcher observes and video-records them without participating in the discussion.The researcher's role is primarily a facilitator and an advisor when a discussion breaks down,and an active listener and observer of students' performance.
7. Videos were used by the researcher inassessing their proficiency levels according to the rubric that wasdesigned and shared with the students in the empirical study.
8. The researcher showed the students their videos and asked them to criticize their own performance. Giving the students authentic products of their own helped in

enhancing their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.

Appendix (D)
Sample Lesson Plan-The Control Group

Subject: Self -assessment

Class: Fourth -Year

Topic: Lack of friends means, stranger in one's own country

Instruction Objectives:The students are required to assess themselves.

Procedures:

1. Different topics are suggested to be discussed by students.
2. Students are required to assess their own performance by using suitable rubric.
3. The researcher clarifies for students how to assess themselves and how to use rubric.
4. The students are instructed to record their own speaking, transcribe it and comment on it.
5. The researcher observes, listens and finally assesses the students' performance.