

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS PEER ASSESSMENT IN AN ONLINE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Research purpose. Peer assessment has been used for the last thirty years as a way to implement learner centered teaching and learning in different fields of study and all study cycles. In the context of foreign languages, it has often been employed as a method helping students to improve their linguistic performance. To be more precise, most of the time it has been used for the assessment of written production in order to help improve it (formative assessment). This study aimed to learn university students' attitudes towards peer assessment of oral production in their English classes being delivered online due to the continuing pandemic situation. It focused on university students' experience of being assessors.

Keywords: EFL, oral skills, peer assessment, university students

Research Methodology. The study involved Vytautas Magnus University students studying general English at upper-intermediate level online in 2021. Most of the participants were first and second year (first cycle) students aged 20 to 21. They were from various study programmes but studied English as an obligatory study subject. The research was both qualitative and quantitative. It used online peer assessment forms, which the students who were assessors filled in to evaluate their peers' oral production (at least several times in the course), and an online questionnaire with open and closed questions that the assessors filled in after peer assessment in order to reflect on their experience of being assessors (the questionnaire was filled in once to reflect on their overall experience).

Results / Findings. The study showed that the students liked assessing their peers' oral production because it helped them to improve their own oral production, encouraged to be more focused in their English classes, participate more actively and understand better what was required of them when their own oral production was evaluated. On the other hand, a significant part of all the students who were assessors felt stressed because peer assessment was a challenging experience, especially when they felt they were not very proficient in English or were under pressure to give what they considered to be "correct" grades to their peers. In addition, some students did not feel comfortable while being assessors because they had been used to being assessed by their teachers.

Originality / Practical implications. The findings show that university students do not have much experience of peer assessment in their English as a foreign language classroom. It may mean that peer assessment is not as common as it used to be and could be used more often, since it brings numerous benefits. However, peer assessment of oral production seems to be challenging. Consequently, a lot more time should be spent on student training before using peer assessment.