# Key Principles of Peer Assessment in ESP Instruction

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## Abstract

*The target goal of the current paper is to thoroughly analyze and introduce the key principles of peer assessment in ESP instruction. Peer assessment is one of the tools of formative assessment and in ESP instruction it can be implemented in the following ways: learner-learner, group to group, learner to group and group to learner. Thanks to peer assessment students learn the strengths and weaknesses of their work, mistakes, and if necessary, receive additional tasks and assignments to fill in the gaps. It is important that the course mate or colleague (in various occupational ESP contexts), provides feedback that promotes the learner's progress. It will help the ESP learner to evaluate his learning process and set new outcomes for him in the ESP course. It is also essential that the student conducting peer review be objective when evaluating the work of his/her classmates. Along with other measures, peer assessment contributes to the improvement of the quality of professional language education and requires personal responsibility, reflection on one's own learning, the validity of the observations made, and, as a result, self-evaluation. Thus, when conducting peer assessment, a collaborative classroom environment should be provided, and appropriate qualities and learning/teaching attitudes should be formed in the learners. Before conducting peer assessment, the teacher must select a task and provide a grading scale for that task with criteria. The ESP course will be more successful if the standards for task evaluation are developed together with the learners via co-construction strategy.*

**Keywords**: *ESP, peer assessment, reflection, validity, progress.*

The idea of students' involvement in the evaluation of their academic achievement is not new. Even though many researchers have recognized peer assessment as a valuable tool for assessment and learning in education, it is underestimated, and its' strategies are not widely applied in Higher Educational Institutions. Based on our research goals we are determined to thoroughly analyse and introduce the key principles of peer assessment in ESP courses in the light of communicative language instruction.

Peer assessment is basically defined as 'the process whereby groups of individuals rate their peers who are students of equal status [6]. This process may or may not entail previous discussion or agreement over criteria. It may involve the use of rating instruments or checklists, which have been designed by others, before the peer assessment exercise, or designed by the user group to meet their particular needs. Peer assessment has also been suggested to be a way of evaluating the quality or success of either a person or a product by [5]. Therefore, peer assessment feeds self-assessment activities particularly through the cycle of receiving and giving feedback. Students often undertake peer assessment in conjunction with formal self-assessment at university. They reflect on their own efforts and enrich this reflection by exchanging feedback on their own and their peers' work.

Thus, peer assessment in ESP context is an important aspect of "assessment for learning" practice. A person learns mostly only those things, which they are involved in. Peer assessment engages the ESP students in the learning process and develops their capacity to reflect on and critically evaluate their own learning and skill development. It supports the development of critical thinking, interpersonal skills, as well as enhancing understanding within the subject-specific field of knowledge of the specialty. Peer and group assessment are often undertaken at the same time. Normally, as in a business environment, the members of a group assess the performance of their peers in

terms of their contribution to the group's overall work. The main objective of this process is to provide opportunity for students to identify what work is considered to be good or bad rather than simply generate grades. Peer assessment promotes profound learning as students can compare new subject-specific knowledge with previously learnt one and discover new levels of the professional field comprehension.

It is where students use criteria and apply standards to the work of their peers to identify strengths, weaknesses, and area that require improvement; thus, it helps the students to develop their understanding of the Intended Learning Outcomes and the assessment criteria. To develop the skills and competences required in a professional environment, university students must reflect on their own performance in the learning process.

Developing effective peer assessment takes time and effort. However once fully embedded in learning and teaching, these assessment strategies can be particularly effective in boosting learning motivation, particularly in an ESP course, the effectiveness of which is exceptionally based on the learner motivation and profound integration in the course instruction.

An effective starting point for the ESP teacher is to model the process of peer assessment and feedback, for example how to give feedback, that is constructive, detailed, linked to assessment criteria, objective, focused, based on subject-specific arguments, etc. The theoretical grounding for peer assessment revealed the following general principles of peer assessment which are critical to an ESP course in terms of effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment [4].

- The purpose for using peer assessment should be explicit for staff and students.
- Peer assessment should contribute to summative assessment, as it has a major role in student skill development, in enhancing learning, and in helping students to improve their performance on assessed work.
- Moderation: for any situation in which the mark from peer assessment contributes towards the final mark of the module, the ESP teacher should maintain the right to moderate student allocated marks through negotiation.
- Instances of unfair or inappropriate marking need to be dealt with sensitively.
- The quality of feedback on student work must be maintained.
- Assessment procedures should always involve use of well-defined, publicly available assessment criteria. This is particularly important in cases where inexperienced assessors (students) are involved. The assessment criteria may be developed by the ESP teacher, but greater value is gained from the procedure if students are involved in developing the criteria themselves (co-construction).
- Involvement of students in assessment needs careful planning.
- Peer assessment procedures should be subject to particularly careful monitoring and evaluation either from the ESP teacher's or ESP students' point of view. It can take time for such procedures to run smoothly and for this reason, the initial involvement of relatively few marks - or solely formative assessment is wise. Student feedback to the ESP teacher on the procedure is more important.
- The use of peer assessment should be recognised as skill development. Such procedures are not just another means of assessment, but represent the development of self-appraisal, evaluative, analytical, critical and reflective skills, which are important as employability skills and can be recognised in the learning outcomes of a course description. Assessment criteria may require more description in order to be better and more consistently understood by markers and to meet the expectations of the learners at different levels.

Principles of peer assessment criteria development for an ESP course may vary depending on the type of communication: learner-learner, group to group, learner to group and group to learner.

For the **group-to-group** peer assessment of ESP learners' oral presentation these criteria may be based on the following list of ideas: audibility, pace, fluency, tone and energy, appropriateness to the

audience, structure and cohesion, use of visual aids, content, argument, creativity, team-functioning, and some other factors which have been introduced below [3]:

**Fig.1.**



**Learner-to-learner** peer assessment criteria for ESP oral presentation are based on the following factors: effective communication, planning, learning criteria understanding, listening, empathy, adapting, conflict resolution, leadership and delegation, constructive criticism and self-awareness, personal accountability, work quality, work quantity, etc.

From another point of view, principles of peer assessment criteria development for ESP course may vary, whether peer assessment is product-oriented or process-oriented or both: product-and-process-oriented procedure. In the two examples mentioned and illustrated above we deal with product-and-process-oriented type of peer assessment.

**Product-oriented peer assessment** evaluates actual student / group performance through products they create, such as completed projects, that demonstrate the level of task achievement. Products can include a wide range of student/group works that target different subject-specific areas and skill/s. And learning competences associated with products or outputs are linked with an assessment of the level of "expertise" manifested by the product.

**Process-oriented peer assessment** is concerned with the actual task performance rather than the output or product of an activity. The learning objectives in the process-oriented peer assessment are stated in direct observable behaviours of the students demonstrating a range of abilities from beginner to expert levels. Tasks should highlight the competences to be evaluated, involve similar objectives, and be interesting for students.

**Product-and-process-oriented peer assessment** evaluates either the learning process, such as demonstrations, presentations, experiments, role-playing, or tangible final products like reports, projects, and drawings. In the backgrould of the reasons for choosing among these three types of peer assessment lie the a number of skills (highlighted below) which may in certain cases be more critical and thus, prevail than the others.

**Fig. 2.**
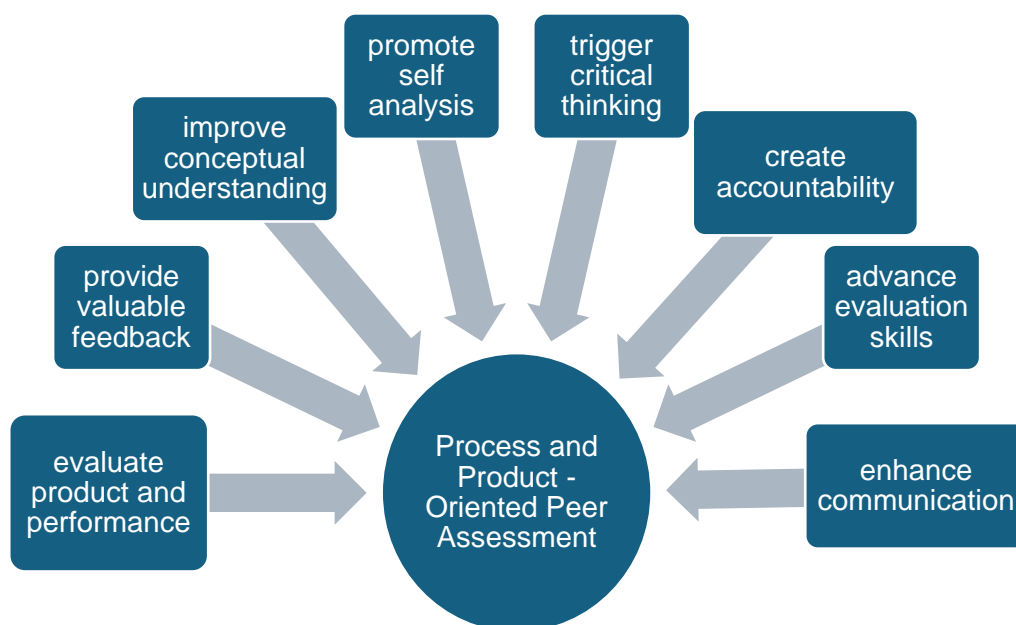


So the principle of choosing among the three types of peer assessment is conditioned by the learning outcomes specified by the ESP teacher for that particular ESP course. For example, project-based learning model, which is widely used in ESP instruction is a wonderful method which allows students to be actively involved in constructing knowledge using their potential and skills, working collaboratively in diverse groups, and investigating any subject-specific problem related to their professional field. The stages of project-based learning, mentioned below, clearly underline the outcomes of product and process-based peer assessment [2]:

- Start with the essential
- Design a plan for the project
- Create a schedule
- Monitor the students' performance
- Monitor the progress of the project
- Assess the outcome
- Evaluate the experience.

In a typical project- based ESP course students usually create products outside the class hours, which makes it impossible for the teacher to acknowledge and monitor the student's overall performance and assess the students' performance in the product creation process. Thus, to carry out a student-centred performance or task, the ESP teacher only serves as a facilitator who allows the students to assess their peers' learning outcomes and work together in groups. Peer assessment requires a classroom culture characterized by supportive, collaborative relationships that lead to feelings of mutual trust among the students. They realise that they share responsibility for their own and their peers' learning, and that part of this joint responsibility is to provide constructive, respectful and non-judgmental feedback. Peer assessment and feedback is grounded in the three questions that frame the feedback loop [2]:

**Fig. 3.**

Where am I going?

- Where is my peer going?

Where am I now?

- Where is my peer now?

Where to next?

- Where is my peer going next?

To answer these questions, students need have a clear understanding of the lesson learning goals and success criteria. They also need to learn how to use this information to provide effective feedback to their peers. However, the ESP teacher should monitor the feedback and, where appropriate, elaborate it to ensure that students receive fair and equal treatment. Many students see assessment as a job for staff, but at a larger stage they are likely to recognise the benefits of their academic learning and skill development. Initial efforts will take time and teacher support. For these reasons, it is preferable that the use of peer assessment in ESP instruction is seen as a strategy to improve learning and assessment across a whole programme.

**To conclude**, interaction is a common feature of communication in everyday and professional lives and this needs to be reflected in the learning, teaching and assessment procedures in ESP instruction. Assessment procedures should not only serve to monitor students' progress, but also reflect the tasks that students will encounter in the world beyond university. The traditional methods of assessment do not assess reflective thinking, critical thinking, self-evaluation and peer evaluation. Therefore, interest in alternative assessment practices is increasing globally. Students in real-life situations must be able to analyse information, apply their problem-solving skills and communication abilities, and reflect on their own role in the learning process. The results of the research demonstrate that peer assessment methods of either oral or written performance can trigger a deeper involvement of students both in the learning and in the assessment process, keep motivation up and develop some qualities essential for future professional development. Therefore, peer assessment should be effectively integrated and implemented in the ESP courses in Higher Educational Institutions.

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