TẠP CHÍ KHOA HỌC

TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM HÀ NỘI

HNUE Journal of Science

Educational Sciences

CONTENT

STUDENTS' PEER ASSESSMENT PRACTICE IN ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract. This research is conducted to investigate non majored English students' capability in peer assessment in fulfilling English speaking tasks. Literature review shows that peer assessment positively impacts students' achievements. In this study, an experimental approach was followed to develop an assessment rubric which students implement assessing their peers' performance in-class activities. Second, this assessment rubric was introduced and tested in an English speaking lecture where the researchers instruct the lecturer and students about the assessment process, then evaluate the effect of peer-assessment practice. Third, the research employed a mixed-method with questionnaires, observation and interviews. Research participants include six teachers and 30 non-English-majored students in English speaking class. The study shows that students can assess their peers' performance through a set of rubrics that highly appreciated lecturers of the course.

Keywords: students' peer-assessment, assessment as learning, English speaking skills.

1.   Introduction

Nowadays, students in higher education are expected to develop self-regulated skills, learning autonomy, and lifelong skills to prepare themselves for a future career after graduation. In order to meet the expected learning outcomes from one course, students need to adopt constructive feedback from stakeholders in adjusting their learning. Feedback may come from teachers, their peers or students themselves under any kind of assessments with the aim of feeding their learning forward. Assessment could be summative or formative, formal or informal, large scale or high stakes, assessment of learning, or assessment for learning.

Within the context of this study, formative assessment theory is applied to examine how feedback could help students in bettering their performance. There are five main strategies of formative assessment cycle, including sharing learning expectations, questioning, giving feedback, self-assessment and peer assessment. Assessing peers is the topic examined by many scholars in the country when they developed their techniques [1], [2], [3], or they applied peer assessment strategy in different disciplines [4], [5]. This study looks at the effectiveness of peer-assessment practice in learning Speaking English skills.

To meet the requirements of setting up a standard to measure students' language competence at different levels, the Ministry of Education and Training released Circular Number 01/2014/TT-BGDĐT dated 24/01/2014 on Promulgating a Foreign Language Capacity Framework For Vietnam. This framework is a six-level proficiency framework, modified from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), adopted as an assessment blueprint,

and the locally developed language proficiency test called Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP).

According to CEFR (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2009), students who achieve B1 can: (1) understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure; (2) deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling in an area where the language is spoken; (3) produce simple connected text on familiar topics or of personal interest; (4) describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Peer assessment or peer review supports a structured learning process for students to take responsibility for evaluating the work of their peers based strictly on a set of criteria [6]. By doing so, students are engaged in the grading process, providing feedback, which makes it possible for them to gain insight into the assessment criteria; they are promoted to be an assessor, which may boost their engagement and motivate them to further their understanding systemically. However, Vietnamese students face many challenges in performing English speaking skills; learning from their friends seems to be an alternative method of learning. This rationale leads to the implementation of the research.

In this research, VSTEP is adapted to be used as an assessment tool of Speaking skill of peer assessment for students at year two at a university who are expected to achieve level 3 (Band 4 and 5) of VSTEP (equivalent to B1 of CEFR)

To follow the national approach of language competence-based assessment, the university has innovated the teaching methods to scaffold students' learning. We have proposed conducting this research to apply the peer-assessment technique under the criteria assessment adapted from VSTEP to assess students' speaking skills competence. Due to a significant gap in performance and understanding of students of the same class, especially those who do not specialize in English, the teachers require sharp observations to gauge each student's merit and assign them peer-to-peer tasks according to their level.

As peer-to-peer assignments are not familiar and utilized effectively in Vietnam, teachers should gradually introduce the concept to students and instruct them attentively to encourage participation. Moreover, students are so familiar with teacher assessment rather than peer assessment even though they benefit a lot from their friends who are much more experienced in certain content than themselves. Students in English speaking lectures found a lack of evidence or feedback to improve their performance relying on foreign teachers only. Students can discuss with their peers how they could better their speaking skills in Vietnamese (if they encountered difficulties in communicating in the first beginning); even they find it easy to share with their friends what are the requirements of the task and how they could maximize their scores

This research is conducted to investigate the impact of peer assessment on students' achievements under the question *"To what extent students are able to assess their peer's proficiency in English speaking skills?"* In the first stage, the research follows an experimental approach by which the research develops an assessment rubric that students find easy to implement in-class activities. Second, this assessment rubric is introduced and tested at an English-speaking lecture where the researchers instruct lecturers and students about the assessment process and then evaluate peer-assessment practice's effect.

The research is significant because it offers students opportunities to assess their peers' performance and learn from them. Moreover, the research fills in the research gap in the country when there is scant research working on peer-assessment in English speaking skills in higher education. Especially for those universities that offer teaching speaking lectures led by native speakers. Most of the research in the country is in the high school context. In addition, the study uses the assessment rubric, which is adapted from the language assessment framework of the

six-level scale, which enables students to know the techniques and assessment methods under the examiners' views. As a result, students learn how to improve their performance and adjust their studies accordingly to achieve their language competence.

The research results have contributed to distributing the implementing peer-assessment rubric in English speaking skills in Vietnamese higher education. Some high schools could adopt this strategy in teaching English speaking also. Students in the research found it easy and beneficial to follow constructive feedback from peers to identify their mistakes and speak more fluently.

2. Content

2.1. Peer assessment in higher education

There has been numerous research on peer assessment in the language learning environment worldwide, but few in Vietnamese. Therefore, peer assessment is simply thought of as the students' assessment of their peers' work. Regarding the definition of peer assessment, peer assessment is the classmates' arrangement to judge many aspects of their equal-status peers' products or outcomes of learning [3]. Nevertheless, it can also include learning or social behavior and occasionally consists of academic products and associated behaviour. More specifically, students would look at their colleagues' work and grade it by analyzing good and bad aspects and suggesting how the work may be improved. Equally, those who receive feedback must be willing to respond to it genially, and decide what points they agree and what points they do not and use this kind of information to enhance the present work (as informative feedback) or the future work (as in summative feedback) [7].

Reasons for assessing students are varied: to give students feedback, to develop achievements, or to correct mistakes [8]; a direct means to help students to be aware of their degree classification levels and to determine their progress in their course; and more importantly to provide a way to evaluate output for the university [9].

There are present benefits of peer assessment for learning and achievement and continuing benefits regarding communication and collaboration skills. Firstly, students can receive better insight into institutional assessment processes through peer assessment [10]. Secondly, the assessor's capabilities can be sharpened and broadened through peer assessment of learning, social behaviour, and peer assessment involving the learning processes more than the products. Combining product and process assessment can improve students' understanding of the consistency or mismatch between these and various ways of learning beyond their own [7]. Thirdly, those who review seem to have cognitive and meta-cognitive benefits when working on peer comments [11]. Peer assessment requires the assessor to revise, summarize, explain, give feedback, analyze misinterpreted knowledge, identify lacking knowledge, and consider alterations from the ideal. These activities are all cognitively demanding, helping to improve and increase the assessor's understanding [12]. The next benefit is that the potential of feedback processes may include facilitating students to assess themselves better, developing various soft skills, improving student engagement and autonomy, promoting students' responsibility for their learning [13].

On the other hand, there are some inevitable problems relating to the reliability of peer assessment due to a lack of accuracy and precision by inexperienced peers [14], [15]. Furthermore, Abson [10] also mentioned that when students are disappointed about their peers' comments or marks, they can negatively impact their learning. Hence, teachers need to give students clear instructions and show the benefits of peer feedback. Nonetheless, peer assessment is often seen positively despite the above problems, with the raised issues to be amended with related training [16].

Research in the Vietnamese context focuses mostly on developing the structure and rubrics for peer-assessment in high schools only, some of them applying for specific subjects such as Biology, Geography and Physics. They all believe that students are totally able to assess themselves and assess their peers if they are provided with doable assessment criteria. Students are at their best assessing peers if they are put working in groups [3]. There are not much formal research in English language teaching, but they have been presented and discussed in some national conferences.

There are various areas in which peer assessment can be applied. In a Chinese EFL writing class, Yang, Badger & Yu [17] concluded that most teacher feedback and more than 50% of the peer feedback are incorporated, resulting in the most successful revisions. The final versions are better than the initial ones. Moreover, peer-initiated revisions are more successful than teacher-initiated revisions, probably because during the peer interaction, discussing helps to embellish mutual understanding and decrease misinterpretation and miscommunication. Nicol, Thomson & Breslin [18] found that in higher education, concerning the practice of feedback in peer review, the production of feedback is seen as just as beneficial to learning as the receipt of feedback. Research into dialogic use of exemplars carried out by To & Carless [19] indicates that students will enhance their understanding of quality, promote their critical thinking skills and improve their ability to correct their work. They agree that exemplars are exceptionally useful to support the feedback processes because, thanks to them, students see what teachers are looking for in an assignment. Topping [20] pointed out that peer assessment has been found in various subject areas relating to multiple outputs or products, involving tests, writing, oral presentations, and skilled professional behaviours. Zhu & Carless [11] did a study of dialogues within peer feedback processes. The findings show evidence of the prospective advantages of having a conversation about written feedback to enhance students' peer feedback experience. Peer dialogue could grease answers to their comments and show their evaluative skills for the feedback provider. For the feedback receiver, written feedback through dialogue makes them more engaged because they reacted to them. In essence, dialogue activates fundamental cognitive processes: the provider acquires feedback-on-feedback, and the receiver responds to their peer's feedback. So, both of them could learn from dialogic feedback.

The research conducted by Musfirah [21] on peer-assessment in speaking skills has concluded that peer assessment contributes to students' confidence and motivation to perform peer-assessment in speaking skills. There are specific assessment criteria of speaking skills: accuracy, content, and delivery. Language use has focused on research at the macro-level, covering organization and strategic competence.

Peer assessment strategies

The ladder of feedback is one of the strategies that we can apply to student peer assessment [22], comprising four steps:

Step 1 - including reading/listening/asking illuminating questions

Step 2 - distinguishing the strong points

Step 3 - determining the areas to be improved

Step 4 - proposing ways to enhance

Another strategy is peer discussion and conferencing. When students have a task, work in pairs for discussion and peer-to-peer conferences, they not only give feedback to a peer, but they also receive an answer to their comments.

In peer-assessment, lecturers are required to: (1) Provide checklist/ assessment rubrics/ success criteria, and (2) Provide time for peer-discussion

Peer review helps students fill the gap between the feedback receipt and its application more efficiently. Typically in peer review, students first make a draft assignment, receive peers' feedback, remake and resubmit the same assignment. Therefore, there are chances for students to use the feedback they receive to update their assignments [18].
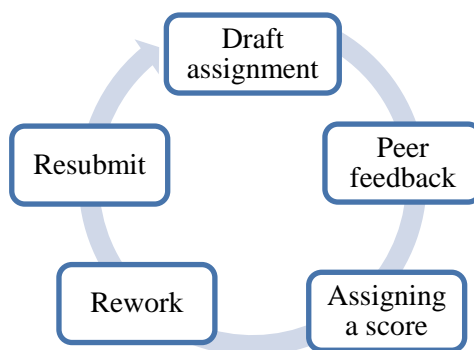

Figure 1. The cycle of peer assessment [18]

According to the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (Iowa State University) guidelines, students are introduced to the assignment and criteria for assessment in the formative peer assessment. They are trained and given practice on how to assess and provide feedback. First, students complete and submit a draft, then students consider the drafts of other students and give feedback. Next, students reflect on the feedback received and revise their work for final submission. In the end, the instructor grades assignments and reflects on the class's activity.

As mentioned above, in this paper, the language assessment framework in Vietnam (VSTEP) (see Appendix 1 and 2) is adapted from CEFR in which six levels of competence (Cambridge ESOL's Main Suite exams, 2009)

Peer assessment has been applied to some subjects confined to English skills at this university. Writing is probably the subject of implementing this medium regularly, where students are provided definitive guidelines and clear-cut rubrics for judgment. For example:

- Peer-to-peer review: Students are asked to review each other's assignments or tasks following the teacher's instructions.
- Peer-to-peer criticism: Students are invited to give each other's critical and constructive criticism based on each other's presentation and task fulfilment.
- High-level peer-to-peer review: Students construct their grading rubrics and measure their peers' performance without explicit instructions from the teachers. The teachers will assess the effectiveness of post-grading.

Additionally, it has been found that some students support peer assessment while some students do not think it is a valuable technique. This is because they thought their peers were not experts, and their review was more challenging than the lecturer [16], [23]. However, they require assessment criteria instructed to conduct the assessment.

Alongside, it is the fact that students receive feedback from lecturers only during the learning process of speaking skills [23]. Much research indicates the effectiveness of peer feedback in moving to lean forward when they specify peer evaluation provides a more supportive learning environment for learners as a means of enhancing their learning experience [2]. Students in Speaking lectures were afraid of making mistakes because they did not want to practice speaking. It was observed that students talk with lecturers and their friends most of the time in learning to speak English. However, they did not give and receive comments from their

friends – a channel closest to them. There is scant research on this topic in Vietnam, which left a gap for this research. This is why the topic was chosen to explore how peer assessment has a positive influence on students' English speaking skills.

2.2. Research design
2.2.1. Theoretical framework
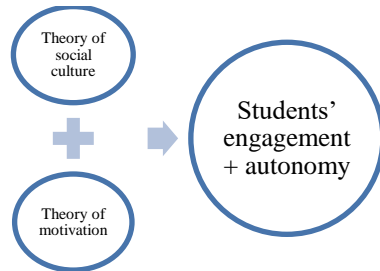
Socio-cultural theory of learning

Outstanding psychologists of the socio-cultural theory are Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky [24] described learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture. He used a theoretical framework to emphasize the social interaction in the development of cognition. Furthermore, his theory has raised the idea that the potential for cognitive development is limited to a zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is an area of exploration where the student is cognitively confident but seeks help to achieve their goals.

… the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers [24, p.86].

The ZPD is a novel concept that specifies the importance of highly skilled peers or teachers supporting and helping students achieve what they cannot gain when working independently.

Vygotsky (in [25]) sees the Zone of Proximal Development as the area where the most sensitive instruction or guidance should be given – allowing the child to develop skills they will then use on their own – developing higher mental functions. Vygotsky also views interaction with peers as an effective way of developing skills and strategies. Thus, he suggests that teachers use cooperative learning exercises where less competent children develop with help from more skilful peers – within the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky's theories are also incorporated into the current interest of collaborative learning, suggesting that group members operate within their ZPD with different ability levels to allow high competency students to support those whose abilities are lower.

A theoretical framework to explain how the theory of formative assessment promotes self-regulated learning has been developed [26]. It supports utilizing ZPD in repositioning formative assessment in helping students build up their capacity to learn. ZPD also assists students in achieving higher performance, and teachers aim at making progress with learners' understanding of any particular curriculum topic [27] [28] [29]. Furthermore, Bruner [30], endorsing constructivism theory, suggested that students can always learn new things as long as they have clear instructions. Besides, he introduced the term 'scaffolding' with the same meaning as ZPD when he spoke about the role of adults and the social environment in a child's development:

[Scaffolding] refers to the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring [30, p.19].

Motivation theory

There are many types of motivation in education, such as motivation in learning and

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motivation in behaviour. With the purpose of this study, the research will concentrate on the meaning, use, and impact of motivation on learning based on Education Psychology Theory, which comprises intrinsic (biological, cognitive, affective, cognitive, or spiritual) motivation and extrinsic (behavioural) motivation.

Theories of motivation have been applied in most educational researches, one of them conducted by Tollefson [31], who explored the view of the cognitive aspect that he identified, that is, differences in students' willingness to try their best at school, which was dealt with through specific theories:

Most of these theories view differences in effort expenditure in relationship with ability, and in some cases, task difficulty as explaining differences in student achievement (p. 65)

Maslow [32] introduced the Hierarchy of Needs - motivational model, which indicates that demands (such as food, shelter, and love) are more critical for human survival than learning. Enhancing motivation in teaching and education plays an important role, one that teachers should pay more attention to in each of their classroom activities. While it is believed that grades, rewards, and punishments can create extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation can be developed by connecting student interests to supporting growing competency. When students are intrinsically motivated, incentives and punishments are unnecessary as the activity is satisfying and rewarding [33] [34]. Therefore, as educators and teachers foster student intrinsic motivation, they believe that extrinsic motivation can promote ongoing learning by itself.

Some teachers also think that student motivation can be encouraged and nurtured by giving feedback despite a complex relationship [34]. Teachers can take a series of different activities to strengthen student motivations in learning based on two categories of motivation discussed [35]. Moreover, Heider [36] and Weiner [37] proposed attributions in their theory to others or self-success and failure, which are internal (ability, effort) or external (luck, task difficulty), under control (effort, task difficulty) or not under control (ability, luck).

Educators cannot interfere with one's ability and luck in the attribution theory on achievement. Still, it needs teachers' support in developing students' effort and skills in performing tasks to achieve learning targets. The study found that environment, personal qualities, and behaviours are significant components of social cognitive views on motivation [38] [39]. The theory of motivation is combined with the cognitive aspect to identify the differences in student willingness and expenditure in relationships with ability and task difficulty [31]. These factors should be considered while implementing formative assessment of different cultural contexts to achieve higher performance.

In the model of student experiences of formative assessment, the influence of formative assessment is put towards student motivation as external motivators. It helps raise the awareness of students' learning and determines what is considered knowledge. Formative assessment, as a result, is regarded as a tool for learning in terms of its process and product. Many other research studies also mentioned feedback (as formative assessment) on student motivation and learning goals [40] [41] [42].

2.2.2. Research methodology

This is experimental research with one the research question "*To what extent students are able to assess their peer's proficiency in English speaking skills*? The research employed mixed methods of questionnaire, observation and interviews to triangulate and answer this question. The participants were 30 students and six lecturers at the university in 2019-2020. Students' expected learning outcome at this speaking class is achieving Level B1 as VSTEP.

One lecturer and 30 students engaged in a tutorial observation in fifty minutes in the first stage. Then, the research asked for permission to join the class and introduce the assessment rubric, which was later applied by the lecturer and students in peer assessment activities. In the

second phase, observed students were surveyed for their opinion in using this rubric. The questionnaire consisted of 5 items developed by the researcher. In the final stage, six lecturers were interviewed for their perceptions of this assessment and the rubric, which will be triangulated with survey and observation data. The interviews lasted for twenty minutes only.

During the observation, students were observed for their competence in English speaking skills in class performance when they were instructed and applied peer-assessment criteria. The rubric was adapted from the guideline for speaking skill assessment according to the Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP). In this research, students were instructed to use the peer-assessment criteria proposed as in table 2. Therefore, assessment rubrics have been simplified to the level we could train students to use and assess their peers.

Table 2. Sample of the developed assessment rubric in peer-assessment (adapted from VSTEP)

Criteria	Sub criteria	Score (1-10)	Feedback
1. Grammar	Range		
	Accuracy		
2. Vocabulary	Range		
	Control		
3. Pronunciation	Individual sounds		
	Stress		
	Intonation		
4. Fluency	Hesitation		
	Extended speech		
5. Discourse management	Thematic development		
	Coherence and Cohesion		

After the lecture, students were asked to rate their satisfaction with the assessment rubric through a short questionnaire. Finally, six native teachers teaching speaking skills at the university were interviewed to check whether this assessment technique is valid and feasible to apply in their classes.

2.2.3. Data collection and analysis

The researcher had contacted the lecturer to ask for permission to collect the data and join his English speaking lecture in fifty minutes. He agreed then the researcher came to the class; she introduced the research and asked for consent from the lecturer and students. When the lecturer and students volunteered to be involved in the research, they provided consent to attend the study.

In the beginning, the researcher introduced the process to collect the data in which the lecturer gave a speaking task to students. Then the researcher instructed the lecturer and students to apply the rubrics to assess their peers' performance. After 20 minutes of working on the speaking task, students assessed their peers based on the provided rubrics and then discussed their peers' results. Next, they shared their friend's strong points and the points that need improvement. It was expected that they could enhance their abilities by learning from others' mistakes. Finally, the researcher noted the activities of the lecturer and how the lecturer assisted students in performing the task and applying the assessment criteria.

At the end of the lecture, the researcher collected the assessment rubrics used by students and all the evaluation forms checked by the students. The collected data were then analyzed

qualitatively and quantitatively. Interviews and observation field notes were transcribed, coded then grouped in pre-describe themes developed through literature review.

This paper demonstrates two typical examples of the peer assessment process as the following:

2.2.3.1. Peer-assessment in group work (without rubrics for assessment):

The class was divided into groups and worked on a topic: *"Describe your classmate or friend.*" Then, they worked in groups to prepare a talk relating to the topic. They could use dictionaries and search for information on the internet. The time limit was 10 minutes. After that, each group would present the topic. Other groups would pay attention and take notes of the mistakes. The groups who find out the most errors and correct them would have points. The groups who have the most points will win.

So, in this activity, the lecturer has given explicit instruction on what students were required to do work in groups, prepare for a talk, and present. And then, they had to pay thorough attention to the other group's presentation, find out the mistakes, and correct them.

However, students were embarrassed in forming a group; they did not know clearly what types of mistakes were, and they did not know how to provide quality feedback. Students were timid to speak and afraid of making mistakes.

2.2.3.2. Peer-assessment in pair work (with assessment rubrics):

Teachers showed the topic "In what way can parents help children develop their interest in reading?". Students were instructed to work in pairs and share ideas. They were advised to take notes of their peers' answers and assess their speaking based on the criteria given by the lecturer. After that, the lecturer had each group assess their friend's performance and the level at which they evaluate their friend's speaking competence. The assessment criteria rate from 1 to 10, including 1. Grammar (Range; Accuracy), 2. Vocabulary (Range; Control), 3. Pronunciation (Individual sounds; Stress; Intonation), 4. Fluency (Hesitation; Extended speech), 5. Discourse management (Thematic development; Coherence and Cohesion). The detailed rubric with descriptive criteria according to VSTEP was also presented to students in the class to understand the meaning of the scores assigned to their peer's performance.

To assess the effectiveness of our rubric, we had distributed a questionnaire to students after a speaking activity. The quick evaluation form consists of five items: The assessment criteria are well written; I found it easy to rate/ assess my peer's speaking performance; The lecturer has instructed clearly how to use the assessment rubric; I found it familiar to use the scale of assessment (1-10); I found it practical to use this rubric for peer assessment in English speaking activities. Those items are rated under the Likert scale: 1. Strongly agree, 2. Agree, 3. Neutral, 4. Disagree.

2.3. Research findings and discussion

Observation data indicated that the lecturer and students had an excellent knowledge of assessment, but they needed more clarification of peer assessment. Typically, they could use general feedback for their peers, but students need more instruction from the researcher and lecturers to provide specific feedback as the particular criteria. In addition, the researcher and lecturer had explained the constructive feedback to the students to provide actionable feedback to their friends. One thing that needs improvement recorded in this experimental research is that students were still feeling shy and passive. They did not want to speak much, and they waited for the lecturer's instruction to guide the requirements. In addition, students lacked some vocabulary ranges, so they could not keep speaking for long.

After carrying out the experimental research, students are found to use a peer-assessment rubric to give feedback and scores to their friends. They also learn from their friend's

performance. It is indicated that students were confident in English speaking tasks. Those were shown in sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2.

2.3.1. Students are able to identify and demonstrate different levels of English speaking abilities

Table 3. One sample of student's peer-assessment form

Criteria	Sub criteria	Score (1-10)	Feedback
1. Grammar	Range	6	Need more control of the complex structure
	Accuracy	5	Some errors
2. Vocabulary	Range	5	Familiar topics
	Control	6	Relatively high lexical accuracy
3. Pronunciation	Individual sounds	7	Quite clear and natural
	Stress	7	Word and sentence stress
	Intonation	7	Efforts with intonation
4. Fluency	Hesitation	6	Sometimes
	Extended speech	7	Stretches of language, self-correction
5. Discourse management	Thematic development	6	Appropriate details and examples
	Coherence and Cohesion	6	Need more connectors between ideas

Students were given handouts of the assessment rubric in peer assessment (a sample in Table 3). Then, they worked in pairs and talked about describing a person they were interested in. While working in pairs, they accord their partners scores ranging from 1 to 10. After that, they complete evaluation forms of their peer-assessment practice. Our findings are as follows:

Regarding criteria 1, grammar, three out of 30 students have the same opinions of giving their peers the scores of 4, which are the lowest in range and accuracy. One of them mentions that her counterpart has limited grammar structures. Eight students are sharing identical scores of 5, both in range and accuracy. The rest of the students give their peers scores higher than five, either in range or accuracy. So, in this criterion, about 23% of students give their classmates the average score under 5.

In the second criteria, which is vocabulary, 5 out of 30 students agreed their peers have scores of 4 and 5 in either range or control. Only one student gives the lowest score of 2 for both sub-criteria. The remaining students (80%) receive scores of 5 or more in both range and control. Those students who take 8 or 9 indicate that their classmates have a wide range of vocabulary. These scores have boosted students' intrinsic motivation along the learning process [38], [42].

Pronunciation - the third criterion, students have various opinions on scores. Only five students receive the average scores under 5, with the lowest score for each sub-criteria of 3. However, most students take the average score of 5 or more with some remarkable feedback, such as the wrong pronunciation of -ed verb ending sounds and -s/ -es endings, pronounced like a native speaker.

The last criterion is fluency. Only one student gives the lowest score of 3. 6 students share the same score of 4. The rest of the students take a score of 5 or more with the same feedbacks:

a lack of vocabulary leading to hesitation.

Overall, the overwhelming majority of students have scores of 5 or more through their peers' assessments. However, they do not give their classmates much higher scores like 8 or 9 but mostly around 6. The research suggested providing students with well-prepared materials for the speaking activity. Also, students need more support and encouragement in conducting speaking tasks. Although they have some points for improvement, they need feedback from lecturers and their peers to better their performance [19], [21].

On the other hand, observation results describe that students are very confident when empowered to give their friends feedback and advice like their lecturers normally do. This is understood as some learning autonomy students undertook during peer assessment implementation [11], [43]. This empowerment motivated students in performing speaking presentations. They were no longer ashamed of speaking English as well as they were not afraid of making mistakes. They learned from their friend's mistakes. Students were observed to correct their friend's mistakes and give recommendations (quality feedback) to improve their performance [18].

2.3.2. Students are able to apply rubrics to assess their peers

The research shows that students can use this proposed rubric to assess their peers' performance with simplified criteria compared with the requirements of CEFR or VSTEP. They also could produce constructive feedback to improve for future achievements. First, however, students need to be trained and instructed clearly on the use of rubrics, rate and constructive feedback and give feedback to their peers.

To test and get feedback from lecturers at universities, the research surveyed them for their feedback on the developed peer assessment rubric for speaking skills. According to the lecturers, the peer assessment rubric was well developed. One said, *"it is easy to instruct students to conduct peer-assessment"* (Interviewee 1). One strongly agreed that the rubric helps peer-assessment possible and feasible: *"the assessment scale from 1 to 10 is so familiar to the students which encourage students to conduct an assessment and involved in speaking activities"* (Interviewee 2). The other confirmed that students could learn about their English speaking competence through this rubric; however, he did not provide additional feedback.

Moreover, all six participating teachers agree that the assessment scale (1-10) is familiar to the students. There was one teacher who thought that it was average for item 1 (The assessment criteria are well written), item 2 (I found it easy to instruct my students to conduct peer-assessment), item 8 (Students could learn about their English speaking competence through this rubric).

There are two over six teachers who hold 'neutral' perspectives of 4 items: Item 3 (The assessment rubric helps peer-assessment to be efficiently conducted); Item 5 (I found it practical to use this rubric for peer-assessment in English speaking activities); Item 6 (This rubric of peer assessment could be adapted for other English skills); Item 7 (This rubric encourages students to involve in English speaking activities). There were only one out of six teachers who did not decide they agreed or disagreed with item 9 (Time allowance for using this assessment rubric is appropriate)

In general, participating lecturers believe that they could apply this assessment rubric in their teaching activities. One lecturer added he designed a similar rubric in his practice.

During the observations, students showed their better understanding of what they were required to do, how to assess their friend's speaking performance [28], what the assessment criteria are [5], what the quality feedback are, etc. [20], [21]. Students in these activities had demonstrated their confidence and tried their best in English speaking. They blinked when their friends got the wrong pronunciation; they noted down all the vocabulary that needed to be replaced. In their turn of speaking, they have made a lot of improvement. Some of the students

asked their partners, *"is it ok?" "should I use different words?", "How should I express the idea of...?", etc.* This finding has strengthened the socio-cultural theory in applying the Zone of Proximal development when students can achieve the learning goals under the lecturer's guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

As specified in the literature and theory framework, students were motivated when they were empowered during the learning process and opportunity to reflect on their and friends' performance. Learning autonomy and motivation factors boost students' engagement like previous research [1] [4]. Giving a score is also an incentive for students when they are encouraged to speak. Lecturers confirmed that they provided a chance for students to try again as they considered practice makes perfect. This finding goes in line with research in the literature review when they consider peer feedback as peers giving elaborated feedback; peer grading/marking as providing a score to a peer product/performance;

3. Conclusions

The research was conducted by observing 30 students at one university studying English speaking skills in the school year 2019-2020. Their competence was observed in class performance when they were instructed to apply peer-assessment criteria according to VSTEP marking guide.

The research results indicate students' positive perception in applying the peer-assessment rubric to provide their classmates with feedback and scores. Students are also learning from their peer's performance during assessment. After receiving feedback from their friends, students are confident in English speaking tasks. They are no longer afraid of making mistakes or feel shy to speak. The research findings again support the theory of learning motivation and socio-cultural learning.

This paper suggests a typical implementation of peer-assessment in teaching speaking skills based on competence assessment of language studying according to the requirements of language competence assessment as VSTEP 6 levels. The implementation of peer-assessment was conducted successfully to boost students' motivation in learning from their peers; and make students confident of performing the task. The experimental process includes three phases: (1) Pre-implementation of peer assessment: train students with assessment rubrics; (2) During peer assessment: clearly instruct students on the method to assess and give constructive feedback; (3) Post peer assessment: Assign score and collect assessment evidence and feedback.

The critical point is assuring explicit instruction, encouragement, and constructive feedback that students could use to adjust their speaking competence. The research also suggests designing a rubric for peer assessment in writing, reading, and listening skills to use widely in higher education in Vietnam. Further research is expected to be conducted on students' assessments to enhance self-efficacy in language learning.

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