

DOI: 10.15587/2519-4984.2022.257869

PROMOTING PEER ASSESSMENT – LEARNER TO LEARNER FEEDBACK IN A MULTILINGUAL HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE SETTING

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Feedback, further known as assessment in this research, is critical to learners' growth and learning. This study is grounded in verbal and written peer experiences, acquired throughout peer evaluation in a multilingual context. This study aims to determine the problems of Grade 11 EFAL learners with peer assessment and how to develop peer assessment practices in a multilingual setting in the Further Education and Training phase. There were 27 learners in the class. Designated three learners gave three demonstrations on various matters, premised on a requisite Grade 11 literature set book, and were graded by their classmates. The perspectives of the learners who were assigned to work in groups were elicited by requesting them to respond to open ended questions in writing after their classmates' presentations. According to the findings, some peer assessments can be subjective depending on the bond between the assessor and the assessed. The learners had a natural feeling of inadequacy in their assessments. When giving feedback in a multilingual setting, it becomes important to give it in a language they are most comfortable with. Similarly, helping students relate new information from peers to the knowledge that they already have helps them to understand and organise information in meaningful ways. Thus, the learners are comfortable with feedback that addresses the known that is then linked to the unknown. This calls for prior knowledge activation by other learners or even the teacher because new information is better integrated with existing information. Once students are used to peer assessment and have overcome their initial fears and hesitations, reliability is likely to be quite high, not that different from teacher reliability

Keywords: peer feedback, peer assessment, multilingualism, English foreign language, English first additional language

How to cite:

Zano, K. (2022). Promoting peer assessment – learner to learner feedback in a multilingual high school english first additional language setting. ScienceRise: Pedagogical Education, 3 (48), 44–49. doi: <http://doi.org/10.15587/2519-4984.2022.257869>

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1. Introduction

English is now used as a language of instruction in several countries. Most learners in South Africa use it as an additional or second language. According to [1], a first additional/second language is attained or learnt upon gaining some competency in a first language. It is typically not used in the learner's home but in the broader community wherein the learner resides. Nevertheless, there are significant disconnects, to which distinct learners have access, to a first additional/second language because a first additional/second language could be a foreign language if the learner has no exposure to the language outside of the classroom [1].

Peer assessment refers to "a reciprocal process whereby students produce feedback reviews on the work of peers and receive feedback from peers on their work" [2]. Peer assessment can be formative or summative, quantitative (providing grades) or qualitative (providing extended verbal feedback) and a variety of products can be peer-assessed, such as written assignments, presentations, portfolios, oral statements and scientific problems [3].

Research indicates giving EFAL learners opportunities to engage in negotiation of form can help them develop their second language faster. [4] conduct a study that shows that peer-to-peer feedback appears to have a

positive impact on both accuracy and fluency development in a second language learning environment. [4] conclude that peer assessment offers opportunities for repeated production practice; it sharpens their abilities to monitor both their language production and that of their peers. Their study suggests that peer feedback accelerates learners' monitoring progress, which stretches them to achieve their full potential in the automatization of second language processing.

There is also evidence that peer assessment has a positive impact on learners' motivation and creativity [5], self-regulation skills [6] and overall enhancement of student learning and performance [7].

2. Literature review

Because this research is about second language and culture, it is critical to grasp multilingual strategies on peer feedback in second language learning. The fairest model for maintaining, preserving and promoting all languages in a region is to use them in a multilingual context. Aside from multilingual individuals, the community is multilingual since individuals from across the world come to participate in communities that are already multilingual, contributing to the languages, articulated in those communities.

After the demise of apartheid, South Africa instituted among the most integrated language legislation on the African continent, encouraging linguistic diversity. The concept was to retain the learning opportunities, which included the awareness, expertise and perspectives, attained by learners via cultural and historic encounters in their social and familial existence as well as cultural identity via daily lives [8].

The term multilingualism has come to mean more than just the phrase “more than two languages” [9]. Besides, [10] argues that an accurate description of the notion is hard to pin down as the notion refers to ever-changing sets of practices, governed by context and time rather than a fixed entity that can be employed in a similar pattern at all times. The term ‘multilingual’ is basically defined according to the number of languages that an individual uses in society. [11] define multilingualism as:

The ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of codeswitching ... according to some, a native-like fluency is necessary in at least three languages; according to others, different languages are used for different purposes, and competence in each varying according to such factors as register, occupation and education (p.673).

Multilingualism, from a structural-functional point of view then, takes a divided language approach to how language functions in communication. Multilingualism has historically been viewed as multiple monolingualism(s), as “previous social arrangements typically required only a particular additional language, language-related knowledge and/or several specific language skills for sustaining economic, political and religious systems” [12]. In South Africa, and most of the African continent, African languages are a numerical majority, but are minority languages when it comes to usage in controlling domains. By the functional space, they enjoy controlling domains like education, the media and government communication, English, French and Portuguese are the majority languages in most African states [13].

The traditional question, which remains unanswered, is: Which degree of language competence is necessary to be bi/multilingual? At what stage of competence can we speak of bi/multilingualism? There is no precise definition of the degrees of language competence. Besides, competence has to take into account the different language areas (lexis, phonetics, syntax, etc.) and the four language skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking. But this question is not easily answered because:

Even if we can gauge bilingual or multilingual capacities with some accuracy, there would remain problems of adequate labelling, for it is hardly to be expected that measured individuals would neatly fall into a small number of categories of ability [14].

Multilingual practices are manifested in translanguaging. [15] refer to translanguaging in education as ‘a process, by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include ALL the language practices of ALL students in a class to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate and appropriate knowledge and give voice to new sociopolitical realities by interrogating linguistic inequality’. According to Allard, translanguaging includes flexi-

ble language practices, such as code-switching, co-languaging and others, though the term extends the understanding of these practices as “dynamic and functionally integrated” in ways, not previously captured by a focus on the alternation of two separate codes [16]. Thus, translanguaging fulfils a scaffolding function, offering temporary bridges between languages that allow pupils to build links between official instruction languages and between home and school languages. These scaffolding moments acknowledge all different languages by giving them the same role and relevance in daily classroom routines.

Since this study seeks to expand current conversational sociolinguistics research on peer-to-peer engagement in second language learning, it becomes important to understand how multilingual practices can render us conscious that we are mandated to others because of poor common linguistic differences. An array of linguistics research is focusing on how speakers utilise language through performance and social encounters. The discourse of belonging is encouraged by using multilingualism to obtain corrective feedback.

3. The aim and objectives of the study

The study aims to determine the problems of Grade 11 EFAL learners with peer assessment and how to develop peer assessment practices in a multilingual setting in the Further Education and Training phase.

To accomplish the aim, the following tasks have been set:

1. Learners’ opinions about the problems of peer assessment in a multilingual classroom in the Further Education and Training phase
2. Learners’ suggestions for the development of peer assessment practices in a multilingual classroom in the Further Education and Training phase

4. Materials and Methods

This study was designed as a qualitative research project. It took place in a multilingual Grade 11 classroom. None of the participants was a native speaker of English. For this qualitative study, only 27 EFAL learners in Grade 11 were used as participants. The participants comprised 8 boys and 19 girls and were aged between 16–19. The researcher requested parental consent for their children to participate in this study. Three learners were selected to make 3 presentations on different topics based on a prescribed Grade 11 literature set book and were assessed by their peers. Their selection was based on their marks in an English literature test they had written. The best three performers were selected to make presentations to their peers because their content mastery in the set book was unquestionable.

The researcher also requested assent from learners to participate in this research. These learners were stationed at one high school in South Africa. In 4 groups of 6 each, the learners assessed their peers based on the *Feedback Form* that had 4 open-ended questions but only two were considered for this study. Before the participants took part in the peer assessment, they were informed of the general aim of the study, which is ‘to determine the problems of Grade 11 EFAL learners with peer assessment and how to develop peer assessment

practices in a multilingual setting in the Further Education and Training phase.' The participants were also introduced to the interview guide form with open-ended questions, used as a data collection instrument.

The learners asked their peers (presenters) questions during their presentations for clarity. Also, they explained some presenters' points to guarantee clarity. Again, after their presentations and oral and written sample, peer-peer feedback assessment was done based on the prescribed criteria. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity for participating in this study.

The qualitative data for this study were analysed using the content analysis method, also known as an interpretive method. The interpretive analysis reduced the volume of information and identified significant patterns. The researchers analysed the participants' responses to peer presentations closely, finding links and similarities in the responses and coded them appropriately. Then, the researchers abridged and positioned the results into themes.

5. Results

5.1. Learners' opinions about the problems of peer assessment in a multilingual classroom in the Further Education and Training Phase

It is natural to have a feeling of inadequacy in whatever we do. Even after seemingly thorough preparation, one always feels ill-prepared for that, which is yet to happen. Similarly, of course, this could be truer of peer assessment. The problem with such peer assessment is that it may be less likely to be "correct" than teacher feedback [3]. To solidify this assertion, the participants had this to say:

We have a lot of faith in our teachers' subject content. He does not battle to explain any concepts to our fullest understanding. When we compare his assessments to that of our peers, we can see a great imbalance. His contributions are always more detailed, measured and reassuring than those of our peers (Learner 12).

Our English teacher went for training to teach this subject. It becomes obvious that his feedback is professional and convincing unlike what we get from our peers. It's not always persuasive enough (Learner 4).

Terminology management is how specialised concepts should be represented to provide the user with an adequate understanding of their meaning as well as sufficient knowledge of their location within the general knowledge structure of a scientific or technical domain. Such a conceptual representation should contain information in various formats. In this regard, peer feedback in linguistic and graphical descriptions of specialised entities plays a major role in knowledge representation, especially when both converge to highlight the multidimensional nature of concepts and the conceptual relations within a specialised domain. When giving feedback in a multilingual setting, it becomes important to give structured feedback in terminographic definitions, meshed with the visual information and explanations both in words and in images for a better understanding of complex and dynamic concept systems. This is highlighted as follows:

Any feedback, which is not represented in diagrams or pictures, is difficult to remember because my vocabulary is not yet rich (Learner 1).

I love feedback ,displayed both in picture and word form because pictures are very colourful, and I get attached to them so easily (Learner 23).

Some peer assessments can be subjective depending on the bond between the assessor and the assessed. It is a fact, that learners relate to each other depending on their friendship. The worry about peer assessment is also reported by [17] who notes that the relations, built upon friendship could prevent a valid peer assessment. This observation is shared in the excerpts:

It's difficult to assess our friends' presentations truthfully. We are always biased towards our friends regardless of their presentations which might be far from being convincing. The whole idea is to preserve our friendships at all costs (Learner 20).

We are not fair in our assessments of our peers who are closer to us. Friendship matters most; we cannot afford to lose our closeness because of academic activity. Even when we can tell that the presentation is not up to the standard, we try to make it look better in our assessments (Learner 16).

Language is culture and culture is language. Humans identify themselves with their language. Humanity and language are inseparable; they are always intertwined. For this reason, humans are tempted to resort to their mother tongue when an opportunity arises. These assertions are captured in the following excerpts:

There are moments when we tend to over-use our mothertongue at the expense of English which is the official medium of communication during peer assessments. This might affect the quality of our feedback (Learner 9).

I think in our assessments, we tend to use our mother tongue more often than English. This becomes a problem when we have to translate into English when we write any given work (Learner 6).

5.2. Learners' suggestions for the development of peer assessment practices in a multilingual classroom in the Further Education and Training phase

The study has shown the need for learners not to use demeaning remarks as they give peers some feedback. Any feedback which is hardly punctuated with positive comments demoralises the recipients. Any meaningful feedback motivates the recipient, hence the need to over-reference the positives in the assessment followed by a few negatives. Peer assessment ushers hope in all the assesseees, thus, the focus is the good in presentations. Initially, peer feedback should highlight positive aspects of the work in question [3]. Then, it should move on to aspects that might be improved (one hesitates to say "negative"). This augurs well with the following findings:

Peer assessment can be beneficial if the assessors consider both the good and the bad about any presentation. The idea is to give hope to their peers instead of just condemning them for their half-baked responses (Learner 2).

We suggest that when we give peer feedback, we see the good or strengths in other people's responses instead of just focusing on the weaknesses in their presentations. We are all bound to make errors; hence, we must not invest a lot of time on errors in our tasks (Learner 21).

Once students are used to peer assessment and have overcome their initial fears and hesitations, reliability is likely to be quite high, not that different from teacher reliability (17). This sentiment is echoed in the following excerpts:

Peer assessment must not be a once-off thing; it has to be part of our learning so that we get used to it. Exposure to peer feedback will help us overcome some of our worst fears such as the urge not to disappoint, choice of words and relevance. The teacher also needs to give us some hints on how to assess our peers so that no one 'strays' when tasked to give feedback (Learner 5).

Practice makes perfect, therefore, teachers need to do fewer teacher-assessment and let us give feedback to each other. When we get used to it, I'm certain our feedback will be as accurate as expected of learners in Grade 11 (Learner 3).

By paying adequate concentration to the basis of academic and emotional life, all the merits obligatory for a good citizen, clear expression, clear thinking, sincere thoughts and action and feeling fullness of imaginative and emotional life can be refined and 'urbanised' simply by mother tongue. Essentially, learning in the mother tongue is effortless, but learning in a second language takes more time, which unsurprisingly hinders the learners' individualities. Giving respondents feedback in a language other than the respondents' language is a breach of good pedagogy ethics and culpable of cultural imposition. Hence, it is important to give feedback in the mother tongue and teach through the mother tongue because the learners' growth depends on it. This is echoed in the following sentiments:

I like it when my classmate tells me about my mistakes in my home language, Sesotho. It will take me time to forget such corrections and contributions (Learner 10).

It seems any criticism, be it verbal or written, as long it's in my mother tongue, stays 'with and in me' forever. In most cases, I can easily remember even the whole wording (Learner 19).

This study also revealed that learners will not struggle with giving and receiving feedback as long as they (giving and receiving feedback) are based on a familiar area. They are largely content with feedback that focuses on a theme they are mindful of. Similarly, [18] advocates for prior knowledge activation because new information is better integrated with existing information. Helping students bring to mind prior knowledge can have a strong positive impact on learning. Similarly, helping students relate new information from peers to the knowledge that they already have aids them to understand and organise information in meaningful ways. This finding is also supported by [19] and [20] who report that for second language learners to understand the written text and given feedback, they rely on various skills and strategies, combining background knowledge and real-world knowledge and first language related knowledge. The participants had this to say:

It's easier to master feedback when it is centred on what I once read or experienced. The moment I see the link, then, I am ready to accept the feedback (Learner 17).

Many times, if feedback relies on what we did the previous years, I like that because it's like a way of refreshing my memory the way I do with my phone when it's freezing (Learner 13).

6. Discussion

According to the findings, while giving feedback to learners, it is critical, that they feel good about it [21]. This is regarded as a method of encouraging learners to make use of the comments they have received. Learners must not be discouraged by feedback at whatever expense. Although it is necessary to direct learners' awareness to the less productive aspects of a learning aspects, learners should be sensitive in delivering such "negative reviews." The study has shown the need for learners not to use demeaning remarks as they give peers some feedback. Any feedback, which is hardly punctuated with positive comments, demoralises the recipients. Any meaningful feedback is meant to motivate the recipient, hence the need to over-reference the positives in the assessment, followed by a few negatives. Peer assessment is designed to use his/her hope in all the assessees. As a result, learners can increase other learners' learning environments by giving constructive feedback.

The study reiterates the need for the learners to receive feedback in their mother language where possible. The value of a mother language can be attributed to several factors. People's perceptions and sentiments are framed by their home language. A child's upliftment must learn to talk in his or her home language. Fluency in the learner's home language, also known as the native language, aids the learner in a variety of ways. It connects him to his heritage and promotes intellectual abilities [22]. A child's earliest understanding of the world is through the language, in which their mother communicates before they are born and throughout their lives. Several pupils in underdeveloped countries learn next to nothing in school, a fact that can be attributed to the instruction, given in a language they do not completely comprehend [22]. This is a technique that results in little or non-existent information and cognitive ability, unpleasant encounters, and school drop and repetition frequencies. Language policy must consider mother-tongue instruction to increase educational quality. Approaches of teaching that overlook the home language throughout the early years can be unsuccessful and detrimental to children's learning. At least in the early years, mother-tongue education can help teachers teach and learners learn more efficiently.

This study also revealed that learners are comfortable with feedback that addresses the known that is then linked to the unknown. This calls for prior knowledge activation by other learners or even the teacher because new information is better integrated with existing information. Helping students bring to mind prior knowledge can have a strong positive impact on learning. Similarly, helping students relate feedback from other learners to the knowledge that they already have helps them to comprehend concepts so easily.

The limitation of the study is that only participants from one school were selected to participate in the study. For further research, participants should be selected from different schools because each school has a unique context.

7. Conclusion

The conclusion covers two sections, namely learners' opinions about the problems of peer assessment in a multilingual classroom in the Further Education and Training Phase and learners' suggestions for the development of peer assessment practices in a multilingual classroom in the Further Education and Training phase.

1. For the first aim of the study, which is about the learners' opinions about the problems of peer assessment in a multilingual classroom in the Further Education and Training Phase, the learners reported that they always feel unprepared or poorly prepared for the assessment that will be administered without the usual overarching involvement of the teacher. This is in line with the finding that the problem with such peer assessment is that it may be less likely to be "correct" than teacher feedback [3].

The results revealed that since learners are young and can be easily distracted, their assessment can be far from objective. This implies that some peer assessments can be subjective conditional on the tie between the appraiser and the evaluated. Such peer assessment can be premised on how they relate to each other in non-academic settings. This is in line with the finding that the relations, built upon friendship, could prevent a valid peer assessment as reported by [17].

Although the learners will write in English in an EFAL context, peer assessments are verbally conducted in their mother tongue. This is expected for learners mostly identify themselves with their home languages when an opportunity arises. This is in line with the finding that it is important to use the learners' home language as the language of instruction as this certifies their distinctiveness and gives them a sense of ownership as advised by [23]. Even [24] asserts that the children think and dream in the mother tongue, so training in the mother tongue use is the first instrument of human culture and the first essential of schooling. This means the only lan-

guage most excellent to attain originality in thought and expression is with which one lives and grows. For the participants, their mother tongue is the natural language of thought and exceedingly appropriate for concept formation.

2. The second aim of the study is about learners' suggestions for the development of peer assessment practices in a multilingual classroom in the Further Education and Training phase. The study reveals that learners wish teachers intentionally allow them to use their home languages in an EFAL as they do peer assessment. When a learner gives other learners feedback in their mother tongue, consequently, they are also catering for the other learners' emotional, cultural, linguistic and psychological needs to mention a few. Thus, it is of huge substance for children to have a compact base in their mother tongue. This is in line with the finding that although many educational laws may be prohibitive, learners tend to smuggle their home languages into the classroom for their benefit [25].

In some situations, learners use demotivating comments in assessing their peers. This implies that less gifted learners are less likely to cooperate in peer assessment. It has also been noted, that teachers need to train their learners on how to assess their peers. Perfection comes with practice, thus, the more the learners assess their peers, the more detailed and objective the feedback becomes. Without this constant exposure to peer feedback, the process can be hardly rewarding. In the end, it will be a futile effort. Also, frequent peer assessment sessions help the learners dispel the fears they might be harbouring like fear of reprisals and hurting their peers' feelings. All this is in line with the finding that, initially, peer feedback should highlight positive aspects of the work in question [3] rather than be turned into a witch-hunting or discouraging exercise.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable feedback.

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Received date 28.04.2022

Accepted date 24.05.2022

Published date 31.05.2022

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