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Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article

## PRE-SERVICE LANGUAGE TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS ON PEER ASSESSMENT IN MICRO TEACHING SESSIONS OF A METHODOLOGY COURSE

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### Abstract

A plethora of research has been conducted in the context of language education and language assessment. Peer assessment, a type of formative assessment, which helps us to take a glance at our own process by means of others, has begun to draw English language teachers' attention in recent years. Types of learner styles, teachers' attitude, and course content have been much researched related to such assessment type. The current study aims to reveal the perceptions of pre-service English teachers on peer assessment. In this descriptive case study, the qualitative data was collected through questionnaires and interviews with 29 pre-service English language teachers enrolled to *Teaching Language Skills I* Course, one of the required methodology courses in ELT Department, Cukurova University. The data was analyzed by an inductive approach through an open coding process. The findings embraced a wide range of themes related to the peer assessment such as objectivity in assessment and affective factors in the assessment process. The study also has some crucial implications for English language teachers, language learners as well as policymakers.

**Keywords:** Pre-service language teacher education, language assessment, formative assessment, peer assessment, case study.

## HİZMET-İÇİ İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN İNGİLİZCENİN ÖĞRETİMİ DERSİNİN MİKRO ÖĞRETİMLERİ SÜRECİNDE YER ALAN AKRAN DEĞERLENDİRMESİ ÜZERİNE YANSIMALARI

### Özet

Dil eğitimi ve değerlendirilmesi bağlamında çok sayıda araştırma mevcuttur. Kendi sürecimize başkaları aracılığıyla bakmamıza yardım eden ve biçimlendirici değerlendirmenin bir türü olan akran değerlendirmesi de son yıllarda İngilizce öğretmenlerinin dikkatini çekmeye başlamıştır. Akran değerlendirmesine bağlı olarak öğretmen tutumu, ders içeriği ve öğrenme türleri sıklıkla araştırma konusu olmaktadır. Bu çalışma, hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerinin akran değerlendirmesi konusundaki algılarını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Betimsel nitelikteki bu durum çalışmasında, nitel veriler Çukurova Üniversitesi İngilizce Öğretmenliği programının zorunlu derslerinden biri olan *Dil Becerilerinin Öğretimi I* dersine kayıtlı 29 aday İngilizce öğretmeni ile yapılan anket ve görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Veriler açık kodlama sürecini içeren tümevarımsal bir yaklaşımla analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, değerlendirmede objektiflik ve bu süreçteki etkileyici

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faktörler gibi akran değerlendirmesiyle ilgili geniş bir tema yelpazesini içermektedir. Son olarak, bu çalışma hem İngilizce öğretmenleri ve yabancı dil öğrencileri hem de müfredat hazırlayıcıları açısından önemli sonuçları barındırmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hizmet öncesi dil öğretmen eğitimi, yabancı dilde ölçme ve değerlendirme, biçimlendirici değerlendirme, akran değerlendirmesi, durum çalışması.

### **Introduction to peer assessment**

In both language education and assessment, traditionalism in ELT has lost its popularity with the recognition of the importance of modernism as a new concept including not only the teacher's responsibility but also the learner's responsibility for learning, which gave a way to reform education at universities. Most of them started reforming their priorities like moving from traditional classes to modernist classes, where lifelong learning becomes an iconic term demanding learners to pursue knowledge throughout their lives. Also, these implications have brought new aspects to the field such as lifelong learning, collaborative learning, alternative assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment.

Peer assessment provides a kind of collaborative learning platform where learners could manipulate their own learning on an assigned task. Giving learners responsibilities in their own learning process enables them to become active learners and to take control of their learning. As Vygotsky (1978) suggests within the scope of social constructivism, any learner can do much better with the help of another. In this point, while a challenging atmosphere in class demands much pressure on students as they have to compete for each other, a collaborative atmosphere paves the way for sharing experiences of students as a learning process. As Reynolds and Trehan (2000) indicate peer assessment and self-assessment enable learners to participate directly in the assessment process in terms of requiring to reflect on their experience and monitor their learning. Furthermore, Black and Wiliam (2006) depict the function of peer assessment by revealing the importance of an understanding of assessment process as learners take the roles of teachers and examiners as they evaluate the work of other students, which ease comprehending of assessment criteria. According to Reinders and Lazaró (2007), if the process is implemented in a well-prepared frame, it would probably result in a more collaborative environment with more autonomous learners. Also, Topping (2009) suggests that an instructor should give a lead to students in every stage of peer assessment process from the first days of implementation for an effective peer assessment. With the help of this implementation, they do become "reflective practitioners" (Falchikov & Bound, 1989).

Lindblom-Ylänne, Pihlajamäki, and Kotkas (2006) conducted a study in Finland tertiary context. Participants were 15 law students taking The History of Law course which was conducted by two different instructors. The researchers used a questionnaire and asked participants to keep learning journals according to the needs of the course. Following, the students transformed their journals into 10-page essays and their peers were needed to assess the essays. Lindblom-Ylänne et al. concluded that self-assessment was to some extent considered as difficult, as the students stated that it was difficult to be objective in the self-assessment process. Still, the scores from teachers and peers appeared similar.

With the aim of determining the feasibility of peer assessment in preparatory classes in Turkish higher education, a study was carried out by Uysal (2008) at one of a state university in Turkey. 64 students participated in this study. The data were collected through a Likert scale and questionnaires in order to elicit students' perceptions regarding peer and self-assessment. The study indicated that the participants succeeded in evaluating their peers in a required manner within the scoring framework. On the other hand, the study was aimed to benefit peer assessment in the students' oral presentations; however, there were no significant differences in the students' oral presentations.

Another study in Taiwanese context focusing on the benefits and weaknesses of peer assessment by Peng (2009) was conducted in a Taiwanese university with 88 EFL learners with the heading of one teacher. The preparatory class students received training on peer assessment at the beginning of the term. A five-point Likert scale was used in the study before and after the implementation of peer assessment. Data collection instruments were composed of open-ended questionnaires, written reflections, peer evaluation, and feedback forms, within-group peer assessment forms, emails and interviews. The results of the study depicted that the learners held a positive attitude towards peer assessment before and after, also most of the learners explained that they had successful experiences in this process. From this point, this study claims that peer assessment could serve as an alternative way to include students in the assessment process in higher education.

Koc (2011) worked together with 22 final year students who take Teaching Practice lesson on Primary School Class Teaching Program at a state university in Turkey. The peer assessment of peers in this course was used. The participants of the study received peer assessment training before the assessment practice. The prospective teachers assessed each other's practice by filling out the forms. The data was collected with a semi-structured negotiation technique. Most of the prospective teachers depicted that peer assessment practice was efficient and it helped the participants develop their assessment skills.

Bay (2011) carried out a study with 56 sophomore prospective teachers taking Measurement and Evaluation course at a state university. An open-ended questionnaire, an interview form, and interviews were used as data collection tools. At the end of the study, the participants of this study suggested that the criterion is needed to be presented before the implementation of assessment, and peer assessment should not be benefited for only scoring.

De Grez, Valcke and Roozen (2012) worked with 57 freshmen students taking Business Administration Introductory course in Belgium. The researchers focused on the effects of self- and peer assessment oral presentation skills compared with teacher assessment. The semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were utilized in the study. As a conclusion, De Grez et al. stated that there was a positive relationship between peer and teacher assessment, but the results embraced critical differences at the same time. Furthermore, the findings showed that the scores of self-assessments were higher than the teacher assessment.

A study from Iran aiming to figure out Iranian students' attitudes towards self-, peer, and teacher assessment by Abolfazli Khonbi and Sadeghi (2013) was conducted with 63 EFL students, aged between 20-22, who study at English Language and Literature at Urmia University and Tabriz Islamic Azad University. The participants experienced self-, peer, and teacher assessment for an academic semester by filling out an attitude questionnaire. However, only thirty-eight of them completed the study. The results of this research showed positive attitudes towards self-, peer-, and teacher assessment. Especially, the peer assessment group expressed a significant positive approach and the researcher also highlighted the importance of university professors who could benefit from self-assessment and peer assessment techniques.

Ozdemir (2016) studied with 41 third grade students taking *Special Teaching Methods II* at a university in Turkey. Two weeks preparation was given to students to enable them to gain confidence in assessment with given assessment criteria including evaluation criteria, as the prospective teachers were asked to assess their peers' presentation by an assessment group and assessors were chosen randomly. For data collection, an interview form with open-ended questions was used, and the data was analyzed with coding. At the end of the study, the findings concluded that peer assessment in this course provided an impartial evaluation; however, it was also suggested that the instructor should not ask close friends and peers having trouble amongst themselves to assess each other's work. Sustaining objectivity in the utilization of peer feedback was also considered as a major challenge as in Şire Kaya and Özkan's (2018) study. The pre-

service teachers in their study preferred teacher evaluation rather than peer and self-assessment for achieving the criterion of objectivity in assessment.

Another study was carried out by Kilickaya (2017) in Turkish tertiary context at the department of foreign language education at a state university. The participants were 35 students aged between 21 and 23. Within the scope of *Teaching Language Skills I* course in the third-year class, the study aimed at identifying the English Language students' perceptions of peer assessment of the group members. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The overall findings supported the use of self- and peer assessment in group work. On the other hand, the findings also revealed that friendship bias and lack of training/experience highly affected the rating of their peers.

Ratminingsih, Artini, and Padmadewi (2017) worked together on a descriptive study revealing the effects of self and peer assessment in Reflective Teaching Class at a university in Indonesia. They took samples randomly from 234 students and 15 of them participated in the focus group discussion. As data collection instruments, the researchers used a questionnaire and a list of questions delivered in the focus group discussion. The results depicted that the students held a positive approach toward self and peer assessment in terms of their future career development. However, participants encountered some challenges such as subjectivity and timidity during the study.

The previous studies in this domain reveal the facts of self and peer assessment by indicating not only the advantages but also the challenges and concerns in conducting such assessment types. The studies about depicting the thematic views of these assessments have not been reported much and specifically in the ELT context. This descriptive study aims to report the perceptions of pre-service English language teachers in a Turkish higher education context by categorizing their ideas into groups according to the participants' understanding expressed.

In this light, we try to seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of pre-service English language teachers regarding peer assessment before and after the peer assessment process in a methodology course?
2. How do pre-service English language teachers conceptualize peer assessment?

## **Methodology**

### **Context of the study**

In the fourth year of high school, the students in Turkey are supposed to take a two-stage university entrance exam. As a following of these standardized exams, the students based on their scores are placed into English Language and Teaching (ELT) departments. When enrolled in the program, these students are required to take a language proficiency test to start the BA program. The majority of the participants in this study were all had one-year preparatory school education before starting their BA program since they could not achieve the departmental standards which involve 70 as a passing grade from the proficiency exam.

This study was carried out in *Teaching Language Skills I* course at The Department of English Language Teaching at Cukurova University in Turkey. The Department of English Language and Teaching aims at training pre-service English teachers as proficient teachers for teaching English at all levels -primary, secondary and tertiary. This four-year program involves ELT methodology, linguistics, and English literature. The program also offers some elective courses for every semester.

In the required course aforementioned, the student teachers are supposed to perform the micro-teaching sessions in front of other class members, which is a rehearsal of a real-life classroom teaching. In the duration of micro-teaching sessions, the class members are required to observe their peer(s) who is on stage as a teacher and evaluate the targeted session by means of a negotiated rubric which is introduced at the very beginning of the term.

### Participants

The pre-service English Language Teachers take *Teaching Language Skills I* course in the first semester of third grade. The course participants are required to attend at least 70% of the classes. The course assessment consists of one midterm (30%), one micro-teaching task (30%), a final exam (40%), and also self-, peer and teacher scoring. The contributors in this study were 29 students whose average age is 20. Out of 29, 16 of whom were female students and 13 were male students. The nationality of all the participants is Turkish. The English level of the group is B2.

### Procedures

At the very beginning of the research, the participants were informed about the research and their consent was taken. All participants were treated equally. They were given enough time to complete the questions in the questionnaire and during the interviews. Their names were not mentioned while using verbatim.

### Data collection and data analysis

In the process of data collection, two data collection tools were employed both at the beginning and at the end of the *Teaching Language Skills I* course in this study: 1) Open-ended questionnaire, 2) Interview. In the open-ended questionnaire, participants were supposed to answer two questions revealing their perceptions towards peer assessment. The questions in the questionnaire were prepared in English, so the responses were received in their target language which is English. The participants were asked to discuss their opinions and beliefs in detail in a sentence form, and they were given a single class hour to complete the questions. The data extracted from open-ended questionnaires was analysed under a grounded theory which embraces open coding, and this enabled the responses to be coded in themes.

As a second data collection tool of the study, interviews were conducted at the beginning and again at the end of *Teaching Language Skills I* course, in this sense participants were able to express their opinions more clearly and this shed light on some unintelligible points on their reflection papers. The following questions were asked during the interviews:

1. What is your general opinion about peer assessment?
2. What are the weaknesses of peer assessment?
3. What are the strengths of peer assessment?
4. What kind of changes can be made for a more effective implementation?
5. Would you like to implement peer assessment in your own classes as a teacher?

In the duration of thematic analyses, two different forms of coding in the grounded theory coding section were utilized, the first is initial coding which focuses on analysing the fragments such as words, lines, segments, and incidents while the second is focused coding which requires of selecting the most useful of initial codes to test them within the frame of extent validity (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, punctuation, subject-verb agreement and case markers were amended in terms of sustaining the inflow and following, the member check technique was utilized in order to ensure the credibility of patterns.

### Findings

In the questionnaire, there were two questions in total aiming at revealing opinions and beliefs about peer and teacher assessment. The pre-service English language teachers were supposed to discuss these two terms in general. With the help of these questions, the themes emerged under three main themes, which are *objectivity in assessment*, *teaching/assessing practice*, and *affective factors*.

In the first main theme regarding peer assessment which is objectivity in assessment, the most repeated theme was *unjust scores*, unlike this theme another one emerged, which is *impartial rating*; however, the number of the second theme remained quite small. Out of 21, one of the participants expressed that *the class is fair (P7)*, while out of 29, 8 of them expressed that the scores from their peers were not fair because of *friendship bias*. One of the participants expressed friendship bias as follows:

Our friends can be harsh sometimes. I don't think they are fair completely. In the process of peer assessment, there shouldn't be emotions, but I believe we can't hold our emotions back if it is about our friends (P20).

Under the theme of *teaching/assessing practice*, three sub-themes emerged. *Recognition of mistakes* appeared to be the highly mentioned theme. Many of participants highlighted *recognition of mistakes* under the benefits of peer assessment. A few of the course participants expressed their voices as follows:

Listening to different people's opinions helps to improve one's skill (P13).

It is important because it reveals our missing points from an aspect. Peer assessment should be involved in other lessons, too (P17).

Most of the participants depicted peer assessment as *a collaborative learning platform* as follows:

People get acknowledged by their peers and get improved each time (P9).

Contrary to these views, four of the participants stated that peer assessment was an *impractical evaluation* for them by these words:

It is very hard to have "fair" results in peer assessment. Since the students who know each other well and like each other will give good grades to his/her friend even if it was bad (P6).

It can be sometimes not so fair, I think. Of course, it is an important assessment but you cannot be sure if they say the truth or not (P21).

In the last theme which is *affective factors*, one sub-theme emerged pointing out *having the anxiety of judging friends*. One of the participants stated as follows:

If they have a right to tell their mistakes freely to their peers, some students can feel shy to participate in the lesson by being afraid of judging his/her friends (P19).

Some of the pre-service English teachers (n.12) depicted teacher assessment as *an objective and constructive evaluation*, as they already stated that they had some trust issues in class among class members, therefore they elucidated that teacher assessment was more reliable than peer assessment. Some of them explained as follows:

Teacher assessment at the end of each task with an objective and constructive manner definitely helps students' own improvement for further tasks; they can keep the teacher's recommendations in mind (P9).

I think teacher assessment is the most advanced in all three of these. The teacher is able to focus on different elements at the same time. I personally care much about teacher's assessment (P13).

The pre-service English language teachers' recommendations included that the criteria should be presented after an adequate assessment practice or training in order to prevent the conflict on assessment and enable more understanding of the established criteria. They also suggested that more sections can be added to the paper that they assess on their peers' micro-teaching presentations. Besides, they stated that they would like to implement peer assessment in their own classes when they do become an English teacher for an effective learning platform in class in terms of filling the gap between students. An instructor should not only trust the grades that the peers give to each other as a real assessment of the presentation or the work, as there will most likely be some students having personal issues with some of the class members

according to their reflections about peer assessment process during the interviews conducting at the end of the peer assessment process.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

In this study, the main target was to examine pre-service English language teachers' peer assessment process, and there were two questions aiming at revealing the participants' perceptions on peer assessment at the beginning and at the end of the peer assessment process.

The interviews at the very beginning of the *Teaching Language Skills I* course resulted that the participants were familiar with peer assessment technique as a term, even though they didn't experience it before. In the result of answers extracting from the open-ended questionnaire and the interviews conducting again at the end of the course, three main themes emerged such as *objectivity in assessment*, *teaching/assessing practice*, and *affective factors*. From these themes, the highly discussed sub-themes were *friendship bias* and *recognition of mistakes*.

The pre-service English language teachers touched upon not only the advantage of peer assessment in terms of realizing the mistakes and deficient points on their own micro teaching but also the disadvantage of peer assessment in terms of unjust scores because of the friendship bias. Most of the participants indicated they had friendship bias, as they believed that some people in the class didn't score fairly due to some personal issues and affective factors, which caused decreasing the credibility of the scores. This problem in the literature was also touched upon and a well-prepared rubric was claimed to resolve these constraints (Reinders & Lazaro, 2007). Also in Sire Kaya and Özkan's (2018) study pre-service language teachers asserted that peer assessment in their methodology course lacked objectivity and what they mostly opted for was teacher grading but not peer grading.

In general, the pre-service English language teachers in this study held a positive attitude towards peer assessment as it was discussed in Ratminingsih, Artini and Padmadewi's (2017) study because most of them explained that they had an efficient process as in Peng's (2009) study. Different from Peng's (2009) study, the participants of this study expressed suffering from friendship bias showing some similarities with the study by Kilickaya (2017). Likewise, in Ozdemir's (2016) study, the pre-service English language teachers recommended during the interviews that the instructor should not ask close friends and peers having trouble amongst themselves to assess each other's work. All in all, this study showed both similarities and differences with the studies in the field in these angles.

Besides these concerns, the majority of the class perceived peer assessment as an alternative assessment technique to become aware of their own mistakes in a collaborative learning platform. Although Reinders and Lazaro (2007) suggest that the peer assessment process would help students become autonomous learners with a decent implementation, a few of them expressed this process as an impractical evaluation in terms of the difficulty of implementing the peer assessment in a class atmosphere devoid of affective factors similar to Reynolds and Trehan's (2000) research. Therefore, using peer assessment with a well-prepared rubric could help students about fairness and equality as it reduces the negative effect of personal issues on scoring. Furthermore, the participants in this study pointed out that peer assessment process enabled them to know different perspectives on the evaluation of a micro teaching presentation. In a similar vein, Black and Wiliam (2006) indicate that this process allows students to realize the different aspects of the assessment process, hence it could be beneficial to use peer assessment in other courses, too.

This study by referring to pre-service teachers' experiences related to the utilization of peer assessment in a methodology course could imply pre-service teachers need to be exposed to alternative assessment tools especially to be aware of such techniques and methods in their actual teaching environments. The study also implies that teacher educators need to enlarge pre-

service teachers' horizons by challenging already existing assessment tools and integrating each individual in the assessment process. Through experiencing and integrating pre-service teachers' own voices and beliefs, teacher educators could well respond to their needs in teacher education programs and could better equip them with proper teacher qualities.

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