Student Attitudes Towards Self And Peer Assessment In Japanese University First Year EFL Classes

Simon Cornelius
Oliver Kinghorn

　本研究は自己およびピア評価という新しい評価法に対する学習者の考えを理解する目的で行われた。調査に参加したのは、日本の大学で外国語としての英語を学ぶ１年生405名である。英語コミュニケーションコースを履修する調査参加者は、一学期中、個人やピアで様々な評価法を経験した。このコース終了後、オンライン質問紙で履修者の意識調査を行った。質問紙では、学習者が１）自己・ピア評価に対してどのような考えを持っているのか、２）自分やピアの英語能力を評価する者として自身をどのように感じているか、そして３）自己・ピア評価法を言語学習に有効な方法だと感じているかの３点を調べた。調査の結果、この新しい評価法をほとんど経験したことがなかった学習者たちも、自己・ピア評価に対しておおむね肯定的な考えを持っていることがわかった。また彼らはピア評価を快く思い、言語学習の手段として評価している一方、自らの言語能力を評価する能力については懐疑的であることもわかった。

Key words: self and peer assessment, student centered learning, alternative assessment, student attitudes, collaborative learning

Introduction

Recent trends in the EFL literature demonstrate an increasing interest in the role of alternative forms of assessment in the classroom. This may partly be due to shifting currents in EFL teaching methodology towards more student centered learning activities (Jones, 2007). It may also be a result of teachers searching for a more meaningful, varied, interactive and ongoing form of assessment than traditional end-of-course evaluation (Azarnoosh, 2013). In the case of a university level EFL oral communication class, for example, continual formative self and peer assessment in tandem with teacher assessment throughout the semester may provide a clearer guide to student's language proficiency and a higher face validity than short oral 'interviews' at semester-end. Furthermore, when assessment has the potential to become less biased towards results and more reflective of different criteria of performance (active participation, creativity, level of preparedness for a task, amongst others), then the practice of alternative methods of self and peer assessment may contribute greatly towards language acquisition and the skills

required to become more competent learners.

Let us first of all be clear on the terminology used in this paper. Self-assessments are assessments that require students to judge their own language abilities or language performance (Brown, 1998). Peer assessment asks students to evaluate their classmates as they complete a task of a similar or identical nature. Managed properly, it can be contended that both self and peer assessment activities may have value as a learning activity in their own right (White, 2009).

The survey at the heart of this paper asked over four hundred first year Japanese university students of mixed levels of proficiency to reflect on the self and peer assessment activities attached to writing and speaking tasks in their EFL classes. While the literature abounds with assurances of the value particularly of peer assessment in the EFL classroom (Topping, 1998; Nilson, 2003), there is still a limited amount of research regarding student's attitudes towards self and peer assessment.

This paper addresses two fundamental questions: (1) What are the prevailing attitudes towards self and peer assessment amongst Japanese university first year EFL learners?; (2) Can self and peer assessment be seen as a valuable language learning tool?

Literature review

Studies that support the efficacy of peer assessment are numerous in the EFL literature, but there are relatively few studies that have been conducted to explore student attitudes to alternative forms of assessment in EFL classes (Azarnoosh, 2013; Peng, 2010; White, 2009; Zakian, Moradan & Naghibi, 2012). Even then, many of these studies have focused largely on the effects that peer assessment activities have on improving EFL writing and speaking, rather than specifically concentrating on student's attitudes towards such assessment methods. It must be said that a number of these recent studies have been based on relatively small sample sizes and yield broadly similar results.

Zakian, Moradan and Naghibi (2012) and Azarnoosh (2013) both reported generally positive attitudes towards self and peer assessment within small student samples, and arrived at the conclusion that alternative forms of assessment are not only a valuable way of assessing language learners but "encourages learners and teachers to regard assessment as a shared responsibility" (Azarnoosh, 2013; p8). White (2009) follows suit and takes a step further suggesting that positive student attitudes to alternative forms of assessment could assist students in becoming more effective language learners.

There is clearly a broad consensus across the literature on the effectiveness of alternative forms of assessment in language learning. Peng (2010), as well as Orsmond and Merry (1996) and Sivan (2000), notes that peer assessment in EFL contexts can develop more autonomous and active learners. Topping (1998) reminds us that although peer assessment can never be a perfect substitute for more traditional teacher assessment, it can promote higher order thinking skills. Nilson (2003) is equally positive in regards to the role of peer assessment not only in developing critical thinking skills but also in the context of collaborative learning. From a pedagogical perspective, there is a strong argument that alternative forms of assessment should feature strongly in a student-centered classroom and that student and teacher should both play an active role in assessment. It is when you scrutinize the role of the student as a judge of his or her own or peer's language performance, however, that you reveal some of the limitations inherent in such alternative methods of assessment.

Some studies question the efficacy of self and peer assessment as a valid means to judge student language proficiency. Saito and Fujita (2004) point out that there is still some doubt as to the accuracy of self and peer assessment due to the somewhat dubious belief that these forms of assessment are "unreliable and thus inadequate for evaluative purposes" (Saito & Fujita, 2004; p34). Other studies have noted various affective factors impairing peer assessment, including how anxious students feel about assessing a classmate and the question of whether students actually know how to make an adequate assessment (Topping, 1998). Cheng and Warren (2005) observed another affective factor that manifested itself in students lacking confidence in their own ability to review peers.

The literature, therefore, depicts self and peer assessment in a broadly positive light. There are studies, however, that contend that alternative assessment isn't completely void of inherent drawbacks.

Procedure

An online survey was conducted with first year students enrolled in oral communication classes at a private Japanese university at the conclusion of the first 15-week semester. Survey participants were given 10 questions both in Japanese and English. Questions included 5-point Likert scale questions and polar style yes-no questions. The survey was presented to students via the open access website Survey Monkey, a web-based service that allows users to create online purpose specific surveys. This format allowed students to respond using smart phones or similar devices to access the survey website and reply anonymously in class. Four hundred and

five students, enrolled in a variety of faculties and differing majors, responded with the large majority of students answering all of the questions (see Appendix). Faculties that participated in the survey consisted of engineering (109 students), economics (49 students), sociology (45 students), law (59 students), literature (43 students), policy (54 students) and commerce (46 students). Consideration was taken by the authors when designing survey questions to avoid ambiguity and to construct specific, relevant and answerable questions (Brown, 2001). The group-administered questionnaire format was utilized, as per say an interview format, for its inherent ease in development and perceived efficiency when dealing with a large scale study (Brown, 2001). Questions and response choices were both in Japanese and English to accommodate the varied L2 English ability of students undertaking their first year of tertiary EFL studies with a native English speaker. Of the 405 survey respondents 54 were enrolled in advanced communication classes.

Throughout their first semester of study, students have been exposed to different self and peer assessment tasks. One form of peer assessment that was undertaken involved students reviewing and correcting their classmates' short essays that were given as homework assignments. Students were encouraged to point out any grammatical and spelling mistakes they could find and give general oral and written corrective feedback to the writer before homework was handed in to the teacher. Students were also involved in marking their classmate's test papers for periodically held tests as another form of peer assessment. Self-assessment was facilitated through activities such as simple self-assessment check boxes after the completion of a series of language modules. Students were required to give an affirmation regarding their ability to complete various language tasks covered in the previous three units of the course materials by ticking boxes representing their degree of achievement or apparent lack of. Furthermore, students self assessed their participation in student led discussions held 4 or 5 times over the duration of the semester. The student led discussion required students to rate, out of 10, their capacity to summarize and understand the main ideas of the discussion, their level of active participation, and their ability to share their opinions and cooperate with others. This form of self and peer assessment was designed by the instructor to focus students better on task, stimulate higher levels of participation, and concretize the learning goals of the activity. Conscious of attaining constructive information and 'uncontaminated' student responses to the survey, the authors were careful not to overstate the potential or perceived pedagogical benefits of self and peer assessment, as noted above in the introduction section, to the students as the authors felt that this may unduly influence the students' attitudes. As stated previously this paper's focus is limited to the student's attitudes towards self and peer

assessment in an EFL classroom context, and as such the authors resolved that teachers influence on students attitudes should be kept to a minimum.

The survey was administered in the final class of the semester and took participants approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Results and Discussion

Describing student responses to the online questionnaire, students demonstrated mostly positive attitudes towards self and peer assessment (see Appendix for individual questions and response results).

The first question addressed student's familiarity with alternative forms of assessment, where over 80% of respondents stated that this was their first encounter with self and peer assessment. This may be a product of standardized teacher-dependent assessment methods utilized throughout pre-tertiary English language education in the Japanese school system. White (2009) notices that the didactic model of assessment predominant in the Japanese education system leaves little room for students to encounter alternative forms of assessment. This relative lack of experience with self and peer assessment may, however, have yielded more authentic responses to the survey questions as students had few preconceptions towards alternative methods of assessment.

Students' belief in their ability to judge themselves and others, and the degree to which they are comfortable with self and peer assessment, gave mixed results. On the one hand, responses to question 2 (see Appendix) demonstrate that a significant majority of students, 77%, are either 'very comfortable' (32.26%) or 'comfortable' (44.91%) with peer feedback and assessment, yet only 51.75% responded that they consider themselves to be a 'good judge of peer's language ability' (question 4). Furthermore, responses to question 3 show a majority of students feel they aren't good judges of their own language ability (63.91%). This is somewhat contradictory to studies conducted by Cheng and Warren (2005), which suggest that students are uncomfortable evaluating peers partly due to a perceived lack of confidence in their own ability. In contrast, the majority of students in this survey felt 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' being assessed by their peers even though they may not view themselves as an adequate evaluator of their peers work. The high level of student acceptance of peer assessment could possibly be attributed to their classroom experiences during the semester, where critical peer review of student material was carried out as a relatively stress free pair activity. The informal nature of the peer feedback tasks may well have swayed participant views, inducing a comfort-

able attitude towards peer assessment.

The results from question 5 clearly demonstrate that students had a strong desire to be involved in the assessment of their own or peer's class work. Either agreeing (55.83%) or strongly agreeing (18.86%) that they should participate in assessment, these responses appear to validate Azarnoosh's (2013) assertion that we should "encourage learners and teachers to regard assessment as a shared responsibility" (p8). Although these positive attitudes suggest students in this learning context have a strong willingness to be involved in their own or other's assessment, the responses to question 6 demonstrate that they are indifferent to the teacher being the sole arbiter of assessment. Perhaps of more significance is the result that approximately 41% of respondents indicated that they felt the teacher should not be the sole assessor, therefore, adding more weight to the results of question 5 which supports the students' willingness to be involved in assessment.

Question 7 asked students whether they view peer feedback on their class work to be as valid as teacher feedback, with a solid majority (61.88%) responding that peer feedback is accepted equally as teacher feedback. These findings are in contrast to Zakian, Moradan, and Naghibi (2012), who found that students who did not like to be involved in the assessment procedure reason that "somebody with higher ability and knowledge should judge their performances" (p4). As previously noted, the overall acceptance of peer assessment by students in this study may attribute to the majority of students viewing peer judgments on their work as valid. Again, in class experiences such as positive appraisals from peers arguably would lead students to view peer assessment as having a high degree of validity.

One of the underlying purposes of this study was to ascertain how students felt towards self and peer assessment activities in the classroom. Question 8, to which 65.41% of respondents answered "yes", asked students to indicate whether they enjoyed participating in such methods of assessment. Being that a majority of two thirds responded in the affirmative suggests that students would welcome more opportunities to be involved in student-generated forms of assessment. Taking into consideration the responses from question 9, however, it would appear that the participants of this study are not particularly eager to undertake more frequent and substantive self and peer assessment as a classroom activity. A majority of 60.20% stated that they were 'satisfied with the current amount' of self and peer assessment in the classes upon which this study is based. Even then, students were engaged in some form of alternative assessment for a limited amount of time in almost every class of the 15-week university semester. A lack of self-confidence, 63% responding negatively to question 6, in their ability to adequately self-assess could well be one under lying factor as to students' reluctance to accept

'more' alternative assessment as a classroom activity.

In regards to student's attitudes towards whether they feel self and peer assessment is a valuable tool for language learning, a combined total of over 68% thought it was either 'very valuable' or 'valuable' (question 10). One plausible reason as to why students' viewed these forms of self and peer assessment as valuable could be attributed to the fact that the teacher had asked them to participate in such alternative assessment tasks. That is to say, students inherently view in class tasks presented by the teacher as valuable to in this case second language learning. If self and peer assessment is considered to be more about 'learning' than about assessment (White, 2009), it is conceivable that the students have demonstrated in their responses an awareness of the wider learning implications of alternative assessment.

Conclusion

A simple overview of this study clearly shows a positive trend in attitudes towards self and peer assessment. Such alternative forms of assessment were perceived as being a valuable language-learning tool even from the perspective of students who had little or no prior experience of such activities. Even though students appeared to lack the confidence to judge their own English language ability, responses indicated that they are broadly accepting of peer assessment. Furthermore, it would appear that there are many students, in the context of this study, who consider peer feedback to be of equal merit to teacher feedback.

Students who participated in this survey demonstrated a willingness to engage in forms of alternative assessment. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to claim that such openness to different forms of assessment is a pre-requisite for attaining language-learning benefits, further investigation into the pedagogical implications of alternative forms of assessment may take us further towards an understanding of the role of learner-centered assessment in engendering a sense of learner autonomy, improved critical thinking, promoting more student interaction and contributing more to the learning process (Azarnoosh, 2013; White, 2009; Zakian et al., 2012).

One positive conclusion from the survey would be that students are already congruent with a shift towards more learner-centered teaching and assessment. If students demonstrate an enjoyment of and a willingness to take responsibility for observing and assessing their own and peer's language performance, then placing the results of this study into a broader educational context, the authors advocate utilizing alternative forms of assessment in tandem with teacher-based assessment in the EFL classroom.

References

Azarnoosh, M. (2013). Peer assessment in an EFL context: Attitudes and friendship bias. Language Testing in Asia. 3(11), 1-10

Brown, J.D. (1998). New ways of classroom assessment. TESOL International Association.

Cheng, W. & Warren, M. (2005). Peer assessment of language proficiency. *Language Testing*. 22 (1), 93-121

Jones, L. (2007). The student-centered classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Nilson, L. (2003). Improving student feedback. College Teaching. 51(1), 34-39

Orsmond, P. & Merry, S. (1996).The importance of marking criteria in the use of peer assessment. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education. 21(3), 239-250

Peng, J. (2010). Peer assessment in an EFL context: Attitudes and correlations. Selected Proceedings of the 2008 Second Language Research Forum. 89-107

Saito, H. & Fujita, T. (2004). Characteristics and user acceptance of peer rating in EFL writing classrooms. Language Teaching Research. 8(1), 31-54

Sivan, A. (2000). The implementation of peer assessment: An action research approach. Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice. 7(2), 193-213

Topping, K. (1998). Peer-assessment between students in colleges and universities. Review of Educational Research. 68 (3), 249-276

White, E. (2009). Student perspectives of peer assessment for learning in a public speaking course. Asian EFL Journal - Professional Teaching Articles. 33, 1-29

Zakian, M., Moradan, A. & Naghibi, S.E. (2012). The relationship between self-, peer-, and teacher-assessments of EFL learners' speaking. World J Arts, Languages, and Social Sciences. 1, 1-5

Appendix

Question 1 Answered: 402 Skipped: 3	
Is the concept of self and peer review and assessment new to you since starting this course? このクラスで行ったピア評価や自己評価は，授業開始時，あなたにとって新しい考え方でしたか？	
Yes／はい	84.83%
No／いいえ	15.92%

Question 2 Answered: 403 Skipped: 2	
Are you comfortable with peers assessing and commenting on your class work? 授業の課題をクラスメイトと評価し合い，コメントし合うことに抵抗はないですか？	
Very comfortable／全く抵抗はない	32.26%
Comfortable／抵抗はない	44.91%
Indifferent／どちらでも良い	14.39%
Uncomfortable／抵抗がある	7.69%
Very uncomfortable／かなり抵抗がある	0.74%

Question 3 Answered: 399 Skipped: 6	
Do you feel you are a good judge of your own English language ability? 自分の英語力を上手く評価出来ると思いますか？	
Yes／はい	36.84%
No／いいえ	63.91%

Question 4 Answered: 400 Skipped: 5	
Do you feel you are a good judge of your peer's English language ability? 自分が級友の英語力を上手く評価出来ると思いますか？	
Yes／はい	51.75%
No／いいえ	48.50%

Question 5 Answered: 403 Skipped: 2	
Do you agree that students should participate in their own self assessment and/or assessment of peer's class work? 学生は課題の自己評価，ピア評価を積極的に行うべきだと思いますか？	
Strongly agree／とてもそう思う	18.86%
Agree／そう思う	55.83%
Indifferent／どちらでも良い	22.58%
Disagree／そう思わない	2.73%
Strongly disagree／全くそう思わない	0%

Question 6　　Answered: 401　Skipped: 4	
Do you agree that the teacher should be in sole charge of assessing your classwork? 課題の評価は教員によってのみ行われるべきだと思いますか？	
Strongly agree ／とてもそう思う	4.24%
Agree ／そう思う	14.71%
Indifferent ／どちらでも良い	39.65%
Disagree ／そう思わない	36.91%
Strongly disagree ／全くそう思わない	4.49%

Question 7　　Answered: 404　Skipped: 1	
Do you feel that peer feedback on class work is as valid as teacher feedback? 課題のピア評価は教員による評価と同じくらい妥当だと思いますか？	
Yes, peer feedback is as valid as teacher feedback ／ はい、同じくらい妥当だと思います	61.88%
No, peer feedback is not as valid as teacher feedback ／ いいえ、教員の評価ほど妥当じゃないと思います	39.11%

Question 8　　Answered: 399　Skipped: 6	
Do you enjoy self and peer assessment activities in class? 自分と級友を評価する事が楽しいと思いますか？	
Yes ／はい	65.41%
No ／いいえ	34.84%

Question 9　　Answered: 402　Skipped: 3	
Do you feel there should be more or less peer and self assessment as a classroom activity? 自己評価，ピア評価は，授業内でのアクティビティとして，多少なりとも含まれるべきだと思いますか？	
Much more ／もっと多く含まれるべき	5.47%
More ／もっと含まれるべき	30.85%
Satisfied with the current amount ／ちょうど良い	60.20%
Less ／減らすべき	3.23%
A lot less ／かなり減らすべき	0.25%

Question 10　　Answered: 402　Skipped: 3	
Do you feel that self and peer assessment is a valuable language-learning tool? ピア評価や自己評価は語学学習に有効な手段だと思いますか？	
Very valuable ／とっても有効的だと思す	11.17%
Valuable ／有効的だと思います	57.57%
I don't know ／分かりません	27.30%
Not so valuable ／有効的だと思いません	3.72%
No value at all ／全く有効的だと思いません	0.25%