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BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF PEER ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

Abstract. Peer assessment has been described as a collaborative method of assessment that promotes active and reflective learning. It is particularly useful in the higher educational context since university students are required to be involved in more autonomous and student-centered activities. Therefore, university instructors should consider alternative forms of assessment. However, peer assessment is often neglected by instructors, and students are not prepared to employ peer practices. The aim of the current literature review is to analyze the previous studies on peer assessment in higher education. Particularly, it will describe the reasons for using peer assessment, its forms, and the benefits and challenges of employing peer assessment in higher education. Therefore, the findings will raise the awareness of teachers and students regarding the advantages and limitations of peer assessment techniques. To achieve this goal, the review of 30 articles, which were related to the implementation of peer assessment in higher education is presented. The articles were selected from various databases, namely Google Scholar, ERIC, and JSTOR, between the years 2015 and 2024.

Keywords: peer assessment, higher education, collaborative learning, benefits, challenges.

Introduction

Peer assessment (PA) has gained the significant interest of scholars in the last few decades. It can be defined as a process where learners evaluate or are evaluated by their fellow students. A substantial number of researchers emphasize the significance of employing peer assessment in the higher education context (Dahal et al., 2022; Double et al., 2020; Topping, 2023). Moreover, Meijer et al. (2020) define the need to integrate more collaborative assessment into the higher education curriculum. Therefore, the need to systematically describe the advantages and obstacles of implementing peer assessment in higher education is considered to be crucial.

Formative assessment is no longer viewed as an instrument to measure student performance but as a tool to motivate learners (Yin et al., 2022). One way to foster students' active participation in assessment is to deploy a peer assessment strategy. Peer assessment has gained considerable scientific attention for many decades. Some researchers mention the positive influence of peer assessment on learners' performance, while others report on its potential drawbacks (Chorrojprasert, 2021). An extensive investigation of advantages and possible shortcomings can lead to better comprehension of the methodology, practical value, and risks associated with this type of assessment. Furthermore, the literature review on the advantages and shortcomings of peer assessment can be useful for educators who intend to utilize more collaborative methods of assessment in their classroom. In addition, it might be beneficial for learners to be aware of the advantages and obstacles of peer assessment to be more prepared for its implementation. The aim of the current paper is to describe the benefits of employing peer assessment in higher education presented by previous scholars and to describe challenges that can be observed when using peer assessment in higher education found in the literature.

Regarding the Kazakhstani context, some scholars revealed the wide use of peer assessment practices in schools, many of which reported the positive impact of peer grading on learners' performance (Ybyrayeva & Koshkarova, 2023; Zhussipova, 2024). However, the research regarding the use of peer assessment techniques in higher education is underestimated by local scholars.

Literature Review

Reasons for employing peer assessment

Assessment significantly impacts the learning process. Huda et al. (2020) claim that in the higher education setting, assessment needs to promote students' active participation and autonomy. Conventional ways of evaluation might not satisfy students' learning needs. Peer assessment is supposed to be an innovative and student-centered learning approach (Van Zundert et al., 2010).

The underlying reason for the wide use of peer assessment activities is related to the attempts of instructors to engage learners in the learning process (Gurbanov, 2016). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that assessment is considered to be a fundamental part of the learning process. During the last few decades, a shift has emerged from the assessment that is focused on teaching to the assessment that promotes learning (Gonzalez & Llorente, 2014). In such a way, assessment can be deployed as a learning tool. Among collaborative methods of assessment in higher education, peer assessment is one of the most prominent, with a substantial number of studies evaluating its aim, value, benefits, and drawbacks (Adachi et al., 2018; Ashenafi, 2017; Alt & Raichel, 2022).

Forms of peer assessment

Peer assessment can be represented in various forms. Vickerman (2007) explains that formative peer assessment is used in situations when students need to provide feedback to their peers to enhance learning. It can be useful to foster metacognition since learners monitor their progress as they learn and adapt learning strategies for better learning outcomes. Wang et al. (2023) state that peer assessment is rarely used in its formative form, focusing only on grading rather than using peer assessment for improving the learning process. Consequently, learners may lack the motivation to think deeply about the evaluation of peers.

In contrast, summative peer assessment involves assigning grades and forming judgements on peers' work. This approach can cause multiple challenges, as reaching objective and reliable assessment conducted by students is problematic (Zhou et al., 2020). This is where the development of accurate rubrics and assessment descriptors can be used to increase the reliability of assessment. Hamer et al. (2015) continue to question the accuracy of peer grading, stating that students have a tendency to underestimate or overmark the works of their counterparts. This can be overcome by open discussions, double grading, and anonymous marking (Panadero & Alqassab, 2019).

With the advancement of technology, online peer assessment is becoming a widely used learning tool. Havard et al. (2023) report that online peer assessment enhances students' critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. Moreover, their findings revealed a decreased level of social loafing among undergraduate students when engaging in digital peer assessment. Thus, it can foster the effectiveness of group projects. Zhan et al. (2022) also highlighted that using online peer assessment tools is advantageous for fostering students' higher-order thinking. Researchers mention such online platforms for peer assessment as EduTech, iLAP, Eduflow, Peergrade, and many others (Latifi et al., 2021; Lu & Zhang, 2012; Ocampo & Panadero, 2023). Although online platforms for peer assessment have great potential, teachers and students might require training to maximize proper learning (Ocampo & Panadero, 2023).

Advantages of peer assessment in higher education

The following advantages of peer assessment were described by researchers:

Development of soft/professional skills

Chorrojprasert (2021) described such advantages of using peer assessment as communicative, problem-solving, negotiation, and other soft skills that can be fostered through exchanging opinions, asking questions, receiving feedback, and providing explanations. Boud and Soler (2016) also claim that peer assessment contributes to professional development, as learners can obtain life-long skills that are highly appreciated in the workplace.

Fostering active learning

Assessment is usually expected to be conducted by teachers; therefore, students are perceived as passive receivers of feedback and grades. Peer assessment can change this tendency, creating an

environment of active learning (Adachi et al., 2018). Kumar et al. (2023) described such learning benefits of peer assessment as increased motivation, better understanding of learning material, and development of critical thinking skills, which all contribute to active participation in the learning process.

Better comprehension of assessment criteria

Students need to understand the assessment standards before evaluating their peers. This creates a need to better understand the assessment criteria in order to provide meaningful feedback (Yucel et al., 2014). Moreover, when learners take the role of assessors, their cognitive skills are enhanced. Their own knowledge is broadened when they have an opportunity to review, evaluate, and provide constructive feedback to learners of similar status (Chorrojprasert, 2021).

Timely and appropriate feedback for students

Learners can benefit from feedback since it uncovers their strengths and weaknesses, therefore creating an environment of self-directed learning. Peer feedback can be more reliable than teacher feedback in group projects since instructors are not well-informed about the actual performance of each team member (Tucker & Abbasi, 2015). Furthermore, peer assessment contributes to better learning outcomes (Li et al., 2020). A similar view is shared by Wanner and Palmer (2018), who state that both providing and receiving peer feedback have a positive impact on promoting reflective learning.

Enhanced responsibility

Peer assessment can develop self-reflection and enhance understanding of others, thus enabling learners to recognize mistakes and propose practical solutions. Topping (2019) claims that peer assessment fosters not only active participation and learning autonomy but also responsibility for one's own learning process.

A qualitative study conducted by Adachi et al. (2018) aimed at investigating the perceptions and experiences of university instructors about the use of peer assessment. A semi-structured interview was administered among thirteen teachers working in one private university in Australia. The findings revealed seven themes regarding the advantages of peer assessment. These advantages include enhanced learning, development of communicative skills, opportunity to experience authentic assessment, ability to provide feedback, better comprehension of rubrics, enhanced teamwork, and development of autonomous learning. Therefore, the study supported the effectiveness of using peer assessment in higher education, which comes in line with the views of previous researchers (Alzaid, 2017; Pèrez et al., 2022; Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000).

Challenges of peer assessment in higher education

The following challenges of peer assessment were identified by researchers:

Reliability and accuracy

Students are novices not only in the subject matter but also in grading and assessing. A substantial number of researchers claimed that peer assessment is highly vulnerable to being unreliable and biased, as learners tend to overmark each other or not provide profound feedback (Hamer et al., 2015; Kulkarni et al., 2015).

Perceived competency

It is generally accepted that assessment should be conducted by a teacher who is competent in the field. Learners might not seriously perceive an assessment that their peers carried out, therefore neglecting the constructive feedback provided by other students (Tai et al., 2017).

Power relationships

Implementing peer assessment can destroy existing power relationships between students and teachers. Instructors might be reluctant to give the power of assessment to their students, and similarly, students might not wish to change the existing hierarchy (Tai et al., 2017; McGarr & Clifford, 2013).

Time and resource constraints

Peer assessment can be time-consuming. Instructors need a clear plan for its implementation. Additionally, teaching support is required at all stages of the peer assessment process (Berg & Seeber,

2016). Moreover, Adachi et al. (2018) report that it requires much effort from the instructors to successfully organize, present, and evaluate peer assessment activities.

Psychological obstacles

Some students experience anxiety while assessing their peers. This can be caused by unwillingness to judge or offend another person (Sridharan et al., 2018). Similarly, Tornwall (2018) claimed that some learners exhibit anxious behavior when being evaluated by learners of similar status.

Stančić (2021) conducted experiential research that explored undergraduate students' experiences with peer and self-assessment activities. The results indicate that peer assessment was considered more psychologically uncomfortable for learners than self-assessment, which aligns with the study of Wanner & Palmer (2018), who advocated for the stressful nature of peer feedback. Additionally, the participants experienced discomfort when assigning a grade to each other, as they felt not competent to be involved in summative assessment, which is a well-described challenge of peer assessment by Panadero (2019).

Another experiential study conducted by Sridharan et al. (2018) was aimed at examining students' ability and behavior during peer assessment practices. The findings demonstrate that students accurately and objectively evaluated each other in a formative assessment. However, participants exposed significant bias when peer assessment was employed as a summative tool for assigning grades. The results questioned the reliability of using peer grading similarly to the ideas of previous researchers (Topping, 2009; Yao-Ting et al., 2010; Nicol et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The current literature review is aimed at examining studies on the topic of peer assessment in higher education. Findings from various studies were described regarding the reasons for using peer assessment, its forms, possible benefits and barriers of implementing peer assessment activities. Having reviewed various studies on the topic, it can be claimed that the underlying reason for employing peer assessment is to promote active learning and using non-standardized assessment. Peer assessment can be utilized in formative, summative, and online forms. Advantages of employing peer assessment include: development of soft as well as professional skills, promotion of active learning, better comprehension of assessment criteria, timely and appropriate feedback, and enhanced responsibility. On the contrary, such challenges of peer assessment as the lack of reliability, accuracy, and competency, complicated power relationships, time and resource constraints, and psychological challenges were found to be widely discussed by researchers.

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ЖОҒАРЫ БІЛІМ БЕРУДЕГІ БІРІН-БІРІ БАҒАЛАУДЫҢ АРТЫҚШЫЛЫҚТАРЫ МЕН КЕМШІЛІКТЕРІ: ӘДЕБИЕТТЕРГЕ ШОЛУ

Аңдатпа. Бірін-бірі бағалау белсенді және рефлексивті оқытуға ықпал ететін бірлескен бағалау әдісі ретінде сипатталады. Ол әсіресе жоғары білім беру тұрғысынан пайдалы, өйткені университет студенттері анағұрлым автономды және студенттерге бағдарланған іс- әрекетке қатысуы қажет. Осы себепті жоғары оқу орындарының оқытушылары бағалаудың басқа альтернативті нысандарын қарастыруы тиіс. Алайда оқытушылар бірін-бірі бағалауды жиі елемейді, ал студенттер бірін-бірі бағалау практикасын пайдалануға дайын емес. Осы әдебиетке шолудың мақсаты жоғары білім берудегі бірін-бірі бағалауды пайдаланудың себептері, оның нысандары, сондай-ақ жоғары білім беруде қолданудың артықшылықтары мен кемшіліктері сипатталатын болады. Осылайша, алынған нәтижелер оқытушылар мен студенттердің аталмыш бағалау әдісінің артықшылықтары мен кемшіліктері туралы хабардар болуын арттыруға мүмкіндік береді. Осы мақсатқа қол жеткізу үшін түрлі дерекқорлардан 30 мақалаға шолу ұсынылған, атап айтқанда: Google Scholar, Егіс және JSTOR 2015-2024 жылдар аралығында.

Түйін сөздер: бірін-бірі бағалау, бірлескен оқу, жоғары білім.

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ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА И НЕДОСТАТКИ ВЗАИМНОГО ОЦЕНИВАНИЯ В ВЫСШЕМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ: ОБЗОР ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ

Аннотация. Взаимное оценивание описывается как совместный метод оценивания, который способствует активному и рефлексивному обучению. Он особенно полезен в контексте высшего образования, так как студенты университетов должны участвовать в более автономной и ориентированной на студентов деятельности. По этой причине преподаватели вузов должны рассматривать альтернативные формы оценивания. Однако преподаватели часто пренебрегают взаимным оцениванием, а студенты не готовы к использованию практики

взаимного оценивания. Целью данного обзора литературы является анализ предыдущих исследований, посвященных взаимному оцениванию в высшем образовании. В частности, будут описаны причины использования взаимного оценивания, его формы, а также преимущества и проблемы применения взаимного оценивания в высшем образовании. Таким образом, полученные результаты позволят повысить осведомленность преподавателей и студентов о преимуществах и недостатках метода взаимного оценивания. Для достижения этой цели представлен обзор 30 статей из различных баз данных, а именно: Google Scholar, Eric и JSTOR за период 2015-2024 годы.

Ключевые слова: взаимное оценивание, коллаборативое обучение, высшее образование.

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