

Graduate University EFL Learners' Perceptions on Peer Assessment in Improving Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

Responding to this ever-changing era, graduate university EFL learners are highly demanded to master speaking skills to be labeled as proficient target language academicians. However, the journey to attain advanced mastery of this communicative competence is a tough one since they frequently experience unpleasant speaking learning activities in their daily routines. Peer assessment appeared as one of the effective solutions to overcome the aforementioned hindrance by which graduate university EFL learners can constantly experience more enjoyable speaking learning dynamics in the support of meaningful, constructive, and encouraging feedback addressed by their trusted learning companions. This present small-scale qualitative study set out to profoundly investigate graduate university EFL learners' perceptions of peer assessment in improving speaking skills. To this end, 10 Likert-scale online questionnaire items and 5 open-ended written narrative inquiry questions were distributed to 21 English Education Master Students batch 2020 graduating from one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. Based on the research results a vast majority of graduate university EFL learners highly support the continual integration of peer assessment in nowadays speaking learning activities due to the promotion of fruitful speaking learning outcomes and meaningful internal as well as external supports. Some recent recommendations were also provided for the betterment of speaking learning investigation.

Keywords: Peer assessment, speaking skills, EFL learners

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INTRODUCTION

In this globalization era, English language is considered as one of the most-used international languages by global learners. Liu (2018) reports that the majority of worldwide learners are required to master English language to better survive in this modern age. Concerning this fact, a great number of countries already demanded EFL learners to possess advanced communicative skills in order to be more ready to compete in the 21st century era. This truth is truly confirmed by Chen and Hwang (2020) revealing that a vast majority of educational institutions heed their major concern to improve EFL learners' communicative competencies in order to better prepare their readiness to face the tight competition in this

ever-changing life dynamics. On the contrary, the ability to communicate by using English language has been one of the formidable obstructions for globalized EFL learners. This impediment emerged as they acknowledged that there is a minimum chance for them to foster their speaking skills in various tangible communicative situations. Ali et al. (2019) confirm that speaking is one of the challenging skills for EFL learners to fully master since they are lack of broader opportunities to practice these communicative skills in the real-time conversational events. Furthermore, there are other potential obstacles hampering the progressive growth of EFL learners' speaking skills such as low self-confidence, a higher level of speaking anxiety, and feeling afraid of making mistakes. All these main challenges are strongly supported by Tarighat and Khodabakhsh (2016) theorizing that EFL learners feel reluctant to rehearse their speaking skills since they experience excessive fear and anxiety if they make lots of errors in the designated conversations impacting their self-confidence.

One of the promising EFL speaking pedagogical methods that can be constantly utilized by nowadays language teachers to overcome the previously-mentioned hurdles is peer assessment. It is believed that through the continual internalization of peer assessment, EFL learners can significantly elevate their willingness to communicate by using the target language since they will receive a vast array of meaningful feedback and encouragement from their trusted learning companions. This impactful peer assessment value is concerned with the peer assessment theory proposed by Kahfi (2021) articulating that it is increasingly necessary for second language educators to implement peer assessment in their speaking classroom learning vicinities as EFL learners can potentially gain a higher degree of self-confidence to continue fostering their communicative competencies with the support from their learning partners. The nature of peer assessment is also far from the daunting and debilitating models. Since peer assessment aims to provide continual comfort for EFL learners to scaffold other learning community members' speaking growth based on their pace, they will probably undergo more enjoyable and stress-free communicative enterprises. Again, all these meaningful means of communication practices occurred as EFL learners address constructive feedback focusing on developing other learning counterparts' communicative skills to the utmost potential. Hasnani and Mubarak (2020) strongly believe that in the support of peer assessment, EFL learners can significantly elevate their communicative competencies to the utmost development in that they continuously experience emotionally-supportive and positively- sound speaking learning climates where mutual communicative supports are imparted to each learning community members.

By implication, the effective implementation of peer assessment in speaking learning dynamics is not without its tremendous impediments. EFL teachers determining to maximize this learner-oriented learning model are highly recommended to clearly inform their learners regarding the major objectives, assessment processes, and learning activities they have engage with. This suggestive recommendation finds a further support from Mubarak (2019) contending that it is of prime importance for worldwide EFL educationalists to familiarize their learners with the entire systems of peer assessment before assessing other learning counterparts' communicative skills in order to promote more meaningful speaking learning activities. During the peer assessment assessing processes, EFL teachers are simultaneously required to be firm in informing their learners to become more confident, objective, and fair in assessing other learning community members' speaking performances. This action is a compulsory as EFL learners can infuse a more robust sense of belonging to their classmates' speaking growth responsibly. This conception accorded with Zheng et al. (2021) asserting that it is principal to fully understand that EFL teachers should ascertain that all learners bear a higher sense of belonging, responsibility, and accountability while assessing their friends' speaking performances in the light of peer assessment. Another exceptional speaking learning benefit that can be attained by EFL learners with the integration of peer assessment is the nourishment of critical thinking skills. Since the designated peer assessment speaking criteria comprise of manifold aspects, they are trained on how to address authentic, constructive, and accurate feedback for the betterment of their learning companions' future speaking performances. By so doing, their critical thinking skills are indirectly elevated due to the precise detection of others' speaking areas that require further improvements. This contention sits alongside with Mubarak (2019) pinpointing that the meaningful integration of peer assessment can enable EFL learners to develop an impressive growth of critical thinking skills in which they have been accustomed to impart specific speaking area improvements to other learning counterparts precisely.

Therefore, it is notably indispensable for modern EFL educationalists to equip their peer assessment with relevant speaking criteria, rubrics, and learning objectives in order to allow the learners to be more highly-desirous of fostering their targeted speaking area improvements insistently. Joo (2016) holds a strong belief that EFL learners can highly establish a conjoint effort, commitment, and activeness during their group speaking learning performances only if the targeted peer assessment is designed in line with their specific communicative contexts, needs, and proficiency. It is also interesting to be highlighted that the continual internalization

of peer assessment in speaking learning activities does not merely improve EFL learners' speaking skills but also life-long learning characters. It is undeniably inevitable for future target language academicians to thoroughly inculcate these behaviours where they are capable of discovering their specific strengths and weaknesses with an enlightenment of critical feedback, solid support, and dissemination of insightful ideas. All these above-elucidated conceptions are mutually interlinked with Rifah and Sabilah (2022) mentioning that peer assessment can be labelled as one of the high-quality communicative enterprises when it successfully imparts a strong foundation for EFL learners to synergistically forge others' speaking skills with the accompaniment of meaningful feedback, collaborative teamwork, and the transmission of novel ideas.

There were five previous studies conducted in this archipelago with regard to the critical importance of fostering Indonesian EFL learners' speaking skills. Practically speaking, all these prior communicative competencies investigation were not framed by peer assessment model. The first study was conducted by Dewi et al. (2022) highly recommending EFL teachers to heed more exhaustive attention on elevating their learners' self-esteem in communicating by using the target language to transform them into more confident communicators. Manipuspika (2018) unveiled that an overwhelming majority of Indonesian university EFL learners are afraid of communicating with their classmates by harnessing the target language as they infuse an excessive anxious feeling during their speaking practices. Mbato (2020) strongly suggested Indonesian university EFL teachers to implement multiple learning strategies in their speaking classroom environments to transfigure language learners become more autonomous, motivated, and capable L2 communicators. In a similar vein, Octaberlina and Muslimin (2022) highly advocated Indonesian university EFL teachers to create a wide range of enjoyable, contextual, and relevant speaking activities in order to progressively promote more friendly communicative learning exposure. In the last study, Wijaya (2021) uncovered that a predominant number of graduate university EFL learners agreed that self-efficacy could be one of the critical determinants to increase their speaking endeavor and competencies. Hence, fostering their self-efficacy levels is of paramount importance for EFL teachers attempting to bring about more anxiety-free speaking learning climates. Despite the fruitful research findings mentioned above, there is still a pressing need for the researcher to conduct a qualitative investigation by investigating graduate university EFL learners' perceptions on peer assessment in improving speaking skills. The main reason prompting the researcher to select graduate students to participate in this investigation is the potential obtained research results can be more enriched and relevant with the speaking learning contexts widely faced by Indonesian EFL teachers nowadays. Thus, this current small-scale qualitative investigation could shed more light

on the critical importance of integrating peer assessment in a vast array of speaking activities, which in turn enable EFL teachers to be more encouraged to internalize this learner-oriented approach in the upcoming L2 communicative enterprises. To fulfill this main research objective, this qualitative investigation is framed by the following research questions:

- (1) How do graduate university EFL learners perceive the integration of peer assessment in improving their speaking skills?
- (2) What are the specific factors impacting the meaningful implementation of peer assessment in speaking classroom contexts?

METHOD

The researcher conducted this present small-scale qualitative investigation with the support of a qualitative content analysis to obtain more obvious depictions out of the specific research phenomenon. Mayring (2014) repudiated that under the guidance of a qualitative content analysis, the researchers can potentially attain more reliable data since the particular study contexts have been explored more deeply. For the data gathering processes, the researcher distributed 10 online Likert-scale questionnaire items to 21 English Education Master Students batch 2020 in one of the private universities located in Yogyakarta City. This set of Likert-scale questionnaire statements fully concern with their perceptions on the integration of peer assessment in improving L2 communicative competencies. The major reason propelling the researcher to select these graduate university EFL learners is they have been more familiar with the actual peer assessment practices, particularly while they were conducting their scientific paper presentations in front of other learning companions. Thus, the researcher expectantly hoped that the subsequent research results attained from these research participants can pave enlightenment for Indonesian EFL educators to start incorporating peer assessment in their daily-based speaking learning activities. To reinforce the research results obtained from this first research instrument, the researcher concurrently made use of 5 open-ended written narrative inquiry questions to be distributed to 3 randomly-chosen interviewees out of the similar samplings. By utilizing this set of interview questions, the researcher can probably gain more reliable data due to the frank dissemination of ideas, experiences, and thoughts disseminated by the interviewees. Clandinin and Caine (2013) confessed that with the support of open-ended written narrative inquiry questions, the researchers can possibly attain more authentic research results as the research participants experience a higher level of freedom in sharing their tangible stories. Speaking specifically, there were two media harnessed by the researcher in gathering the

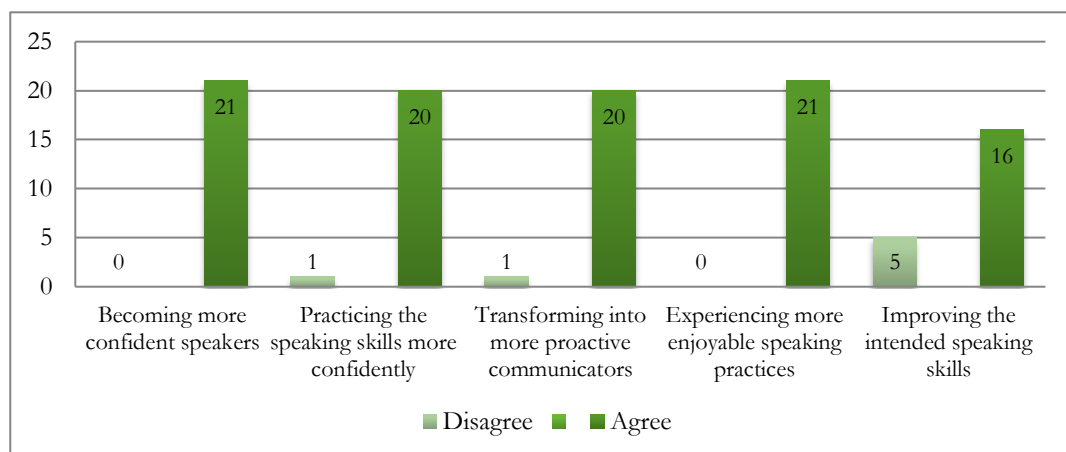
intended data namely Google Forms and Whats App application. The first medium was used when the researcher distributed 10 online-likert scale questionnaire items to 21 invited research participants.

Further, the second application was utilized while sending 5 open-ended written narrative inquiry questions to 3 interviewees. By releasing this strategy, the convenience of the data gathering processes would be experienced by both parties resulted in more robust research results attainment. In the data delineation stage, each research result was thematically categorized into some specific themes. Afterwards, these research themes were subsequently corroborated by the excerpts of open-ended written interview results, relevant theories, and prior research findings to generate more contextual research outcomes for the targeted educational stakeholders; EFL educators. To do so, an open-coding approach was simultaneously implemented in the data analysis stage to accurately categorize the most-often appeared research results derived from the questionnaire and written interview protocols eventually influencing the entire validity of this present small-scale qualitative investigation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section intended to critically expound the obtained research results obtained from the invited graduate university EFL learners through the 10 Likert-scale questionnaire items and 5 open-ended written narrative inquiry questions. There were two major specific themes thematically categorized in the light of a qualitative content analysis namely: (1) Peer assessment promotes more fruitful speaking learning outcomes and (2) meaningful internal and external supports sustain the use of peer assessment. The comprehensive delineations regarding these two themes can be discerned in these subsequent lines.

**Figure 1.1. Peer Assessment Promotes More Fruitful Speaking Learning Outcomes
(93%Participants Agree)**



From the chart above, it can be fairly concluded that the majority of graduate university EFL learners highly supported the constant utilization of peer assessment since it progressively promoted fruitful speaking learning outcomes for them. It can be discerned from the first major benefit of this satisfying speaking learning attainment where all graduate university EFL learners sanctioned that they have transformed into more confident L2 communicators in the light of peer assessment. This positive speaking learning outcome occurred as they have wider opportunities to hone their communicative skills intensively. While their speaking skills are gradually enhanced, their self-confidence will be automatically increased. This first strand of benefit is in agreement with Caceres (2020) found out that a great majority of university EFL learners having been exposed to peer assessment are more liable to speak more confidently due to the student-centeredness nature of daily-based L2 communicative practices. These above-explained conceptions concur with the following three interviewees' excerpts.

[Interviewee 1: *Yes. I think it motivates us to improve our speaking skills because we will be observed by others. Thus, we challenge ourselves to speak English well.*]

[Interviewee 2: *Since I need to convey my idea/ opinion to them, it helps me to increase my confidence in speaking because it will be more comfortable for me to speak to someone. It would be helpful for me to be a better speaker.*]

[Interviewee 3: *Yes because peer assessment is very helpful for me to foster speaking skills. I don't feel tense like facing the test when I practice speaking if my friends give me feedback.*]

It is also interesting to be highlighted that 20 out of 21 graduate university EFL learners strongly agreed that during the integration of peer assessment, they are more committed to forging their targeted L2 communicative competencies. This laudable speaking learning commitment can emerge only if EFL speaking instructors are strongly dedicated to addressing a vast range of encouraging comments, feedback, and suggestions for the betterment of future learners' speaking performances. Chien et al. (2020) strongly suggested worldwide EFL educationalists constantly impart a wide variety of positive comments, appraisals, and feedback toward the learners' speaking performances since these elements have terrifically reduced their speaking anxiety.

Another notable meritorious speaking learning value imparted by peer assessment is graduate university EFL learners can progressively transfigure into more active L2

communicators. The major impetus inducing this commendable behavior is these learners have ingrained a higher level of commitment to foster each other's speaking skills through supportive comments, suggestions, and feedback. By doing so, these learners can potentially instill the end goals in their mindset that they have to become more resilient and persistent learning community members to greatly improve their speaking skills. This above-explained finding is closely interlinked with the theory of peer assessment proposed by Fulcher (2021) highly accentuating the critical importance for EFL educators to design peer assessment activities in which learners' targeted L2 communicative competencies can intensively thrive. By carrying out this action, EFL learners can progressively transform into more proactive communicators since they have gained a more profound understanding of the collective speaking learning objectives set altogether by all learning community members. All these theoretical frameworks are corroborated by the fact that 20 out of 21 graduate university EFL learners agreed that they have progressively become more proactive L2 speakers in the support of peer assessment.

It is worth emphasizing that all graduate university EFL learners strongly support the continual internalization of peer assessment in their daily-based speaking learning activities since it has promoted a higher degree of speaking enjoyment during their practices. Again, this rewarding speaking learning value happened not by accident. Rather, all learners experience robust, solid, and collaborative speaking learning supports addressed by other learning companions. Under these collective supervisions, they will feel less pressured while practicing their L2 communicative skills and undergo more emotionally-supportive speaking learning climates resulting in the significant elevation of their speaking motivation. These conceptions are mutually aligned with the prior finding of El-Senousy (2020) highly advocated globalized EFL teachers to start implementing peer assessment in their speaking learning circumstances as this strategy will provide an influential benefit for language learners to significantly improve the targeted communicative skills with the support of respectful, meaningful, and encouraging comments imparted by their trusted learning companions. These conceptions are closely aligned with three interviewees' excerpts as follows.

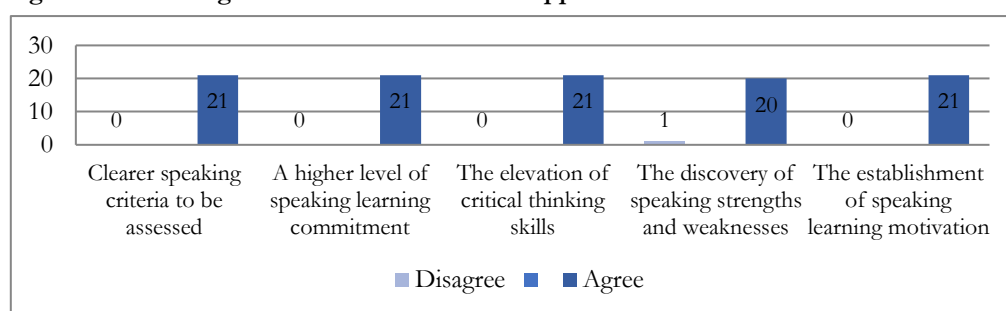
[Interviewee 1: *After getting the feedback, the students tend to fix the parts that should be fixed or improved. In addition, they can ask their friends that can speak English fluently to teach them or give them examples of how to speak English fluently.*]

[Interviewee 2: *The specific benefit I have gained form peer assessment activity is that it allow me to argue and convey my thought through discussion with peer. It also helps me to generate new knowledge and improve my understanding.*]

[Interviewee 3: *I feel that I gain my confidence since my friends are not judgemental. They give me feedback as friends who want the friends to develop the speaking skill. Moreover, I feel enjoyable in learning with friends, it makes me always remember what they says.*]

Lastly, the most prominent and foremost peer assessment outcome propelling graduate university EFL learners to impart further support toward its constant integration in nowadays speaking learning circumstances is the significant enhancement of speaking skills. 16 out of 21 graduate university EFL learners hold a strong belief that it is indispensably pivotal for worldwide speaking instructors to start implementing peer assessment at the beginning of L2 communicative enterprises. This initiative is worthwhile to be released due to the intensive supportive speaking learning supports given by other learning community members. All these resourceful speaking learning encouragements may be manifested in the forms of positive appraisals and meaningful feedback majorly intending to locate the particular speaking strengths as well as weaknesses possessed by learners to advance their prospective communicative performances to the fullest potential. These above-depicted contentions are tightly interwoven with Ramdani and Widodo (2019) discovered that an overwhelming majority of EFL learners have greatly fostered their L2 communicative competencies to the fullest potential in the light of peer assessment. This positive speaking learning outcome occurred since all learning community members establish solid teamwork and conjoint effort in enhancing each other's speaking skills.

Figure 1.2. Meaningful Internal and External Supports Sustain the Use of Peer Assessment



As depicted in the above figure, an overwhelming majority of graduate university EFL learners completely agreed that the continual implementation of peer assessment can run well when meaningful internal and external supports are addressed for their ongoing speaking learning activities. Starting from the external supports, all graduate university EFL learners

believed that more obvious speaking criteria are crucially essential to be designed by speaking learning instructors before applying this learner-oriented model in their daily L2 communicative practices. This action should be undertaken while speaking learning instructors introduce the major aims, dynamics, and nature of peer assessment. After embodying this initiative, it can be surmised that graduate university EFL learners will show their best speaking performances since they have noticed the main peer assessment expectations desired from their communicative learning dynamics. This finding echoed the theory of peer assessment devised by Cadena-Aguilar and Álvarez-Ayure (2021) noting the paramount importance for EFL teachers to design more reliable, contextual, and relevant speaking criteria to be assessed in peer assessment activities. By doing so, EFL learners can potentially experience more enjoyable communicative learning enterprises since they have known the stipulated expectations desired from their speaking performances.

The second external factor affecting the meaningful run of peer assessment in this modern L2 communicative enterprise is the installation of robust speaking learning commitment. In the peer assessment context, commitment refers to learners' profound desire and strong responsibility in assessing other learning counterparts' speaking performances fairly and reliably. As noted in the previous section of this paper, the proper utilization of peer assessment can significantly foster EFL learners' speaking learning responsibility. This vital learning behavior matters since they are more spirited to improve others' speaking skills by addressing constructive feedback for the significant advancement of their future speaking performances. This aforesaid explanation has shared a commonality with the previous finding of Pizarro (2022) unveiling that the majority of university EFL learners have successfully instilled a more robust speaking learning commitment in the presence of peer assessment. This laudable learning character happened as they gained a higher level of responsibility for assessing other classmates' speaking performances and became more supportive encouragers for the further advancement of others' speaking skills development. The following three interviewees' excerpts substantiated all these aforesaid delineations.

[Interviewee 1: *Confidence. When we do peer assessments, I think it facilitates us to be confident in delivering our opinion in front of our friends.*]

[Interviewee 2: *Since I feel more comfortable and open when interacting with a peer and we share a similar discourse, I will take other opportunity to discuss various topic with a peer. It will be helpful for us to develop our communication skills.*]

[Interviewee 3: *Yes because peer feedback is useful, based on my experience. This can be a strong approach to improve their ability to speak in front of public.*]

Moving on to the first internal factor supporting the constant internalization of peer assessment in speaking learning activities, all graduate university EFL learners entirely experienced that peer assessment has sustainably improved their critical thinking skills. Besides the enhancement of L2 communicative competencies, graduate university EFL learners in this study concurrently learn how to assess their classmates' speaking performances with a critical mind. This attitude is extremely essential as they can gradually transform into more competent speaking assessors useful for their future careers as professional workers in their distinctive fields. This aforementioned explanation concurred with Miller and Morris (2016) strongly advocated worldwide EFL educationalists to start internalizing peer assessment at the commencement of their speaking learning activities due to the significant elevation of learners' critical and problem-solving skills. The enhancement of these two pivotal life competencies is notable since learners are trained on how to assess other learning counterparts' speaking performances accurately and reliably. The critical importance of critical thinking skills hovers in the perspectives of these three interviewees.

[Interviewee 1: *The teacher should give them space to practice their English speaking skills in small groups so that it builds their confidence in speaking English. I know that speaking especially by using English in front of people is not easy. They need to be confident so that they can deliver their perspectives.*]

[Interviewee 2: *Yes, I will fully support EFL teachers to use peer assessment approach in their daily-based L2 communication practice, because peer assessment provides students a structured learning process to be more critical and also allow them to provide feedback on each other's work.*]

[Interviewee 3: *I'll keep utilizing peer feedback to assess speaking skill with specific criteria / rubric based on the focus or topic of speaking.*]

The second internal factor prompting the continuous internalization of peer assessment in speaking learning enterprises is the successful discovery of L2 communicative strengths and weaknesses. 20 out of 21 graduate university EFL learners highly valued the continual usage of peer assessment in their speaking practices since they have gained a more exhaustive

understanding of the major specific speaking areas that needed to be improved for the upcoming speaking performances. Thus, both speaking learning instructors and EFL learners are requested to establish more solid collaborative networking with each other in which reliable, authentic, and valid speaking criteria are ready to be assessed. Juan et al. (2022) remarked that it is indispensably essential for globalized EFL teachers to incorporate peer assessment in their speaking learning vicinities since learners can specifically discover their strengths and weaknesses which are useful for the further advancement of their future speaking performances. Thus, EFL educators must create clearer speaking scoring rubrics for learners to assess other classmates' speaking performances precisely.

The eventual and most paramount internal factor propelling graduate university EFL learners to support the use of peer assessment in their daily-based speaking activities is the thorough establishment of speaking learning motivation. All graduate university EFL learners participating in this study acknowledged that during the integration of peer assessment, they infuse a higher level of intention to showcase their utmost speaking performances. This growing speaking motivation took place as they continually observed other learning companions' outstanding speaking performances resulting in more satisfying L2 communicative performances and fruitful speaking learning outcomes. Hence, it is worthy of attention for speaking learning instructors to inculcate a higher degree of motivation within their learners to committedly practice their targeted speaking skills. With this in mind, they can potentially gain ample benefactors regarding the significant elevation of their speaking learning achievements, outcomes, and performances. These above-elucidated perspectives affirmed the prior finding of Zurita (2022) phrased that by integrating peer assessment at the outset of speaking learning dynamics, EFL learners are strongly encouraged to show their best communicative performances due to the comprehensive construction of novel speaking skills disseminated by other learning counterparts. As a result, more satisfying and fruitful speaking learning outcomes will find them as their final rewards.

CONCLUSION

Given this complex picture, it is fair to be inferred here the constant integration of peer assessment in this modern L2 communicative enterprise is notably essential. The vast majority of graduate university EFL learners participating in this study truly support the further integration of

this learner-oriented learning approach since peer assessment has progressively promoted a significant degree of benefits for their speaking skills improvement. Besides that, the effective internalization of peer assessment in graduate university EFL learners' speaking classroom circumstances has simultaneously transfigured them to become more proactive, confident, and responsible L2 communicators. All these impactful speaking learning outcomes emerged as the tangible result of emotionally supportive as well as positively-sound speaking learning vicinities disseminated by all learning community members. Aside from all these rewarding research results, two major shortcomings should be pondered on conscientiously by future researchers attempting to replicate this current small-scale qualitative investigation. The first drawback is mutually interlinked with the limited number of research participants participating in this study. Thus, a larger sample of student participants coming from distinctive universities would provide more profound insights into the potential efficient strategies that can be continuously utilized in maximizing the peer assessment utilities through a wide variety of speaking learning activities. The second dearth aligns with the thoroughness of peer assessment investigation in fostering graduate university EFL learners' speaking skills. As all research participants have already graduated from their university in the long-term period, the reliability of the data is eligible to be further inquired. Hence, there is a call for future researchers to conduct a more profound investigation on psychological factors highly affecting graduate university EFL learners' speaking skills improvements. These areas can comprise speaking anxiety, self-efficacy, self-motivation, and willingness to communicate. By heeding future attention to these focal areas, graduate university EFL learners can sophisticatedly make use of various efficient strategies to foster their targeted L2 communicative competencies without relying solely on peer assessment. Irrespective of these aforesaid deficiencies, the obtained research results could potentially contribute an additional piece of understanding toward the significance of peer assessment in improving graduate university EFL learners' speaking skills. By upholding this underlying premise, it comes as no surprise for L2 communicative instructors to eventually discern more holistic, meaningful, and fruitful speaking learning outcomes that will be the clearest rewards grabbed by their fellow disciples.

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