

# Examining Learners' Experiences and Challenges with Peer Assessment in Bhutanese Classrooms: An Explorative Study

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Received 23 January 2025 | Received in revised form 11 February 2025 | Accepted 15 February 2025

## APA Citation:

Wangmo, T. & Youden, P. (2025). Examining Learners' Experiences and Challenges with Peer Assessment in Bhutanese Classrooms: An Explorative Study. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 10(1), 2025, 1-10. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v10i1.1494>

## Abstract

*This exploratory study investigates the experiences and challenges of Bhutanese students with peer assessment in an Academic Skills module. The research focuses on learners' familiarity, attitudes, and perceptions of fairness regarding peer assessment and examines the correlation between grades assigned by peers and teachers. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collects both qualitative and quantitative data through surveys, observations, and ANOVA analysis. Findings indicate a generally positive reception of peer assessment, with most students perceiving it as beneficial to their learning and assignments. However, some concerns about fairness, reliability, and potential biases were noted, underscoring the need for clear guidelines and training. The ANOVA results show no statistically significant difference between peer and tutor assessment scores, suggesting that peer assessments can be as reliable as teacher assessments. This research provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers in Bhutan to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes through well-structured peer assessment practices, contributing to the broader discourse on effective assessment methods in diverse educational settings.*

*Keywords: peer assessment, student perception, reliability and fairness*

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## 1. Introduction

Peer assessment has always been one of the prominent approaches in creating student-centred classroom. Asaba and Marlowe (2011) agree that implementing peer assessment in teaching and learning ensures students' active involvement, being responsible and boosting motivation. Moreover, it supplements and increases the reliability of traditional forms of teacher assessment. Topping (1998,

p.250) defines peer assessment as “an arrangement in which individual consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status.” Therefore, peer assessment can empower students to take responsibility for and manage their own learning.

The Center for Teaching Innovation asserts that peer assessment can enable students to learn to assess and give constructive feedback, develop lifelong assessment skills, engage deeply with course material, and learn through knowledge diffusion and exchange of ideas (Cornell University, 2024). Azarnoosh (2013) views that focusing on peer’s strength and weaknesses can enhance students’ learning, raise their level of critical thinking, and lead them to autonomy. Learner Autonomy in Language classroom is essential as it allows students to be independent learners, responsible for their learning, and over all manager of their learning. Lamb (2017) also states that autonomous learners develop skills for lifelong learning. In addition, Benson (2011, p.58) defines autonomy “as the capacity to take control of one’s own learning”.

Moreover, Miller and Ng (1996) agree that peer review and peer evaluation transform learners from passive recipients to active participants in language learning programs, particularly in developing writing skills. Numerous studies have also found that peer assessment provides students with an authentic audience, encourages critical reading, boosts confidence and fosters significant interaction among students in a class.

In reviewing the literature on education, pedagogy, teaching practices, and other teaching-learning approaches in Bhutan, it is evident that minimal attention has been given to peer assessment, particularly in understanding learners' experiences with peer assessment, especially in the context of oral presentations. Most studies have focused on the overall quality of education in Bhutan, including assessment practices that highlight the principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in education, formative assessment practices, peer learning as an alternative pedagogy, peer mentoring programs, Differentiated Instruction (DI) in inclusive schools, teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion, and inclusive practices, along with other teaching-learning approaches. Therefore, this paper aims to explore in-depth experiences of students’ peer assessment during their oral presentation assessment, and observe their way of providing feedback or assessing their peers.

Through their experiences, readers and educational practitioners might gain valuable insights into the implementation of peer assessment suited to the Bhutanese context. This research will not only shed light on learners' perspectives and experiences with peer assessment but also provide practical guidelines for educators to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. By understanding the unique cultural and educational dynamics of Bhutan, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on effective assessment practices in diverse educational settings. Additionally, it seeks to inform policymakers and curriculum developers on how to integrate peer assessment methods that align with Bhutanese educational values and goals, ultimately fostering a more collaborative and reflective learning environment.

To understand the experience of peer assessment, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the attitudes and behaviours of Bhutanese students towards peer assessment?
2. How does the inclusion of peer assessment impact the learning outcomes of Bhutanese students?
3. What challenges and benefits do Bhutanese students perceive in the process of peer assessment?
4. How do the grades assigned by peers compare to those assigned by teachers among Bhutanese students?

## 2. Literature Review

Peer assessment is considered an effective tool for fostering a student-centred classroom. Much of the literature demonstrates its use across interdisciplinary subjects, highlighting its versatility in various academic fields. Studies have shown that peer assessment has been effectively employed in university

courses across disciplines such as accounting, engineering, humanities, and other fields. Common findings from these studies indicate its positive impact on learners' educational experiences. This review also examines the application of peer assessment in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) settings.

Lladò et al (2014) explored the benefits of peer assessment, emphasizing its role in student empowerment and professional development. They used a Likert-scale questionnaire with open-ended questions to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Their findings revealed a generally positive perception of peer assessment among students, with reports of increased motivation, deeper understanding, improved critical analysis, and greater autonomy in their learning processes. Students viewed mistakes as opportunities for improvement. However, challenges such as potential subjectivity, discomfort, and lack of preparation were also noted.

Adachi et al (2017) investigated the perceptions of 13 Australian academics on self and peer assessment in higher education. Their study found that peer assessment improved student self-efficacy, encouraged collaborative learning, developed critical thinking and reflective skills, increased feedback literacy, and promoted a deeper understanding of the subject matter. However, concerns were raised about the reliability and validity of peer assessments, the additional time and effort required for implementation, potential resistance from students and tutors, and the need for careful design and guidelines to ensure fairness and accuracy.

Sridharan et al (2018) examined the role of peer assessment in fostering teamwork skills within accounting colleges. Their study investigated factors such as anonymity, question relevance, and mark allocation, which affect the effectiveness of peer assessment in preventing free-riding, reducing conflict, improving communication, and enhancing the quality of teamwork contributions.

Musfirah (2019) conducted a descriptive study claiming peer assessment as a powerful tool for assessing and improving speaking skills, promoting self-directed learning, and benefiting both students and teachers. The study emphasized the importance of teacher involvement, understanding rubrics, and providing training and support. Joo (2016) examined the role of self and peer assessment in second language (L2) speaking, highlighting how learner involvement in evaluating their own and their peers' speaking performance can enhance their learning.

Cisneros (2022) demonstrated the influence of peer assessment on the speaking skills of EFL students. Participants shared that combining peer assessment with meaningful and innovative activities led to increased interaction both inside and outside the classroom. Similarly, White (2009) found that EFL students recognized the potential benefits of their involvement in the assessment process compared to teacher-only assessment. Tshering's study explored the implementation and impact of peer assessment on students' descriptive essay writing, concluding that it honed learners' writing skills and fostered a collaborative and reflective learning environment. This collaborative nature of peer assessment promoted a deeper understanding of writing processes and enhanced students' motivation and engagement in learning.

The existing literature shows the potential advantages of peer assessment in enhancing learning and skills development. However, my paper aims to observe learners' behaviour during peer assessment, their style of giving feedback, and compare their grades with those given by tutors. This will provide insights into the dynamics of peer assessment and its impact on the learning process.

### **3. Research Method**

The study was conducted with students enrolled in the first year, first semester of the Academic Skills module, a university-wide course offered by the Royal University of Bhutan. The participants included 100 students from Jigme Namgyel Engineering College (JNEC), pursuing diploma courses in Surveying, Computer and System Networking, and Civil Engineering, as well as 34 students from the College of Science and Technology (CST), enrolled in bachelor's programs in Electronics and Communication Engineering, and Instrumentation and Control Engineering. These students were

selected as the research sample because the Academic Skills module is a mandatory component of their curriculum. This diverse group provided a comprehensive population for examining the effectiveness and perceptions of peer assessment in academic tasks.

This exploratory research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of learners' perceptions and experiences with peer assessment in presentations. The research data were collected through participant observation, including detailed and systematic observation of student interactions and behaviours during the peer assessment process, allowing for an in-depth analysis of their attitudes and engagement. Additionally, structured or semi-structured questionnaires were administered to gather students' perceptions and attitudes towards peer assessment. The survey comprises sixteen items, including closed-ended questions utilizing a four-point Likert scale, and open-ended questions tailored for CST and JNEC participants. To further substantiate the findings, assessment scores from both peers and teachers were collected and compared, enabling an analysis of the correlation and differences between the two sets of scores. This triangulation of data sources enhances the reliability and validity of the study, providing both depth and context to the numerical data obtained and offering a fuller picture of the research problem.

#### 4. Results

This study investigates students' perspectives on peer assessment within their Academic Skills module, specifically focusing on the evaluation of peer presentations. The sixteen items of survey questionnaires address research questions related to learners' familiarity with and attitudes toward peer assessment, their experiences and learning outcomes following the implementation of peer assessment, and the challenges encountered in this process. Additionally, the study examines the correlation and differences between assessment scores given by peers and those given by teachers to provide insights into the effectiveness and reliability of peer assessment.

The survey results indicate varying levels of familiarity with and attitudes toward peer assessment among participants. Out of 100 participants, 63% reported being familiar with peer assessment, while 29% indicated they were not familiar, and 8% were unsure. In contrast, among the 34 participants, 64.7% were familiar with peer assessment, whereas 35.3% were not. Regarding, attitudes toward peer assessment, 77% of the 100 participants held a positive attitude, and 23% remained neutral. Among the 34 participants, 76.5% expressed a positive attitude towards peer assessment, 20.6% were neutral, and 2.9% had a negative attitude. These findings suggest a generally positive reception towards peer assessment among the majority of participants, with some variability based on familiarity.

Table 1: Participants familiarity and attitude towards peer assessment

sl.no	Survey Item	Participant	Result	Remark
1	Familiarity on peer assessment	100	63%	Yes
			29%	No
			8%	Maybe
		34	64.70%	Yes
			35.30%	No
2	Attitude towards Peer assessment	100	77%	Positive
			23%	Neutral
		34	76.50%	Positive
			2.90%	Negative
			20.60%	Neutral

Table 2: Impact of peer assessment on student Learning

Survey item	Participant	Result			
		4. Agree	3. Tend to Agree	2. Tend to Disagree	1. Disagree
Impact of Peer assessment on their learning	100	23%	57%	18%	2%
	34	28.60%	40.20%	22.40%	8.80%

The data regarding the impact of peer assessment on student learning reveals differing levels of agreement among participants. For the group of 100 participants, 23% agreed that peer assessment positively impacted their learning, while a majority of 57% tended to agree. A smaller proportion, 18%, tended to disagree, and only 2% disagreed. For the group of 34 participants, 28.6% agreed that peer assessment had a positive impact on their learning, with 40.2% tending to agree. Meanwhile, 22.4% tended to disagree with the statement, and 8.8% disagreed. These results suggest that a significant majority of both groups perceive peer assessment as beneficial to their learning, though there are few expressing reservations or disagreement about its effectiveness.

Table 3: Participation perception on peer assessment regarding fairness and application

Sl.no	Survey item	Participant	Result		
			Yes	No	Maybe
1	Peer assessment is a fair method of assessment	100	50%	12%	38%
		34	61.80%	8.80%	29.40%
2	Peer assessment improved my assignment	100	82%	1%	17%
		34	88.20%	2.90%	8.80%
3	Recommend peer assessment for other courses/module	100	97%	3%	NIL
		34	76.50%	2.90%	20.60%

The survey data highlights participants' perceptions of peer assessment in terms of fairness, its impact on their assignments, and their willingness to recommend it for other courses or modules.

- *Perceptions of Fairness:* When asked whether peer assessment is a fair method of assessment, 50% of the 100 participants responded "Yes," indicating a belief in its fairness, while 12% disagreed, and 38% were unsure. Among the 34 participants, a higher percentage (61.8%) viewed peer assessment as fair, with 8.8% disagreeing and 29.4% expressing uncertainty. These results suggest a moderate level of confidence in the fairness of peer assessment, though a significant portion of participants remains undecided.
- *Impact on Assignments:* A substantial majority of both participant groups agreed that peer assessment improved their assignments, with 82% of the 100 participants and 88.2% of the 34 participants responding affirmatively. Only 1% of the larger group and 2.9% of the smaller group disagreed, while 17% and 8.8%, respectively, were undecided. This indicates that most students perceive peer assessment as beneficial to their academic work.
- *Willingness to Recommend Peer Assessment:* The data also reveals strong support for recommending peer assessment for other courses or modules, with 97% of the 100 participants and 76.5% of the 34 participants endorsing its use. Only 3% of both groups opposed recommending it, and 20.6% of the smaller group were uncertain. This suggests a general endorsement of peer assessment, although some hesitancy exists among a smaller subset of students.

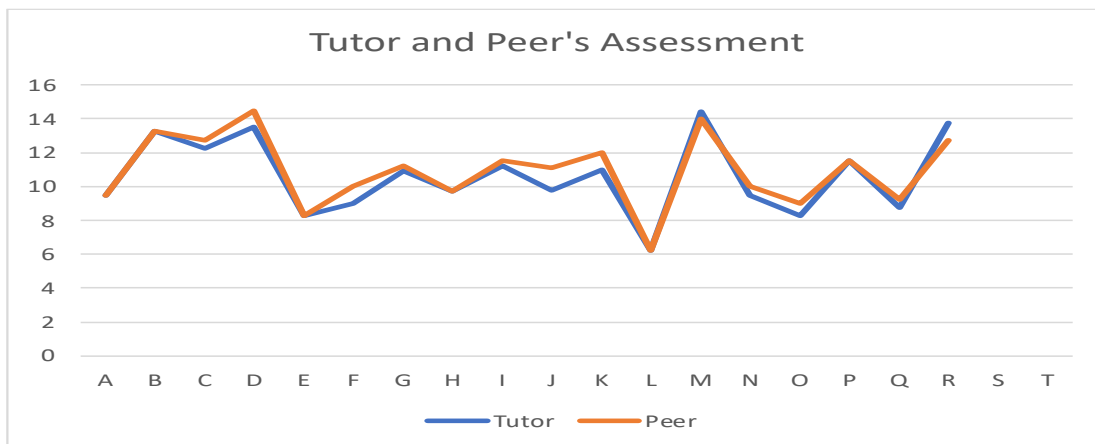


Figure 1: Graph representing the differences in Teacher and Peer’s assessment

Overall, the results indicate a predominantly positive perception of peer assessment among participants, particularly regarding its perceived impact on their learning and assignments, though some scepticism about its fairness and applicability to other contexts remains.

Table 4: ANOVA Summary Comparing Tutor and Peer Assessment Scores

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Tutor	19	203.5	10.710526	4.9312719		
Peer	19	210.75	11.092105	4.8897953		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	1.3832237	1	1.3832237	0.281685	0.5988581	4.1131653
Within Groups	176.77921	36	4.9105336			
Total	178.16243	37				

The ANOVA analysis presented in the table examines the differences in assessment scores between tutors and peers. The summary statistics reveal that both groups had 19 observations, with tutors having a mean score of 10.71 and a variance of 4.93, while peers had a slightly higher mean score of 11.09 and a variance of 4.89. The ANOVA results show that the between-group sum of squares is 1.383, with 1 degree of freedom (df), leading to a mean square (MS) of 1.383. The calculated F-statistic is 0.2817, with a p-value of 0.5989. Given that the P-value exceeds the common significance level of 0.05, there is no statistically significant difference between the tutor and peer assessment scores. Additionally, the F critical value (4.113) is higher than the calculated F-statistic, reinforcing the decision to fail to reject the null hypothesis. This analysis suggests that there is no meaningful difference in the scores given by tutors and peers, supporting the reliability of peer assessments as comparable to tutor assessments in this academic context.

Table 5: Learners' confidence in peer assessment with different supporting materials

Survey Item	Participants	Result			
		Very Confident	Somewhat Confident	Somewhat unconfident	Not Confident
Peer assessment with criteria	34	35.30%	58.80%	2.90%	2.90%
Peer assessment with sample answer	34	44.10%	52.30%	2.90%	0.70%

The table presents the results of a survey examining participants' confidence levels when engaging in peer assessments using two different types of support materials: assessment criteria and sample answers. The survey involved 34 participants, and their confidence levels were measured on a four-point Likert scale: Very Confident, Somewhat Confident, Somewhat Unconfident, and Not Confident. The survey results highlight that sample answers are more effective than criteria alone in boosting participants' confidence levels in peer assessments. The distinctive increase in "Very Confident" responses and the reduction in "Not Confident" responses when using sample answers underline their effectiveness as a support tool. However, the unchanged levels of "Somewhat Unconfident" suggest that further support may be needed to fully address the needs of participants who remain uncertain regardless of the support material provided.

## 5. Discussion

In this section, we answer the research questions from the detailed analysis we did in the results section. Overall, the results suggest a generally positive reception of peer assessment among participants, with most students acknowledging its benefits to their learning and assignment quality. However, some variability exists in terms of familiarity with and attitudes toward peer assessment, perceptions of fairness, and willingness to recommend its broader implementation.

- *Familiarity and Attitudes Towards Peer Assessment:* The positive attitudes observed among the majority of participants suggest that students are generally open to peer assessment as a method of learning. However, the existence of a small group with neutral or negative attitudes indicates that peer assessment may not be universally accepted, highlighting the need for further exploration into the factors influencing these attitudes, such as the clarity of the assessment criteria, student confidence in providing feedback, or the perceived fairness of the peer assessment process.
- *Impact on Learning and Assignments:* The data indicates that most students believe peer assessment positively impacts their learning, with a significant number agreeing that it enhances their assignments. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that peer assessment can promote active learning, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of subject material as students engage with the assessment criteria and learn to provide constructive feedback. However, the minority of students who disagreed or were unsure about its impact suggest that the effectiveness of peer assessment may be contingent upon how it is implemented. Factors such as the quality of peer feedback, the structure of the assessment process, and the level of student engagement could influence these perceptions. Future studies might investigate how these elements impact student learning outcomes in peer-assessment settings.

- *Perceptions of Fairness and Willingness to Recommend:* The mixed views on the fairness of peer assessment highlight a critical area for consideration. While a majority perceive it as fair, a substantial proportion of students remain undecided or view it as unfair. This ambivalence could stem from concerns about the subjectivity of peer evaluations, potential biases, or a lack of trust in the accuracy of peer assessments compared to those conducted by teachers. Such concerns underscore the importance of providing clear guidelines and training for students to enhance the reliability and fairness of peer assessments. Furthermore, although there is strong support for recommending peer assessment for other courses, the hesitancy observed among some students suggests a need for more robust evidence demonstrating its effectiveness and fairness across diverse academic settings.

*Student 1: I've seen peer assessments work well when everyone actively participates and there's open communication. However, if there's a lack of commitment or if personal biases it will affect the evaluation.*

*Student 2: Less knowledge, answer not to my expectations leading to difficult to assess, Not experienced, tends to give same marks... giving high marks though they don't deserve, worrying that they might not like me.*

*Student 3: Hurting other emotional, doubting ourself as we are also learners, bad judgement.*

*Student 4: Sometime I believe that some friends are not reading our work properly and just assessing for the name sake.*

*Student 5: Fear of Bad judgement, Hurting others emotions, Unsatisfied marks.*

*Student 6: Since we ourself is a learner, it was hard to sport their mistake, making personal feedback, peer pressure influences the grade, less experience, fearing the drawback, friendship preference*

*Student 7: not having enough knowledge for the task I was assessing, providing feedback was quite challenging. -have to read time and again in order to understand their work, -sometimes it is hard to know if I am on the right track or not.*

*Student 8: Generally, I find peer assessment to be fair. However, some feedbacks remains in skeptical mode unless verified by the teacher.*

*Student 9: I have seen some of the students get better grades than those who deserve as some tends to be more professional and observes everything and grades them but in most cases I felt that students are grading their friends and doesn't really act professional and blindly grades their peer with higher grades though some doesn't really deserve it.*

*Student 10: It will be fair as equal position of people is judging each other.*

Figure 2: Student perspectives on the challenges and fairness of peer assessment

**Comparison Between Peer and Tutor Assessments:** The ANOVA analysis comparing peer and tutor assessment scores indicates no statistically significant difference between the two groups, suggesting that peer assessments can be as reliable as tutor assessments in this context. This finding supports the validity of peer assessment as a complementary or alternative form of evaluation that can empower students to take an active role in their learning. However, the lack of significant differences also raises questions about the distinct value that peer assessments might offer beyond replicating tutor assessments. Further research could explore how peer assessment can uniquely contribute to learning

outcomes, particularly in terms of fostering critical reflection, self-assessment skills, and collaborative learning.

## 6. Conclusion

This study offers important insights into the dynamics of peer assessment in a Bhutanese classroom setting, highlighting its benefits and challenges. However, there are some limitations that need to be addressed. The sample size was relatively small, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study's scope was confined to a specific educational context and subject area, which may not fully capture the diverse experiences of students across different disciplines and educational levels. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data could introduce biases, as students might overestimate or underestimate their attitudes and experiences with peer assessment. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample, explore peer assessment across various disciplines, and consider longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of peer assessment on learning outcomes. Despite these limitations, the study's findings underscore the importance of preparing students adequately for peer assessment, ensuring fairness, and enhancing the reliability of peer evaluations to foster a collaborative and reflective learning environment.

## 7. Implications and Future Directions

The results of this study have several implications for educators and curriculum designers. To maximize the benefits of peer assessment, it is crucial to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the process through training and clear instructions. Addressing concerns about fairness and enhancing the reliability of peer assessments can help build student confidence and willingness to engage in this form of evaluation. Stonewall et al (2024) evaluated a training program that aimed to address fairness in peer assessments within higher education group learning. Their study found that students who underwent the training perceived peer assessments as fair and felt confident in their ability to rate peers fairly. Thus, it is significant to provide training on peer assessment. Additionally, understanding the diverse attitudes and experiences of students with peer assessment can inform the development of more inclusive and effective assessment strategies that cater to different learning styles and preferences.

Future research should continue to explore the factors influencing the effectiveness of peer assessment and its impact on student learning in various educational contexts. In conclusion, while peer assessment is generally well-received and viewed as beneficial by most students, there remain areas for improvement and further investigation to fully realize its potential as a valuable tool for learning and assessment.

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