

# The impact of peer assessment on the attainment level of oral presentations skills

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of contemporary language for specific purposes (LSP) is to prepare students for independent and competent performance in the globalised world of English as a lingua franca, with oral presentations as an indispensable element. Recognising that many students experience anxiety when faced with public speaking, teachers need to boost their self-confidence and improve their oral presentation skills, which can be achieved by promoting team-work and collaborative learning. The aim of this paper is to explore whether peer assessment of oral presentations influences the level of students' attainment of oral presentation skills. The research was conducted at the Dag Hammarskjöld University College of International Relations and Diplomacy in Zagreb. The participants assessed their colleagues' presentations at the beginning and the end of the semester by using rubrics. They appeared to have improved after receiving peer feedback, at least according to their peers' comments and slightly higher rating on the rubric. Additionally, the analysis of the participants' attitudes toward peer assessment complements the quantitative findings, demonstrating that participants recognise its importance and are able to self-reflect more efficiently on their own and their colleagues' work.

**Keywords:** *ESP, oral presentation skills, peer assessment, peer assessment tool, attitude towards peer assessment*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### I.1. Peer assessment

One of the aims of education is to enable students to function independently in the labour market where they will be required to assess their colleagues' strong and weak points, as pointed out by Nortcliffe (2012). Teachers of English in LSP courses are in an advantageous position as they can assist their students in achieving that goal by helping them develop three indispensable sets of skills – oral presentation skills in English, teamwork and collaborative learning, and active participation in learning together with taking responsibility for their own learning – thereby increasing their autonomy (Everhard and Murphy 2015). One method that teachers of English have at their disposal is peer assessment, a tool that learners use in order to reflect on and specify the

level, value, and quality of their peers' performance (Topping 2009). Since peer assessment has been shown to result in improvements in the effectiveness and quality of learning (Topping 2009), we decided to explore whether peer assessment of oral presentations influences the level of students' attainment of oral presentation skills.

## **I.2. Benefits of peer assessment**

Peer assessment can be generally regarded as an active agent in stimulating engaged and substantial involvement of students in the overall learning process, by which they become more independent in setting and evaluating their own learning criteria. In addition, peer assessment provides an objective and functional tool for making detached and informed decisions concerning the assessment of one's peers, as well as self-assessment (De Grez, Valcke and Roozen 2012).

On the one hand, peer assessment activities in today's pedagogical practices are favoured because they decrease the central role of the teacher in the classroom (De Grez, Valcke and Roozen 2012), which is especially important given the unrelenting reality that teachers often lack the time to provide their students with individual, timely, and quality feedback on their work (Andrade and Valtcheva 2009).

On the other hand, peer assessment is a crucial element of observational learning. Observational learning, according to Bandura (1997), can help students comprehend more explicitly the learning outcomes, or goals, that they are attempting to achieve, both by observing their peers and by receiving meaningful feedback from them. In that way, they can compare their performance to the performance of their peers sustained by a defined measurement tool, or standard. As research has suggested (e.g. Murillo-Zamorano and Montanero 2017), peer feedback aimed at improving the presentations or the process that was used to prepare them, structured around precisely defined and pre-explained rubrics, may well improve the students' perception and reflection upon their performance in the role of speakers. As they strive towards improving their presentation skills – the goal they have set for themselves – the desired level of performance ceases to be an abstract ideal and becomes much more comparable, compatible, and attainable (De Grez, Valcke and Roozen 2012).

### **I.3. Peer assessment vs. teacher feedback**

Another argument for the implementation of peer (and self-) assessment in the language classroom, as already suggested, is that its application can positively unburden the role of teachers in assessment, as well as allow for the more beneficial inclusion of students as active participants in self- and peer evaluation, and in the broader process of formative assessment (De Grez, Valcke and Roozen 2012). Formative assessment in this context, as suggested in Ozogul and Sullivan (2007), refers to the evaluation of student work that is not yet in its final form, and can thus be exploited for its potential for subsequent learning. In this way students become more involved in the language acquisition process because they assess the quality of each other's progress formatively and estimate the level up to which they have fulfilled the set criteria or goals, thus assessing for revision and improvement of results, and not for grades (Andrade and Valtcheva 2009).

More to the point, peer feedback is richer in both volume and immediacy (Topping 2009), while an increased number of assessors decreases subjectivity and increases reliability, as stated by Falchikov (2004). Nortcliffe (2012) mentions further advantages of peer assessment, namely that more assessors provide more sources of feedback, which in turn leads to better self-reflection and enables those assessed to apply the feedback they have received in their subsequent work, e.g. oral presentations. Equally important is the possibility of an ensuing discussion in which the student who received the feedback has the opportunity to request clarification and communicate directly with the assessor, especially when the whole process of peer assessment is part of a repetitive process which allows the student present their work, demonstrating the improvements or defending their initial positions (Murillo-Zamorano and Montanero 2017). In this way, students become partners in the teaching-learning process, their self-esteem is raised, they become more self-critical and proactive learners, and they focus on their future learning goals, which they see as set by themselves, not externally (Lindsay and Clarke 2001).

The complexity of the issue at hand could be summarised as a “caveat” to both researchers and practitioners (Topping 2009: 26):

Providing effective feedback is a cognitively complex task requiring understanding of the goals of the task and the criteria for success, and the ability to make judgments about the relationship of the product or performance to these goals. [...] Do not assume the teachers are any more reliable than the peers! You might want to match yours against the average of several peer assessments.

#### **I.4. Efficient peer assessment**

Teachers still play a crucial role in peer feedback activities. They must teach students how to give efficient feedback because without it such activities are futile. Comparable results have been achieved by other researchers as well (Murillo-Zamorano and Montanero 2017): participation in traditional assessment methods, based on the teachers' immediate feedback in the classroom, produces favourable outcomes. The feedback with which students provide one another on their oral presentations, on the other hand, should be useful and accompanied by non-judgmental comments in order to show the presenters where improvements can be made for their subsequent presentations (Harlen 2006). Hodgson and Pyle (2010) add that feedback should not be given only as points but should be accompanied by comments which are to be discussed both by the assessors and the presenter after the presentation. The results of their research show that the students experienced the greatest learning gain when feedback is given as comments only.

According to Falchikov (2004), feedback should be given in three stages – first, student-assessors should start with some good points regarding the presentation, as this boosts the presenter's self-confidence; second, they should move onto advice for improvement, since the presenters will then be more willing to accept criticism; third, feedback should end with other good points, thus embedding constructive feedback within positive feedback (the so-called “sandwich method”).

#### **I.5. Possible problems with peer assessment**

Peer assessment has some potential downsides that are not to be disregarded when teachers consider using it in their teaching practice. Its strengths and weaknesses have to be weighed against each other, and teachers should decide for themselves whether such

an approach is the best option in their LSP classes. Ross (2006) and Falchikov (2004) list several disadvantages of peer assessment activities for students. The results of their research show that some students objected to doing the teacher's job, lacked the confidence to mark fairly, took these activities as an opportunity to embellish their grades, feared retaliation in response to awarding low grades to their peers, misunderstood the data from assessment sheets, and let friendship and hostility influence peer assessment outcomes. Jelaska (2005) add that peer assessment is also dependent on different learner types, namely that collaborative learners are the ones most likely to fully participate in such activities and thus fully benefit from them; that participant learners may participate in them and benefit from them to some extent; and that independent, dependent, avoidant and competitive learners will not participate in them nor fully benefit from them.

Falchikov (2004) and Lavrysh (2016) also list several disadvantages of peer assessment from the teachers' perspective: some did not comprehend its benefit, some were afraid to include it in their classes, some experienced difficulty in building a positive environment focused on improving, some believed that students lacked the necessary experience for these activities, some thought that students would collude and award each other over-inflated grades, and finally some felt uncomfortable with the change of role and giving students control.

## **II. RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS**

After teaching ESP to university students of international relations for several years, we have come to recognise that many of them experience anxiety, nervousness and stage fright when they are given the task of delivering an oral PowerPoint presentation in front of their peers, a task which will be everyday practice in their professional career. It was felt that using only teacher assessment contributed to their anxiety, so we wanted to investigate whether the advantages of efficient peer assessment observed by previous researchers would influence the level of our students' attainment of oral presentation skills, i.e. improve their results. In other words, we aimed to see whether pre-instructed and pre-structured feedback from peers might provide a positive stimulus in the sense that the students begin to recognise and appreciate consequential feedback coming from

someone in the same position. Furthermore, we were interested in gaining insights into our students' attitudes towards peer assessment and examining whether its previously researched shortcomings would be outweighed by its benefits.

In our research, we wanted to explore whether the students' level of oral presentation skills would be measurably higher in their second presentation after having received peer feedback on their first presentation and whether their attitude towards peer assessment would change after the second presentation. Therefore, we asked ourselves the following research questions (RQ):

- (i) RQ1: Will there be any difference in the students' attainment of oral presentation skills between the first and the second presentation based on peer assessment?
- (ii) RQ2: Will there be any difference in the attainment of oral presentation skills in the second presentation between first-year and second-year students based on peer assessment?
- (iii) RQ3: Will there be any difference in attitude towards peer assessment after the second presentation?
- (iv) RQ4: Will there be any difference in attitude towards peer assessment between first-year and second-year students?

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Our study was conducted at the Dag Hammarskjöld University College of International Relations and Diplomacy in Zagreb in the summer semester of the academic year 2018/2019. All students in Year 1 and Year 2 were included in it – 36 participants in the peer assessment of oral presentations (17 participants from Year 1 and 19 from Year 2) and 28 participants in the evaluation of peer assessment activities via a questionnaire (13 participants from Year 1 and 15 from Year 2). The data used in this study was collected using the two instruments – the peer assessment table (Figure 1) and the questionnaire (Figure 2).

Student:				
Title:				
Category	Element	Explanation	Points (1-5)	Comments
Organisation	Introduction	introduction and hook		
	Development	clearly structured parts		
	Conclusion	summary and food for thought; Q&A invitation		
	Length	appropriate time management		
	Visual impression	text-image ratio and layout		
Language	Fluency	clarity of expression		
	Range	vocabulary variety: words, expressions, etc.		
	Accuracy	correct language, no language errors		
	Appropriateness	language appropriate to the audience and topic		
	Written language	lexical variety, grammar and spelling accuracy		
Non-verbal communication	Body	posture, movement, facial expression, gestures		
	Eyes	eye contact with the audience		
	Voice	loudness, intonation, speed, pauses, emphasis		
	Persuasiveness	topic knowledge, no visible nervousness		
	Interaction	pointing, referring, using appropriate expressions		

Figure 1. Peer assessment table


	VISOKA ŠKOLA MEĐUNARODNIH ODNOSA I DIPLOMACIJE DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD	PEER ASSESSMENT/ PRESENTATION SKILLS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE
<p>Dear colleagues</p> <p>We would kindly ask you to take a few minutes to evaluate the success and usefulness of peer assessment in the context of presentation skills.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How did the evaluation elements in the table contribute to the preparation of my own presentation?</li> <li>2) How did the evaluation elements in the table help in assessing my colleagues' presentations?</li> <li>3) What have I learnt from this assignment?</li> <li>4) How will I prepare for future/upcoming presentations?</li> <li>5) How will I evaluate/assess my colleagues' presentations from now on?</li> </ol>		

Figure 2. Peer assessment questionnaire

Rubrics were used in the peer assessment table as students understand assessment criteria better if they use rubrics, and they become more realistic judges of their own performance since they monitor their own learning, without having to rely on their teacher's feedback (Thomas, Martin and Pleasants 2011). There are fifteen elements in

the table, divided into three categories with five elements in each – four for assessing the presenters themselves, and the fifth one for assessing the PowerPoint elements (shaded grey in the table). Before the participants saw the table for the first time, they mentioned all the elements in the discussion on what constitutes a good presentation, guided by the researchers; thus, nothing in the table, once presented, was new or unclear to them. Responses from the questionnaire about participants' self-perception of potential learning values when engaging in peer feedback activities are also found and tested in other recent studies (Rodríguez-González and Castañeda 2016).

An almost identical peer assessment table and the questionnaire had been used in a pilot study in the Private High School for the Arts in Zagreb several months prior to this study. On the one hand, the rubrics in the peer assessment table had been designed by the researchers and high school students together, and they were almost identical to the ones in this study – they only lacked the three elements related to the PowerPoint, as the presentations were only oral, without any visual aids. On the other hand, the items in the questionnaire, which had been designed by the researchers, were identical to the ones used in this study. As the answers to these five questions given by high school students had proved very useful in the pilot study, and as the questions had been fully understood by the students, the same questions were used in this study.

For the purposes of this study, the answers to open-ended questions in the questionnaire were classified into three categories – positive, negative and neutral. Such rubrics completed by participants who examined their peers' presentations were used by other researchers as well (Rodríguez-González and Castañeda 2016).

Firstly, positive answers included comments which stated that the rubrics helped the students, that they were useful for the preparation of both their own presentations and the assessment of their peers', specifying at least one helpful element they had learnt from this assignment which they would implement in future presentations as well as peer assessment assignments. Secondly, in their negative answers the participants said that the rubrics had not helped them during the preparation of their own or the assessment of their peers' presentations, that they had not learnt anything from this assignment, and that they would not prepare differently for their future presentations,



nor would they assess their peers differently. Finally, the neutral answers were those which did not give clearly negative or positive answers to the questions asked.

The data was collected in eight stages as described below.

- 1) In the introductory lesson, the study was presented to the participants, and they were given an opportunity to give their consent to participate in it; then, the elements of oral presentations were presented and discussed with the participants.
- 2) The benefits and potential disadvantages of peer assessment were discussed.
- 3) The peer assessment table was presented to the participants and its elements were discussed, drawing parallels to the same elements discussed in Stage 1 above.
- 4) A video of a student giving an oral presentation was shown to the participants, and they used the peer assessment table to assess the presenter in the video, followed by a discussion regarding their points and comments.
- 5) The participants took the peer assessment tables home in order to prepare their first presentation. The topic that they presented was very closely related to the material covered in their classes – Year 1 presented on chosen countries and Year 2 on chosen (sub)cultures. They later gave their presentations in class and other participants assessed them using the same peer assessment tables, after which a discussion on the given feedback followed.
- 6) After the first round of presentations, all the participants completed a questionnaire in which they commented on their peer assessment experience.
- 7) The presenters took all the completed peer assessment tables home in order to study their peers' feedback and prepare for their second presentation, which was on the same topic.

- 8) Towards the end of the semester, two months after the first round of presentations, the participants gave their presentation for the second time, after having studied their colleagues' feedback given in the peer assessment tables. This presentation was once again also followed by the peer assessment activity, then by a discussion. Finally, the participants were asked to comment on the peer assessment experience using the same questionnaires.

The data collected was then entered into Microsoft Excel, followed by a t-test in SPSS which calculated whether there was a statistically significant difference between the analysed sets of data.

#### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

##### **IV.1. The difference in the students' attainment of oral presentation skills between the first and the second presentation**

The primary focus of macrostructure analysis is on major forms and structures. These major forms and structures refer to the semantic structures. The results of our study showed that, out of maximum 75 points, the total average peer assessment points were 68.17 for the first presentation and 71.01 for the second presentation (Figure 3), indicating that the participants awarded their peers higher points for the second presentation than for the first one. Looking more closely at the average peer assessment points for each of the three categories (organisation, language and non-verbal communication), it is also evident that the participants awarded their peers higher points for the second presentation in all three categories (Figure 4).

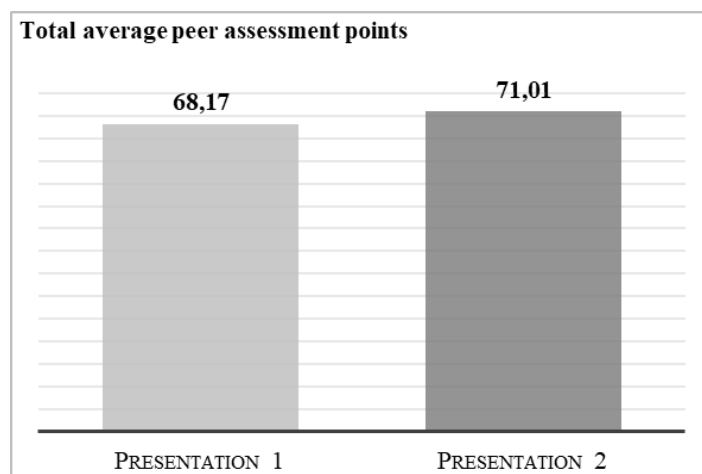


Figure 3. Total average peer assessment points

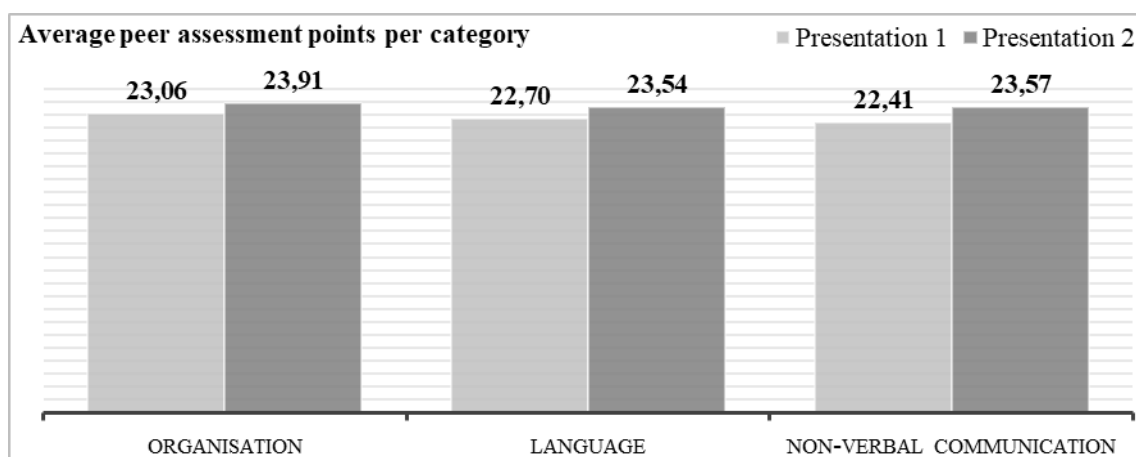


Figure 4. Average peer assessment points per category

However, even though there is a difference between the average points for the two presentations overall, as well as in each individual category, those differences were not proven to be statistically significant (Table 1).

Table 1. The difference in the peer assessment points between the first and the second presentation.

Variable	Round	N	M	SD	t	p
Organisation	1	36	23.0558	1.38821	-3.059	.063
	2	36	23.9051	.92076		
Language	1	36	22.7029	1.93269	-1.981	.250

	2	36	23.5399	1.64098		
Non-verbal communication	1	36	22.4084	1.52894	-3.693	.266
	2	36	23.5694	1.10509		
TOTAL	1	36	68.1672	4.19630	-3.223	.294
	2	36	71.0144	3.23813		

When looking at the peer assessment points awarded for each of the fifteen constituent elements of presentation skills as set out in the peer assessment table (Figure 5), it can be observed that the participants were constantly awarded higher points by their peers in their second presentation. The lowest average points in the first presentation were awarded for the element of eye contact (4.25 points out of maximum 5.00), followed by accuracy (4.34 points). Furthermore, the biggest differences between the first and the second presentation were observed in the categories of eye contact (0.31 points), voice (0.28 points) and persuasiveness (0.27 points), all of which pertain to the category of non-verbal communication.

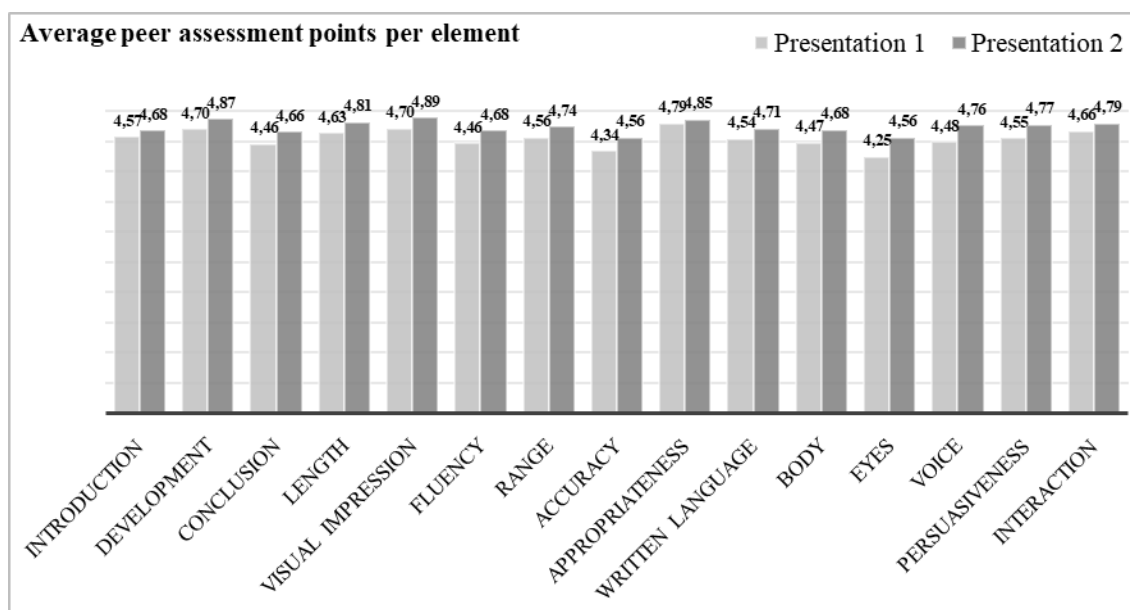


Figure 5. Average peer assessment points per element

This small and thus not statistically significant increase between the first and the second presentation could be attributed to a relatively small sample of participants (36), or to the fact that they were awarding high points to each other for the first presentation, so there was little room for measuring improvement in the second one. Moreover, the participants could have avoided giving each other low scores because their relationships affected their ability to assess objectively, or even because some of the rubrics might have been unclear to them.

However, this increase is seen as relevant to the aims of our study because it demonstrates that some improvement in the attainment of oral presentation skills did occur in the second presentation. The comments that the participants included in their assessment tables and in the discussion that followed after each peer assessment strengthen the relevance of this increase. The peer feedback after the first presentation was very constructive and objective, whereas the one following the second presentation, apart from also including advice on what to improve, contained comments on the progress in the second presentation – whether there had or had not been any. The level of the participants' oral presentation skills might have improved in their second presentation owing to the very feedback they had received after the first presentation, which was both discussed in class immediately after the presentation and studied at home in order to be comprehended more thoroughly and applied more competently in the subsequent presentation.

Given below are some examples of constructive feedback from the peer assessment tables after the first presentation for each of the fifteen constituent elements (the letter P with the number stands for the participant who was being assessed):

- introduction: P2: *No hook.* P12: *Her own story. Impressive.* P24: *Put something interesting.* P35: *I liked the hook.*
- development: P5: *Put contents and conclusion.* P6: *No structured parts at all.* P26: *Clearly structured parts.*
- conclusion: P6: *The end was quick.* P20: *The quote at the end was beautiful.* P24: *Very good ending with a famous person.*

- length: P2: *Too short.* P5: *On point.* P16: *It was more than 10 minutes.* P26: *Longish but interesting.*
- visual impression: P5: *Images are really good.* P16: *Small letters.* P21: *Just facts on slides. Not too much text.*
- fluency: P5: *Because of the reading, you didn't show your expression well.* P18: *Some stuttering.* P35: *I couldn't understand some word.*
- range: P23: *Work on extending your vocabulary.* P28: *No linking words.* P49: *Has a little problem with longer words.*
- accuracy: P1: *Some minor errors.* P5: *Some mistakes, but you can do it better.* P10: *Try to work on your pronunciation.* P21: *Indirect speech.*
- appropriateness: P31: *Too much information.* P35: *I understood everything.* P49: *Good language, but needs work.*
- written language: P2: *Misspelt words.* P16: *Little mistakes, overall really good.* P33: *A few spelling and grammar errors.* P34: *No mistakes found.*
- body: P13: *Too many gestures.* P23: *Work on your posture.* P42: *Crossed hands on chest.* P46: *A lot of smiling, which is very nice and cute.*
- eyes: P2: *No eye contact at all.* P6: *You are reading, no eye contact.* P34: *Try to make more eye contact.* P46: *Not facing the audience.*
- voice: P2: *He needs to speak louder.* P5: *She is too quiet, but not fast.* P16: *Maybe too slow.* P49: *Too many pauses.*
- persuasiveness: P21: *She was nervous a little bit, too many 'um's.* P23: *We can see you're nervous because you were playing with the pointer.*
- interaction: P42: *Not a lot of pointing, which was needed to explain all those pictures.* P43: *He showed everything in the presentation, pictures, etc.*

Below are some examples of the feedback for some of the elements of the peer assessment table following the second presentation in which the participants compare the results and assess whether the presenters made any progress in relation to the first presentation:

- development: P16: *Better than last time.*
- length: P22: *Much better than the last time.* P22: *Big improvement.*
- visual impression: P2: *Some new information.* P5: *Like always, nice to look due to all the pictures.* P16: *Better than last time.* P28: *I'm still impressed with the layout of your slides.*
- fluency; P5: *Great improvement in pronunciation.* P15: *Great pronunciation, big improvement.* P26: *Pronunciation has been improved.*
- range: P16: *Much better.*
- accuracy: P10: *Improvement.*
- body: P31: *Better than last time.* P35: *You have much more movement.*
- eyes: P6: *Much better.* P22: *More than usual, but still not enough.* P35: *More eye contact.* P49: *Better than last time.*
- voice: P17: *This time you smiled, love it!* P35: *Everything was at the same level.*
- persuasiveness: P5: *Great! More confident!* P10: *Little bit nervous, but much better than last time.* P20: *First*

#### **IV.2. The difference in the attainment of oral presentation skills in the second presentation between first-year and second-year students**

The points that participants in Year 1 were awarded by their peers for both presentations were compared to the points awarded to the participants in Year 2 (Figure 6). It is evident that Year 1 participants received slightly higher total average points for the first presentation than Year 2 participants: 68.47 compared to 67.89 out of 75.00 maximum points. The situation was, however, reversed in the second round of presentations –

Year 2 participants received slightly higher total average points than Year 1 participants: 71.04 compared to 70.04. The increase for Year 1 participants between the first and the second presentation equalled 2.51 points (or 3.35%), whereas the for Year 2 participants it was 3.15 points (or 4.20%).

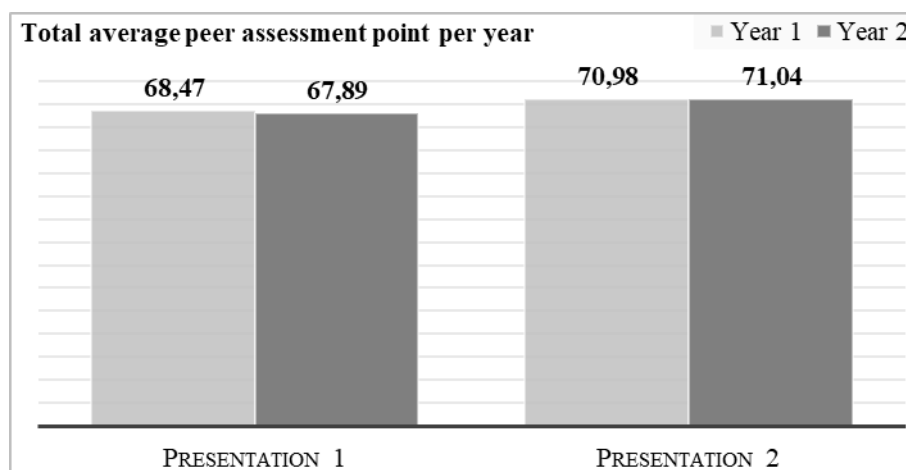


Figure 6. Total average peer assessment points per year

As the results above demonstrate, Year 2 participants attained a higher level of their oral presentation skills in their second presentation based on peer assessment than Year 1 participants. Although the difference might not seem categorical (71.04 points for Year 2 participants compared to 70.98 points for Year 1 participants), Year 2 participants increased their overall number of points in the second presentation by 4.20%, whereas in the case of Year 1 participants, the increase was only 3.35%. This goes to show that Year 2 participants could be more successful in applying the received peer feedback in their subsequent presentation than Year 1 participants. The reasons for that might be that they have more experience in giving presentations and had already been given feedback in the past, which is corroborated by their responses in the questionnaire. Another reason could be that they are more academically skilled and agile and can thus achieve better results in scholastic endeavours presented to them than their younger colleagues.

### **IV.3. The difference in attitude towards peer assessment after the second presentation**



After each of the two rounds of presentations, the participants' attitudes towards the experience of peer assessment were examined using the peer assessment questionnaire. Upon analysing all five questions of all the participants of both years, the results demonstrated a positive response to 79% of all the questions after the first presentation and to 89% of all the questions after the second presentation (Figure 7). In comparison, the number of neutral responses decreased from 9% to 3%, and so did the number of negative responses – from 12% to 8%.

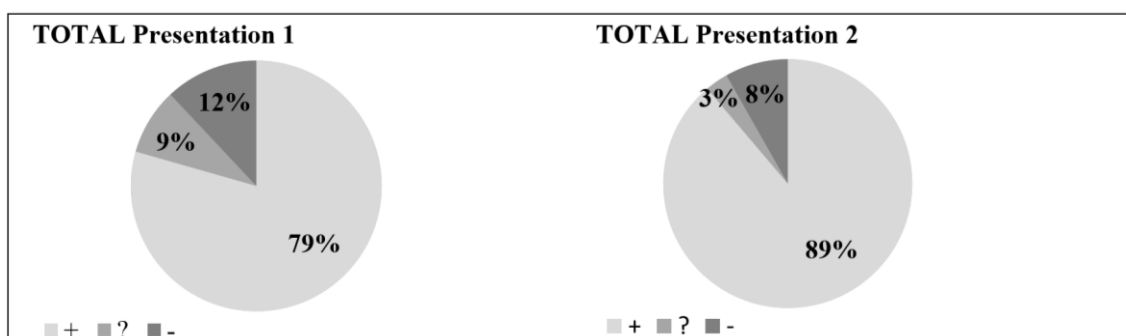


Figure 7. Total attitude change towards peer assessment between the first and the second presentation

Taking into consideration the participants' responses to each question separately (Figure 8), it becomes clear that the number of their responses in which they expressed a positive attitude towards peer assessment was higher after the second presentation than after the first presentation for all questions except the third one (*What have I learnt from this assignment?*) – the number of positive responses was lower after the second presentation than after the first presentation: 88.00% compared to 91.43%. That question is also the one to which negative responses were higher after the second presentation than after the first presentation: 8.00% compared to 2.86%. In all other questions, there was a decrease in the number of responses expressing a negative attitude after the second presentation in comparison to those after the first presentation.

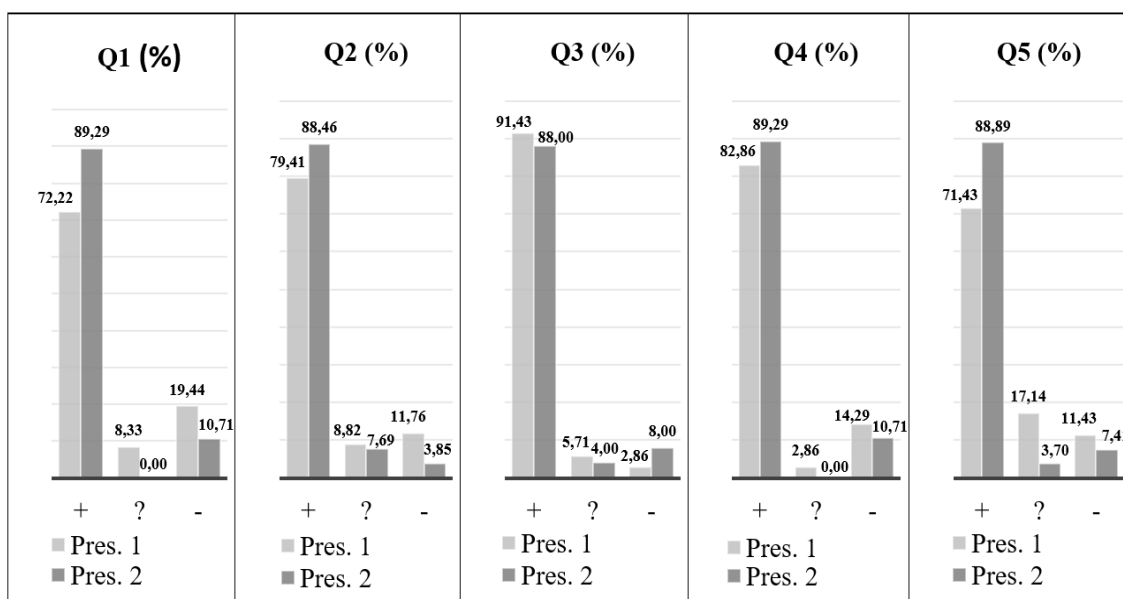


Figure 8. The attitude expressed in the participants' responses in the peer assessment questionnaire

Given below are some examples of positive, neutral and negative attitudes expressed in the participants' responses:

- 1) "How did the evaluation elements in the table contribute to the preparation of my own presentation?"

Positive attitude: P25: *The elements from the table were good guidelines while preparing a presentation. They were like small reminders of what to pay attention to.* P21: *The elements in the table helped me to prepare my presentation better, to put less text and more pictures and charts in the presentation.*

Neutral attitude: P2: *They helped somewhat, but since I already had a decent presenting experience, I was familiar with most of the elements.*

Negative attitude: P4: *To be honest, I didn't really use the table while making my presentation, but since I was aware I was going to be judged according to it, I did put more effort into my PPT.*

- 2) "How did the evaluation elements in the table help in assessing my colleagues' presentations?"

Positive attitude: P4: *Helped me see how many factors go into making a PPT & knowing those factors enables you to see faults & issues people have in their PPTs that you can help them with or advise them on those issues.* P30: *I was more focused on some things, while before I would assess the whole presentation without thinking about their posture, for example, which also really matters.*

Neutral attitude: P25: *They made the peer assessment simpler, but it would be good to add a few more elements.*

Negative attitude: P5: *I focused more on assessing than on the content of the presentations. It would be better to have fewer of them.*

3) “What have I learnt from this assignment?”

Positive attitude: P3: *That the sandwich practice is great & really helps people give advice without being too mean.* P31: *I have learned that I'm too nervous during the presentation and everybody sees it. So I need to work on this 'problem'.*

Neutral attitude: P46: *Honestly, not much; learned how to be more compassionate and understanding towards somebody's mistakes/flaws, or more objective.*

Negative attitude: P38: *That colleagues do not need to assess presentations.*

4) “How will I prepare for future/upcoming presentations?”

Positive attitude: P13: *I am not going to read, put more pictures on slides and practise before the presentation.* P14: *I am going to prepare using your concept of elements because it is much easier in this way. Thank you!!!*

Neutral attitude: P10: *With little changes, but basically in a similar way like until now.*

Negative attitude: P41: *The same as until now.*

5) “How will I evaluate/assess my colleagues' presentations from now on?”

Positive attitude: P13: *I am going to be honest because it is for their own good, and I expect the same from them.* P31: *I will evaluate them remembering all the aspects I learned from the table.*

Neutral attitude: P45: *In the same way, not too strictly, not too leniently.*

Negative attitude: P38: *The same as my colleague evaluated mine.*

Overall, the participants expressed a more positive attitude towards peer assessment after the second presentation than after the first one. This might indicate that with practice and more frequent exposure to presentations, followed by peer assessment activities, the participants recognised the benefits of peer assessment and provided more positive responses in the questionnaire regarding peer assessment. Furthermore, if one looks at the responses to each question separately, it is probable that for questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 the participants expressed a more positive attitude after the second presentation than after the first one due to the fact that they understood the benefits of the peer assessment elements as guidelines in preparing their own and assessing their colleagues' presentations. Their responses suggest that they might have become aware of those skills that they had not previously mastered up to the desired level, such as not reading from their notes, putting more pictures and less text on the slides, improving their fluency and accuracy, their speech speed, etc. The responses also show that the participants appear to have decided to plan their later preparations more carefully and on time, using the elements in the table, and rehearsing before the actual presentation. The responses to question 3 were the only ones where there was a noticeable decrease in the number of positive attitudes expressed after the first presentation than after the second presentation, and where a rise in the number of negative attitudes became apparent. This could be explained by the fact that the participants might have misunderstood the question and expected to have gained more knowledge from this activity, and not skills. Although the results of our study show that the participants did acquire more skills, they were possibly not aware of that when directly asked.

The above results demonstrate that the participants could have recognised that the peer assessment table elements are a useful guideline in their preparation for the

presentations, which might provide a focus in order to address all the constituent parts, and finally encourage them to work on their weaknesses. They emphasised the importance of feedback coming from different sources, thereby making it more objective, and they especially valued the constructive criticism which guided them in improving their subsequent presentations. Furthermore, they were active participants in the teaching-learning process because they provided feedback to their peers and in that way helped them to improve, but they also simultaneously become more familiar with the requirements of a successful presentation, which finally resulted in the strengthening of their own presentation skills. The majority of the participants in our study said they would continue using the peer assessment table for their future presentations, specifying how they would improve them – by adopting the practice of rehearsing, allowing themselves more time for preparation, not reading their notes, paying attention to the text-image ratio, working on their fluency, accuracy, and pace, etc. Finally, their responses to the questions regarding future peer assessment showed that they plan to continue being objective, professional, serious, constructive, honest, realistic, critical, strict, but also more careful and thorough.

#### **IV.4. The difference in attitude towards peer assessment between first-year and second-year students**

After having analysed the questionnaire responses of each year separately, it can be seen that the number of positive responses for Year 1 participants increased from 86% to 98%, whereas the number of neutral responses decreased from 8% to 2% and the number of negative responses from 6% to 0% (Figure 9). On the other hand, the number of positive responses for Year 2 participants increased from 73% to 80%, whereas the number of neutral responses decreased from 9% to 4% and the number of negative responses from 18% to 16% (Figure 10).

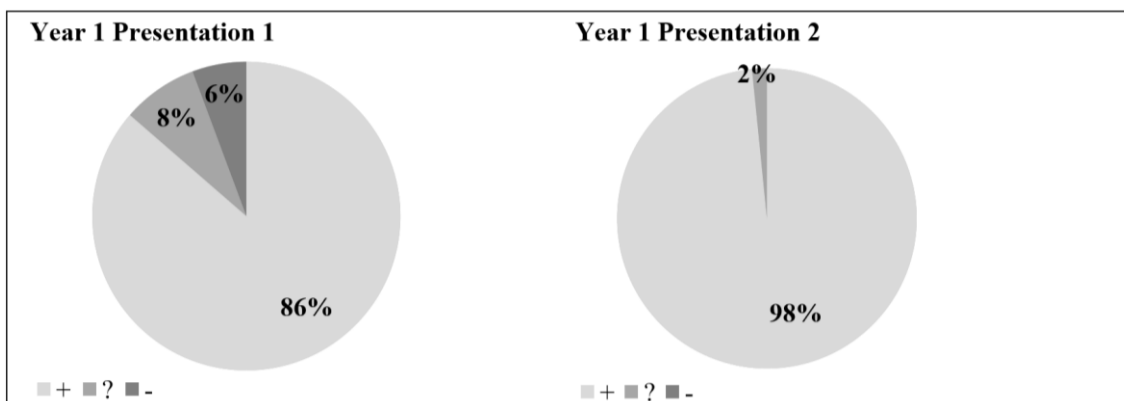


Figure 9. Year 1 attitude change towards peer assessment between the first and the second presentation

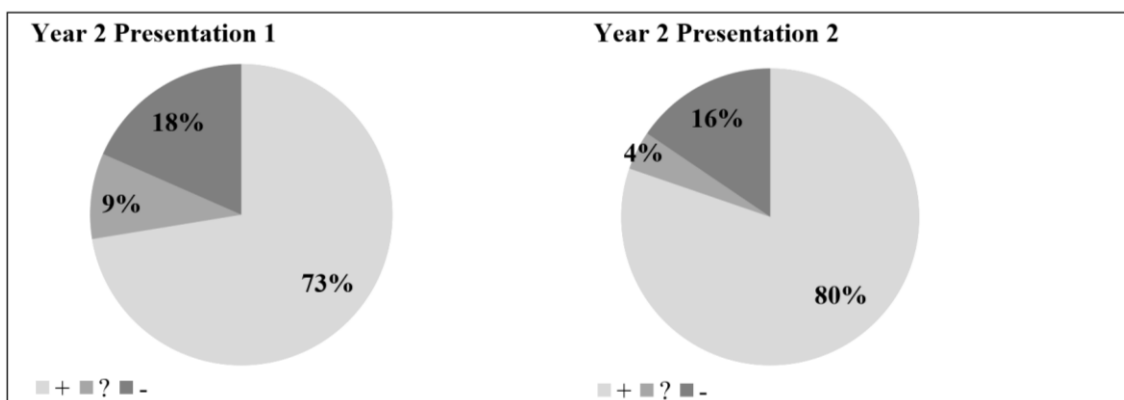


Figure 10. Year 2 attitude change towards peer assessment between the first and the second presentation

The above results clearly show a difference in attitude between Year 1 and Year 2 participants. Year 1 participants improved their attitude towards peer assessment since after the second presentation there was not a single negative attitude expressed in any of the responses to all five questions, and an overwhelming majority, 98% of the participants, expressed a positive attitude in all of their responses after the second presentation, which was an increase of 12% compared to the first presentation. Such results could suggest that Year 1 participants benefited from peer assessment to a great extent since many of them had never even given a presentation, so they might have seen this table as a useful tool and guide. On the other hand, although Year 2 participants also expressed a more positive attitude after the second presentation than after the first one, this increase in positive attitudes in their responses was only 7%, a rise from 73% to 80%, and the number of responses expressing a negative attitude dropped by only

2%, from 18% to 16%. This could suggest that a number of them were relatively experienced in giving presentations and familiar with some of the assessment criteria, so this activity was not as beneficial for them as for Year 1 participants. It might also be the case that not all Year 2 participants used the elements in the table for the preparation of their presentations or took into consideration their colleagues' feedback for the preparation of their second presentation.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The results of this study seem to offer insights into the effectiveness of peer assessment as an indispensable activity, not only in ESP classes in higher education but also in other English classes and even other courses and subjects. Students in programmes such as the International Relations programme will most likely be required to deliver presentations in English in front of an audience, using visual aids such as PowerPoint. That is why it is considered to be fundamental for ESP teachers to instruct and train their students to master the skills of presentation, using peer assessment activities and peer assessment tools.

The primary aim of this study was to find the answers to our research questions, and they showed us that the participants attained more oral presentation skills in their second presentation in comparison to the first presentation based on peer assessment; that the second-year participants attained more oral presentation skills in the second presentation based on peer assessment; and that all the participants expressed a more positive attitude towards peer assessment after the second presentation, but first-year participants more than second-year participants.

From this point, it is possible to continue researching other potential correlations in the process of teaching and assessing oral presentation skills in ESP courses. However, some limitations of our study have to be taken into account. One of them is the previously mentioned small sample of participants who delivered and assessed the presentations – only 36 participants took part in the quantitative part of our study and only 28 in the qualitative part – as well as the number of presentations given by the participants in this study – only two. It might also be interesting to see whether the participants would attain an even higher level of presentation skills in the third or even

fourth presentation, i.e. if they would receive even higher points in the subsequent presentations and whether there would be a statistically significant difference between each round of presentations, especially between the first and the last. Another limitation could be the fact that not all students in all classes can be given such training in peer assessment and be guided by their teacher as was the case with the participants in this study.

This study can be expanded to investigate the participants' attitudes more thoroughly: it would be relevant to see if their attitudes would continue to be more positive with every subsequent presentation, or if a ceiling after a certain number of iterations might be expected, after which positive attitudes would no longer continue to increase, but would, perhaps, even decrease. Another matter worth considering is whether to change the topic of the presentation for each performance, exploring the effect that such an intervention would have on the attainment of presentation skills of the participants. Additionally, peer assessment could be compared to teacher assessment to provide further insight into the degree of objectivity of peer assessment. Furthermore, future research could use a more objective measure to test improvement, by for instance asking teachers or assessors to use the rubric and to analyse video recordings of both presentations, preferably without knowing which was the first and the second presentation. Finally, the peer assessment table could be changed according to the needs of other ESP teachers – some elements could be left out, and others could be added, the point scale could be expanded to include more points, the table could be in a digital form, etc.

In conclusion, final emphasis needs to be placed on the double, or even triple, effect of peer assessment in the context of improving ESP students' presentations skills. Such an endeavour could provide the students with feedback on their work, giving them the much-needed focus on and appreciation of all of the indispensable elements an oral presentation should comprise, and teaching them how to adopt both roles they had been cast in – the role of the assessor and the role of the assessed. Moreover, it would necessarily implicate the teachers themselves in a very different and non-traditional way. Their role in the process of peer assessment, in general, is to be able to appreciate fully how their students react to direct appraisal and commentary by their peers as opposed to a figure of authority, how (and if) they confront criticism and fault-finding,



how to discern between potential ill will, inexperience, and carelessness by the assessors, and finally how to define their own position in the process of peer assessment. All things considered, we contend that it is only when all the participants of a learning environment – the student presenter, the student assessors and the teacher – act together, that the level of oral presentation skills of ESP students can really be improved.

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