

Peer Assessment in Online Language Courses

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As a popular strategy in collaborative learning, peer assessment has attracted keen interest in academic studies on online language learning contexts. Peer assessment in online language courses has received much attention since the COVID-19 outbreak. It remains a popular research topic with a preference for studies on online writing courses, and demonstrates international and interdisciplinary research trends.

peer assessment

online language learning

educational technologies

1. Introduction

Collaborative learning can enhance learning outcomes, cognitive abilities, and social skills ([Laal and Ghodsi 2012](#)). A growing size of evidence can be found in previous empirical studies to support the advantages of collaborative learning, or more specifically, peer assessment ([Jung et al. 2021](#)). Online learning has demonstrated its significant role and advantages, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Adedoyin and Soykan 2020](#)). Online learning and peer assessment in various subjects continue to develop, inspiring integrative research to investigate peer assessment in online language courses and provide enhanced and diversified forms of it. With the development of information and technology, educational technologies have become popular, and more technologies have been introduced to teaching practice, as listed by [Haleem et al. \(2022\)](#). Although collaborative learning may take forms other than peer assessment, many recent studies focus on it in online education contexts, where educational technologies are usually integrated. Consequently, peer assessment in online language courses sparks constant academic interest and is now a critical component of studies on online education.

The significance of peer assessment in online language education is evident in its vast advantages when applied to distance education. For instance, peer assessment effectively promotes learners' writing skills, reflective thinking abilities, and problem-solving efficiency ([Lin 2019](#); [Liang and Tsai 2010](#)). Implementing peer assessment activities in online language teaching also brings improved academic achievements compared with traditional feedback and offline courses, such as transferable skills, a better understanding of the assessment criteria, timely feedback, and constant learning and development ([Adachi et al. 2018](#)). However, there are also problems with peer assessment in online language education. The quality of peer assessment may be limited due to students' expertise; how to enhance the students' engagement and self-efficacy in peer assessment is still not completely clear ([Lin 2019](#); [Adachi et al. 2018](#)). There is still a controversy about peer assessment in online language courses, which requires researchers to continue further investigations.

2. Peer Assessment in Online Language Courses

2.1. Introducing Peer Assessment to Online Language Courses with Interdisciplinary Research

Rising interest in peer assessment and online language courses has been revealed by researchers in recent years ([Li et al. 2020](#)). A considerable number of studies have combined these two aspects, investigating the implementation of peer assessment in online language courses ([Lin 2019](#)). The overall findings of most existing studies suggested positive outcomes: peer assessment in online contexts could enhance learners' language learning achievements ([Liu et al. 2018](#); [Ghahari and Farokhnia 2018](#)). With the popularity of e-learning contexts, peer assessment has been actively applied. To illustrate this point, empirical results on this topic have been significantly enriched by technological advancements and applications since the advent of the 2020s. Examples can be found in further applications of video annotation tools, online teaching platforms to satisfy the educational needs in the post-COVID-19 era, and automated evaluation tools corresponding to e-learning environments ([Fang et al. 2022](#); [Shek et al. 2021](#)). These studies contributed to understanding peer assessment in the era of online learning and teaching triggered by COVID-19 ([Adedoyin and Soykan 2020](#)).

Researchers in linguistics extended their interest to different language skills and learning contents in language courses, and they actively sought interdisciplinary methods and perspectives outside language education studies. Empirical evidence supporting peer assessment in online language education was provided from the existing literature, even if research interest in different language skills could vary. Among them, commonly investigated language skills included listening ([Tran and Ma 2021](#)), speaking ([Nicolini and Cole 2019](#)), and writing ([Sun and Zhang 2022](#); [Zhang et al. 2022](#)). More integrative language courses included English for specific purposes ([Salem and Shabbir 2022](#)), academic writing ([Topping et al. 2000](#); [Cheong et al. 2022](#)), and communication skills ([Shek et al. 2021](#)). The development of applied linguistics by involving theories and concepts from various subjects and research areas made interdisciplinary approaches increasingly crucial. The interactions between linguistic studies and theories in other research areas have conceived popular research methods and open-minded perspectives in current studies. Dominantly reflecting the interdisciplinary trends, psychological constructs were examined when educational technologies were introduced to language courses, shedding light on the effects of e-learning methods on students' motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, and cognitive load ([Akbari et al. 2016](#); [Lai et al. 2019](#); [Yu et al. 2022a](#), [2022b](#)).

2.2. Theoretical Foundations of Peer Assessment in Online Learning Contexts

The idea of peer assessment was derived from early discussions on collaborative learning, and the subsequent studies continued extending the theories and the applications of peer assessment. Inspired by [Piaget \(1929\)](#), who suggested that collaborative learning and cognitive construction were related and developed together ([Roberts 2004](#)), Vygotsky started with his theories, indicating how learners would more easily learn knowledge and develop particular skills ([Vygotsky and Cole 1978](#)). However, the concept of peer assessment was not termed first until Keith J. Topping. Although [Topping \(2009\)](#) suggested earlier origins of peer assessment in educational contexts, researchers now dominantly attributed the blossoming studies related to this topic to Topping's systematic foundations of peer assessment ([Lin 2019](#)). In his earlier reviews of peer assessment, Topping predicted the rising

trend of computer-assisted peer assessment ([Topping 1998](#)). In a series of articles and books, he reviewed and summarized the developments of peer assessment ([Topping 1998, 2009, 2018](#)), inspiring emerging research topics related to peer assessment in various educational contexts. Relying on the theoretical foundations, studies in recent years have contributed to new theories with growing empirical evidence in diversifying educational contexts.

2.3. Educational Technology Applications for Peer Assessment in Online Language Courses

Although collaborative learning was proposed much earlier, introducing educational technologies to peer assessment benefited from rapid and revolutionary changes in the era of information and technology ([Roberts 2005](#)). Not specifically for peer assessment, educational technologies were introduced into language education for various purposes. As summarized by [Haleem et al. \(2022\)](#), in technology-enhanced language education studies, dominant educational technologies included at least the following: (1) quick assessment technologies, for example, automated writing evaluation tools ([Nunes et al. 2022](#)); (2) resources for distance learning, especially video-based instructions, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) ([Fang et al. 2022](#)) and video conferencing ([Hampel and Stickler 2012](#)); (3) electronic books and digital reading technologies ([Reiber-Kuijpers et al. 2021](#)); (4) broad access to the most up-to-date knowledge and enhanced learning opportunities; (5) mobile-assisted language learning (as reviewed by Burston and Giannakou 2022); and (6) social-media-assisted language learning ([Akbari et al. 2016](#)). With diversified techniques and designs, technology-enhanced language learning in recent years was established as an emerging, rapidly developing, interdisciplinary, and critical research area.

With the emergence of educational technologies, the frontiers in studies on peer assessment in online language education witnessed the welcoming integration of education technologies. Many empirical studies in more recent years closely turned to popular educational technologies, and were eager to discover the application of peer assessment in online language courses. Video-based peer feedback was considered an efficient tool to provide emotionally supportive feedback for language learners with an enhanced sense of realistic perception using virtual reality ([Chien et al. 2020](#)). Compared with traditional forms of written feedback, video peer feedback improved learners' Chinese-to-English translation performance ([Ge 2022](#)). Digital note-taking technologies demonstrated unique advantages in addressing learners' special needs when suffering from language-related disabilities ([Belson et al. 2013](#)). However, the educational technologies applied to peer assessment in online language courses still comprised a small proportion of dominant educational technologies assisting language learning.

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