Business Students' Attitudes Towards Peer Assessment: Insights from a 360-Degree Feedback Study

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Abstract: *This paper investigates the implementation and impact of peer assessments in university courses, focusing on business students at a Hungarian business university. Data from undergraduate courses taught in Hungarian and English from 2023 to 2024 were analyzed to explore students' engagement and perceptions of the peer evaluation process in presentation classes. Using numerical scales and qualitative feedback, the study aimed to understand the dynamics of co-evaluation, where students are both evaluators and recipients. The findings reveal that students value both giving and receiving feedback and recognize the importance of mastering performance appraisal techniques as essential soft skills. Integrating peer assessment throughout the university curriculum is suggested to enhance critical reflection and interpersonal skills, preparing students for the collaborative demands of the modern workplace.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Peer assessment has emerged as a crucial pedagogical strategy in higher education that emphasizes reciprocal interaction and feedback among students to enhance their learning experiences and academic outcomes. This paper provides a concise review of empirical studies on peer evaluation, focusing on its pedagogical benefits. Following this review, the paper presents findings from a small-scale study that examines peer assessment within the broader framework of 360-degree evaluation, concentrating specifically on peer feedback while excluding instructor and self-assessments. Through detailed analysis, this study investigates students' attitudes toward giving and receiving feedback, the types of feedback they provide, and the necessity of structured training to ensure effective peer assessment practices.

The 360-degree feedback mechanisms, as discussed by Edwards and Ewen (2019) and Fleenor et al. (2008, 2021), provide a multi-rater feedback system that encompasses various stakeholders, including peers, superiors and self-assessments. This comprehensive approach not only broadens the feedback landscape but also deepens the learners' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses from multiple perspectives. It has proved effective in enhancing transparency and trust among students and facilitating a more rounded development of skills. Such feedback systems are particularly valuable in promoting self-regulated learning and continuous personal development.

Empirical research highlights the value of peer assessment in enriching educational experiences and fostering a participatory learning environment. Studies like those by Sattler et al. (2020) articulate its effectiveness, presenting peer feedback as not only beneficial for learners but also for instructors as it provides insights into student understanding and engagement. Research findings

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also confirm that learning by reviewing others' work encourages critical thinking and reinforces content comprehension, making peer assessment an indispensable part of modern pedagogical strategies (Cho & MacArthur, 2011; Jiang et al., 2022). This method has been shown to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, enabling students to experience the relevance of their learning firsthand.

Wisniewski et al. (2020) detail how feedback serves as a powerful tool in learning and propose a model that maximizes its effectiveness by focusing on the feed-up, feedback and feed-forward. Gielen et al. (2020) extend this discussion by suggesting improvements in feedback design to enhance peer feedback's impact on learning. The integration of structured feedback within educational systems can lead to a substantial uplift in academic performance which aligns closely with the goals of competency-based education models. These models emphasize skills mastery, adaptability and the critical role of feedback in achieving high educational standards.

The studies by Sande and Godino-Llorente (2014) and Cheong et al. (2022) demonstrate that peer assessments, when effectively implemented, can significantly elevate student performance more than traditional assessment methods. This effectiveness stems from the active engagement and responsibility students take in evaluating each other's work, which not only enhances their evaluative skills but also deepens their understanding of the subject matter. The reciprocity of peer assessment encourages a higher level of attentiveness and participation, which are crucial for learning enhancement and academic success.

Incorporating peer and self-assessments into the curriculum, as noted by Bozkurt (2020) and Yan et al. (2022), facilitates a reflective learning process where students evaluate their learning processes and outcomes critically. This reflective practice cultivates higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis and evaluation, which are essential for academic and professional success. The iterative process of giving and receiving feedback not only sharpens students' intellectual abilities but also builds a supportive learning community that values constructive criticism and continuous improvement.

According to Fang et al. (2021), collaborative peer assessment tasks significantly enhance the quality of self-evaluations by fostering a reflective learning environment. These activities encourage students to think critically about their work and how they can improve it, based on the feedback received from peers. Such collaborative environments support the development of key interpersonal skills and the ability to engage constructively with diverse perspectives. This not only aids in academic growth but also prepares students for professional environments where teamwork and feedback are integral.

Simonsmeier et al. (2020) highlight the necessity of thorough training in peer assessment techniques to maximize their effectiveness. Such training should not only focus on the mechanics of giving and receiving feedback but also on understanding the criteria for effective evaluation and the ethical considerations involved. Proper training ensures that peer assessments are conducted with integrity and respect, fostering an environment of trust and constructive criticism. Educators must therefore prioritize these training modules to equip students with the necessary skills to benefit fully from peer assessment methodologies.

Huisman et al. (2020) discuss the development of a questionnaire designed to assess higher education students' beliefs about peer feedback. This questionnaire was validated through exploratory

and confirmatory studies, which confirmed four key scales: students' valuation of peer feedback as an instructional method, their confidence in the quality and helpfulness of the feedback they provide and receive, and the importance they attribute to peer feedback skills. The study demonstrated the utility and reliability of the questionnaire for both research and practical application in educational settings. Huisman et al. (2020) highlight the importance of understanding students' perceptions of peer feedback to improve educational practices and support peer feedback as a critical learning tool in higher education.

The literature review has established that peer assessment is a critical component of contemporary education which contributes significantly to enhanced learning outcomes, better performance and the development of critical thinking and self-evaluation skills. The discussed studies not only highlight the importance of structured feedback systems but also the essential role of training in the effective implementation of peer assessments.

Building on the findings of previous research, this study aims to explore three key questions: What are the key factors in the feedback given by business students in peer assessments? How do business undergraduate students perceive the value of peer assessment in presentation courses? How do students' perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of peer evaluation vary, and what factors contribute to these perceptions? These questions are designed to uncover the subtleties of students' attitudes towards peer assessment, the nature of the feedback exchanged and the broader implications for their personal and academic growth.

2. METHODS

The study employed a mixed-methodology approach to examine the attitudes and engagement of undergraduate business students toward peer assessment within a prominent business university in Hungary. The research involved 98 undergraduates enrolled in business-related courses, specifically targeting presentation classes.

The investigation focused on three main areas related to peer assessment: first, quantitatively assessing students' presentation skills using standardized scales, second, conducting a qualitative analysis of written feedback to understand depth and sentiment and third, measuring students' attitudes towards peer assessment through a mixed-method survey approach. For the quantitative investigation, numerical scales with analytic descriptors were utilized by students to assess various dimensions of presentation skills, including clarity, engagement, content accuracy and overall effectiveness. This structured quantitative investigation facilitated the collection of standardized data essential for identifying patterns in peer evaluation across the academic years 2023-2024. In the qualitative analysis, a content analysis of 1,258 written feedback texts was conducted. This involved examining the texts for recurring themes, the emotional tone of sentiments expressed, and the depth of the constructive criticism provided. This rigorous qualitative analysis was crucial for gaining deeper insights into how students formulate their evaluations and how they react to the feedback received. Additionally, the research design included a survey to capture students' attitudes toward the peer evaluation process. This survey featured Likert-scale items to quantitatively measure students' satisfaction and perceived value of peer assessment, together with open-ended questions for qualitative insights that allowed for detailed personal reflections and suggestions for improvement.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing the written evaluations, it could be observed that the topics highlighted were aligned with the quantitative criteria, emphasizing multiple aspects that are crucial for the effective delivery of the presentation in question. The following key areas of focus could be identified:

1. Theme and Content: Students prioritized the relevance and interest of the presentation's topic, underscoring its importance in engaging the audience.
2. Presentation Style: Effective presentations were noted for their dynamic delivery as opposed to monotone or rambling styles. Elements such as eye contact, gestures, tone of voice, and pacing were mentioned to determine the presenter's engagement level and clarity.
3. Illustrations and Slides: The quality of slides and visual presentation was another focal point, with effective use of pictures and illustrations enhancing comprehension and interest.
4. Vocabulary: In this field, the focus was on the richness and variety of vocabulary, the correct use of foreign expressions, and the mention of language errors.
5. General Impression: Confidence, preparedness, and the ability to maintain audience interest formed the basis of the general impression.

Additional aspects mentioned included "Interactivity", particularly how well the presenter engaged with the audience and responded to questions; "Time Management", focusing on adherence to allocated time and handling of any overruns or gaps; and "Technical Implementation", which involved the management of technical equipment and troubleshooting during the presentation.

In general, the analysis showed that the evaluations were mainly positive in tone. Most of the feedback commended the speakers' meticulous preparation, their engaging presentation style, and the interesting topics are chosen, e.g. "It was a very topical subject, and I learned a lot of things that were not interesting before and I really liked the way he presented it." or "It was a good performance although I found the speech a little difficult to understand at times." However, the document also included constructive criticism, which highlighted potential areas for improvement such as avoiding monotony, maintaining eye contact and paying attention to technical details, e.g. "What I can suggest is that if you are already confident in a performance, try to work on gesticulation, move around and fill the space."

The perceived value of peer evaluation is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The data in Figure 1 indicates that most students find peer review beneficial, with 35 categorizing it as "very useful" and 55 seeing it as "quite useful," demonstrating a strong appreciation for its value in the feedback process. On the other hand, a minority view it less favourably: 6 participants rated it as "less useful," while only 2 considered it "not useful." The data suggests that peer review is generally regarded as a valuable contribution to the work or learning process of the participants.

Figure 2 illustrates the responses of the students on their perceptions of evaluating peer presentations, categorized into five aspects: "I liked that I could also evaluate," "interesting," "challenging," "unusual," and "not so important". Students were given the option to rank three aspects about evaluating peer presentations out of these choices. The most favoured sentiment was the opportunity to evaluate others, with 40 respondents ranking it first, and with 17 ranking it second. The aspect "interesting" was also highly favoured, receiving 22 first-place, 9 second-place, and 21 third-place rankings. "Challenging" was the third most ranked sentiment at first place by 19 participants and at second by 10. "Unusual" garnered less interest, with being ranked in both first and second place by 14, and third by 8 students. The aspect deemed least valuable was "not so important," with four

first-place selections, one second-place selection, and one third-place selection. The results reflect a generally positive reception of peer evaluation, with a clear preference for active involvement and the intriguing nature of the task.
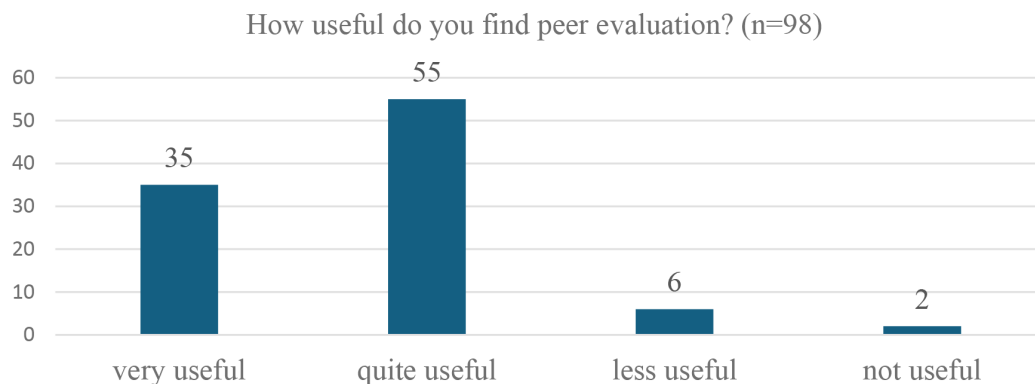

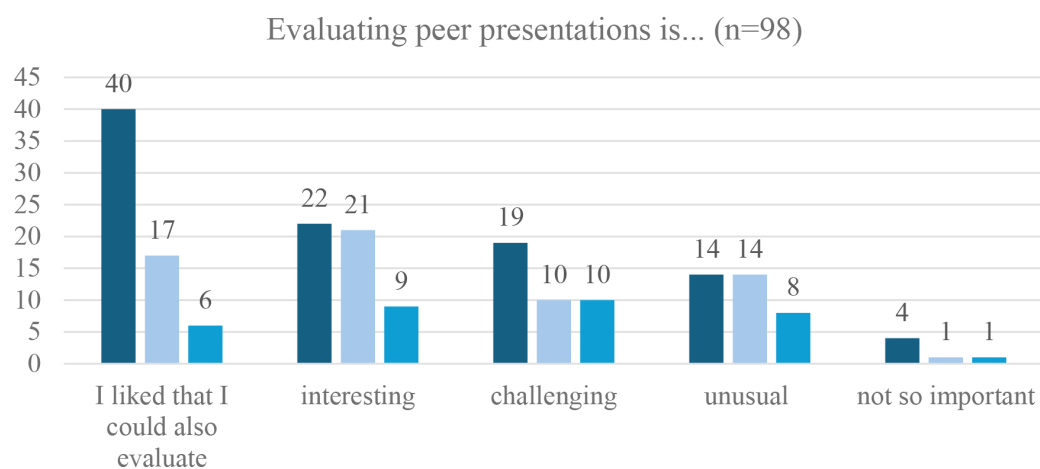**Figure 1.** Usefulness of peer assessment
Source: Own research

Figure 2. Perception of peer assessment
Source: Own research

In an open-ended question, students were invited to provide their thoughts on additional factors that they consider when evaluating the performance of their peers. Most participants indicated that the evaluation process assisted them in a more comprehensive understanding of their peers' work and in developing their own critical thinking abilities. The more frequent thoughts and topics that arise in this context were:

1. Overall impression and experiences: Many students expressed that they felt positive about receiving constructive feedback and found the evaluation system to be beneficial. A number of respondents indicated that the evaluation process had a unifying effect on the group and contributed to the formation of a sense of community.

2. Positive evaluation: The feedback indicated a positive evaluation, with particular emphasis on the importance of empathy and justice. The students expressed appreciation for the clear and beautiful presentations, and they were gratified to see that their work was appreciated by others.

3. Negative evaluations and challenges: Some participants reported difficulties during the evaluation process. These difficulties included concerns about offending others and scoring too harshly or too leniently. Additionally, some participants found the mandatory text feedback challenging.

4.   Suggestions and problems: Students proposed the introduction of additional evaluation criteria and more detailed feedback options. Some students expressed a preference for live evaluation.

The overall tone was positive, with students expressing appreciation for the value of feedback. Criticisms and suggestions were also constructive in nature and aimed at enhancing the system. Overall, participants perceived the evaluation process as beneficial and supportive, which facilitated their personal growth and strengthened group cohesion, as illustrated by the following examples:

"It helped us to improve our ability to formulate a sound critique."

"It's very good to be able to evaluate each other's performance and it strengthens the group community, so in a word, I think it's absolutely constructive."

"I think it's one of the most useful pieces of feedback we can get."

"I think it's a very fair system and I haven't seen anybody abusing that right. I hope everyone gets what they deserve."

The research has provided valuable insights into several aspects of peer assessment. Concerning the first research question—What are the key factors in the feedback given by business students in peer assessments?—the findings indicate that students prioritize thematic relevance, dynamic presentation style and the effectiveness of visual aids. These elements are seen as crucial to engaging the audience and delivering successful presentations. In response to the second research question—How do business undergraduate students perceive the value of peer assessment in presentation courses?—the research reveals a strong appreciation of the fairness and constructive nature of the feedback. Students value peer assessment for its role in enhancing their personal and academic development, a finding consistent with the research by Double et al. (2019), which also highlights the positive impact of peer assessment on academic growth and emphasizes the importance of empathy and fairness in assessment. Addressing the third research question—How do students' perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of peer evaluation vary, and what factors contribute to these perceptions?—the study found a generally positive attitude among students. A significant majority of students find peer evaluation very or fairly useful, strongly influenced by their active involvement in the evaluation process. This finding aligns with the research of Yan et al. (2023), which also highlights how active participation in peer assessment contributes to more favourable perceptions of its usefulness and effectiveness. The positive reception supports the research question exploring the factors contributing to these perceptions, highlighting the importance of engagement and the opportunity to participate in peer evaluation.

Overall, the research confirms that peer assessment is an invaluable pedagogical tool that enhances learning outcomes by developing critical evaluation skills and strengthening community bonds among students.

4.   FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While peer assessment is widely studied in various educational fields, there remains a notable research gap within the context of business education. This gap indicates a potential for significant contributions to the existing body of research to explore how peer assessment techniques can be tailored to fit the unique needs of business education. Future studies could investigate how these

methods impact specific business skills such as strategic thinking, problem-solving, and leadership, which are crucial for business students. Addressing this gap could provide valuable insights into effective pedagogical strategies that cater specifically to the needs of business education.

Additionally, to fully comprehend the potential of 360-degree evaluations, future research should also explore the other two aspects of this comprehensive feedback model: instructor assessments and self-assessments. While peer assessment provides valuable peer-to-peer insights, integrating instructor feedback and self-reflection could offer a more holistic view of student performance and developmental needs. Investigating these components could enhance understanding of their interplay and collective impact on student learning outcomes. Such studies would not only broaden the scope of research but also deepen the understanding of 360-degree feedback systems as a multifaceted tool for enhancing educational practices in business studies. This holistic approach could lead to the development of more robust, integrated feedback systems that support the development of essential business competences.

5.   CONCLUSION

The mixed-methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative data collection allowed the study to thoroughly assess the effectiveness and reception of peer assessment within the business education context. By evaluating peer assessments at key points in the courses investigated, the study aimed to provide detailed insights into the development of students' evaluative skills and their educational impact. The combination of content analysis and attitudinal surveys enriched the understanding of the dynamics of peer assessment in this specific educational setting. The results demonstrated that students recognize the significant value of feedback skills, viewing peer evaluation as a crucial element in their personal development. The students adopt a serious and positive approach to peer feedback, demonstrating an understanding of its impact on learning and self-improvement. The overall response to peer feedback is notably positive, accompanied by constructive criticism. This further enriches the learning experience and emphasizes the importance of feedback in educational settings. Despite its proven benefits, the need for more targeted research in business education settings presents a fertile ground for future academic inquiries. By closing these gaps, educators can refine peer assessment practices to better serve educational objectives and student needs in business disciplines.

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