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PROMOTING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH PEER FEEDBACK IN ORAL COMMUNICATION CLASSROOM

Didih Faridah[1), Luthfiyatun Thoyyibah[2), Asep Dudi Kurnia[3)
didihfaridah@gmail.com[1), luthfiyatun20@gmail.com[2), asdudmail@gmail.com[3)
Universitas Galuh Ciamis, Indonesia

Abstract

Being able to speak critically requires think critically. This study explicates students' perception on the use of oral peer feedback/review in establishing their speaking ability and critical thinking. Peer feedback/review is commonly employed in the classroom learning process especially in writing and oral communication classroom. The study acquired a qualitative case study design. Questionnaires and interviews were disseminated to gain the data. The eighteen undergraduates' students of the English education program taking oral communication classroom entailed in this study. Findings indicated that most of the students perceived the beneficial use of oral peer feedback to enhance their oral communication speaking and critical thinking skills. They found that their peer feedbacks/review were very functional in establishing their oral communication skill. Defining the oral peer feedback/review, the students elucidated that it helped them in describing, analyzing, and evaluating critically what they had experienced. Concerning the findings, the students were able to reflect on their previous speaking performance and become more critical in analyzing and evaluating each of the performance sessions. Also, they were more aware of their comprehension of the materials taught in the classroom from the previous feedbacks/review. The findings profound that regular practices of oral peer feedback/review can be accomplished to develop students' critical thinking to speak critically. Future studies might explore the extent to which these peer feedback activities have a quantitative effect on students' critical thinking skills.

Keywords: critical thinking, oral communication, peer feedback/review, students' perception

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, peer feedback is widely used in teaching English writing, but it is still rarely used in oral communication classroom. Peer feedback is referred to as a student-centered activity in which learners apply set criteria to assess peers' performance and provide feedback. Mangelsdorf (1992) as cited in Rachmawati, et al. (2018) stated that peer correction, also commonly referred to as peer feedback, peer review, or peer evaluation, is a collaborative learning activity during which language learners exchange their writing drafts and give feedback to each other for the purpose of revision. As a way of enhancing learner autonomy, peer feedback has been claimed beneficial as viewed from theoretical

and pedagogical perspectives (Saito, 2013). Mory (as cited in Xianwei, Samuel, & Asmawi, 2016) stated concisely that there are four perspectives on how feedback supports learning. Firstly, it becomes an incentive to increase response rate and/or accuracy. Secondly, a reinforcement that connects responses to prior stimuli automatically (it focused on correct responses). Thirdly, considering feedback as information for learners to validate or change a previous response. Lastly, regarding feedback as scaffolding to help students in constructing internal schemata and analyzing their learning processes.

As a tool to encourage students' critical thinking, peer feedback can be blended into the learning process (Ekahitanond, 2013). A mindset where the focus is on asking pertinent questions, the questions being directed at what is presented, the source of the information and what the information might mean was seen as critical thinking (Khan, 2017). Scriven and Paul (as cited in Ekahitanond, 2013) report that critical thinking is defined as the process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information collected from observation, experience, feedback, reasoning, or communication, and it is functioned as a way to believe and act. Accordingly, peer feedback can be used in developing learners' critical thinking, particularly in an oral communication classroom.

Speaking is an important part in teaching and learning English process. It accomplishes the purpose of real communication such as conveying news, obtaining information or expressing opinion with the variation of methods the way they learn in order to gain students' interest and fun in learning English (Hendriwanto, 2014). Meanwhile, Richard (2008) states that 'the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second languages or foreign language learners. However, learning to speak accurately and fluently is one of the most challenges for language learners. In addition, speaking skill relates to interaction that shows the way learners gain the purpose of its learning process as the essential development in gaining students' critical thinking (Rajasa & Sari, 2019). In terms of non-English speaking countries, Indonesia remains English as one of the obstacles in teaching and learning activities in the classroom setting. Whereas, Luoma (2004) argues that speaking tasks can be seen as activities that involve speakers in using the language to achieve a particular goal in particular speaking situation. Thus, to master speaking skills, learners should be involved in speaking activities. In other words, the teacher needs to push the students to speak English as much as they have time. Then, the teacher needs to create opportunity for students to speak.

Lee (2017) investigated 49 Korean EFL university students to study the effect of peer feedback in an English oral presentation class. Those students were divided into two groups consisting of 25 students (i.e., control group) which were given only the instructor's feedback, and the rest 24 students (i.e., experimental group) were additionally given peer feedback. Those who shared peer feedback as a small group during the semester performed much better on the final exam by improving their oral proficiency and they had greatly improved presentation skills through peer feedback tasks. This study shows that peer feedback gives a positive impact on students, both their oral proficiency and their presentation skills. This finding was also strengthened by students' positive arguments about the use of peer feedback. Of course, Lee's study is of great benefit for the current research since it has provided quantitative findings, and it also implies a gap particularly the lack of qualitative data to support his study.

Meanwhile, Alnasser and Alyousef (2015) also investigated the impact of the new form on learners' overall writing quality, and macro and micro-level writing features. The new form of peer feedback in their study was the one focusing on macro peer feedback only, the micro feedback, on the other hand, was provided by the teacher. 41 Saudi EFL undergraduate

students undertaking an English program were involved in this study. The findings shows that at a statistical level, each form of the technique had a significant impact on the participants, with the new form having an even greater impact. It was also found that when it compared to the conventional form, the new form had a more positive impact at the macro level. Similar to Lee's study, this study also provides support to the present research by exposing a major quantitative finding. Additionally, since this study was action research, qualitative findings from questionnaires and interviews were also indicated, making it more reliable to conduct further study on a different skill.

Another study on peer feedback was undertaken by Ting & Qian (2010) which is focusing on writing skills. In particular, they investigated peer feedback provided by 11 students in a Chinese EFL writing classroom. Results showed that the students incorporated a substantial part of the peer feedback in their revisions, most of which were surface-level revisions. The revised drafts were slightly improved in terms of fluency but greatly improved concerning accuracy. No significant differences were found at grammatical and lexical complexity. Results also indicated that peer-review activities could induce self-correction among students and cultivate independent critical readers and writers. This research was largely qualitative, which is similar to the present study, making it different from the previous two related studies. A very careful analysis was also conducted to discover the types of revision students provided in each written work. Thus, the results and the qualitative nature of this study seem to be similar to the present study, except the focus of feedbacking, i.e. students' oral communication.

Another previous study that can be said the most related to this research is "Promoting university students' critical thinking skills through peer feedback activity in an online discussion forum" written by Ekahitanond in 2013. The research variables in this study, namely critical thinking skills and peer feedback activity, are very similar to this present research article. However, the peer feedback was not directly done in the classroom, but in an online discussion forum, in which it is quite popular nowadays with the emergence of various kinds of social media and online applications. 39 sophomores participated in a one-group pre-test / post-test design. However, the researcher also employed a questionnaire to discover students' attitudes towards learning through peer feedback. The findings show that there is an increase in the post-test, which means that a peer feedback strategy application can promote students' critical thinking skills. Results from the questionnaire also showed that students gave a positive attitude towards learning, were more motivated, and were more confident when discussing with friends in online forums.

Several previous studies highlighted previously implies that not much research in ESL/EFL so far has been focused on the effect of peer feedback on critical thinking in oral communication class. In other words, although students' perceptions or attitudes towards peer feedback have been investigated in some studies, its effects on their critical thinking in oral communication class have not been much of interest. Whereas, in many matters of learning English, especially for foreign language learners, being critical can be seen by someone's opinion. Opinion is very close to someone's oral ability. Therefore, in this study, the researchers would like to see if implementing peer feedback in oral communication classroom would give influence on students' critical thinking. More specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:
1) How does peer feedback affect students' critical thinking?
2) How do students perceive peer feedback in developing their critical thinking in an oral communication class?

Didih Faridah[1), Luthfiyatun Thoyyibah[2), Asep Dudi Kurnia[3)
Promoting Students' Critical Thinking through Peer Feedback in Oral Communication Classroom

METHOD

The research employed a qualitative descriptive case study design and focused on interpreting and understanding how the students perceive oral peer feedback, with regard to their speaking and critical thinking skill development. A case study is believed to understand specific cases and ensure a more holistic approach to this research. A case study was also chosen to guide the researchers due to several justifications. First, it highlighted the bounded, singular nature of a case, i.e. peer feedback activity in a speaking class of undergraduate EFL students in Indonesia. Second, qualitative research especially case study considers context as an important thing, and so does the present study. Third, this case study research also employed various sources of data, particularly using questionnaires and interviews. Overall, it is in harmony with Duff's idea (2008, p. 22) that case studies are mostly defined as any research which considers that context is necessary, and the use of multiple sources of data is important as well.

In particular, this study was aimed at finding out and elaborating the participants' perceptions on oral peer feedback activities in a speaking class, and targeted at discovering everything related to the participants' critical thinking skills. Thus, through this study, we can identify the extent to which oral peer feedback enhances the critical thinking skill qualitatively, including how their skill develops during classroom activities. The results will be of great benefit to enrich the findings of the previous quantitative studies concerning the same topic.

To accomplish the objective of this study, the researchers selected a total of eighteen undergraduate students learning English at a private university in East Priangan, West Java, Indonesia. All participants were Indonesian as the English Foreign Language learners who were all majoring in the field of English language education. Samples were selected randomly, considering that there were many participants taking part in the oral communication classroom. These participants have something in common, i.e. they were joining an oral communication class and experiencing the application of peer feedback at the time this study was conducted. The participants' ages range from twenty up to twenty-one years old. Those are categorized as juniors. They are mostly Sundanese who live in the eastern part of West Java Province, Indonesia. However, some others are Javanese coming from East Java, but demographically it's very close to West Java. The study took place in the academic year 2017/2018.

There are two instruments used in this study; questionnaire and interview. First, questionnaire used to investigate students' perception on the use of oral peer feedback in promoting their critical thinking It consists of 10 statements about the effect of oral peer feedback to the students' critical thinking and their oral communication ability. Second, the interview were undertaken to investigate their critical thinking in their oral communication classroom.

The participants were asked to respond to all the items in the questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire items were adapted from Nisa (2018) who researched the use of oral peer feedback in the critical listening course. It was in the form of a Likert Scale, consisting of five options: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly disagree. The purpose is to discover the participants' views on the influence of peer feedback applied previously on their critical thinking skill development. Meanwhile, the semi-structured interview was conducted to discover the participants' perceptions about the application of peer feedback in developing their critical thinking skills. Each interview lasted about seven to ten minutes for each interviewee. The interview questions were designed as a follow-up interview, i.e. based on the results of their answers on the previously completed questionnaire. The

functions of participant interviews were twofold. Principally, the interviews were conducted to get detailed information regarding students' perceptions on the peer feedback process. In addition, the authors also obtained data about how students thought of the effect they got from oral peer feedback that might change or enhance their critical thinking skills.

Once data has been collected, the participants' responses in the questionnaire were calculated to find out the percentages of each statement. A table was used to display the results. Meanwhile, the interview results were transcribed and some excerpts were displayed to describe the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results and discussion of the study are presented under the two aforementioned research questions.

1. How does peer feedback affect students' critical thinking?

To find out the effect of oral peer feedback' (OPF) on the students' critical thinking, a list of 10 questions of the questionnaire was given to each of them. The students simply chose one option for each statement. The items are summarized in the table below along with the results of the students' assessment:

Table 1
The Result of Students' Questionnaires

No.	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1	Oral peer feedback (OPF) helps me to improve my comprehension of speaking.	31%	69%	0%	0%
2	Oral peer feedback (OPF) makes me aware of my speech organization	16%	79%	5%	0%
3	Oral peer feedback (OPF) helps me understand the speech delivered by my peers	11%	89%	0%	0%
4	Oral peer feedback (OPF) makes my pronunciation better	63%	26%	11%	0%
5	Oral peer feedback (OPF) enrich my vocabulary	53%	37%	10%	0%
6	Oral peer feedback (OPF) gives positive feedback for my future performance	42%	53%	5%	0%
7	Oral peer feedback (OPF) corrects my grammar.	37%	63%	0%	0%
8	Oral peer feedback (OPF) create an opportunity to give feedback to my peer critically.	16%	79%	5%	0%
9	Oral peer feedback (OPF) is very challenging in oral communication classroom.	58%	37%	5%	0%
10	Oral peer feedback (OPF) motivates me to be better in future performance.	58%	37%	5%	0%

Statements number 1 and 3 looked at how OPF helped the students in improving their comprehension in oral communication with their peer(s), and the result shows that a large number of students agree with that statement. Students agree that OPF helped improve their speaking performance by practicing with friends. When someone gives a correction to the speaker, it helps the speaker realize their mistakes and engage them to fix and improve their speaking performance. This is very understandable because feedback is intended to provide input so that an error can be corrected. Besides, feedback recipients can also get diverse input, so that "By giving and taking quality feedback from various perspectives, they can gain deeper knowledge" (Lee, 2017).

In terms of pronunciation, statement number 4 showed us a significant response to students' better pronunciation. Statements number 2, 5, and 7 focus on whether the students had improved in certain skills such as vocabulary, grammar and how to organize the speech. The result shows that the students dominantly agree and only a small number of them disagree. The percentage score shows that most of the students agree that their skills in the English language are much better by doing a lot of practice in the classroom using OPF. On the other hand, a small number of students felt that their pronunciation did not improve because they needed more time to practice. Some students did not learn some new vocabulary because they were stuck only to a few words that they know.

In the meantime, statements number 6 and 8 deal with whether OPF gave positive feedback to students' future performance and if OPF created opportunities to give feedback to their peers critically. The result shows that more than half of the students agree with the statement. The percentage score indicated that OPF would for sure make them successful in the future since criticizing one another helps the other person improve their performance.

Then, statement 9 focuses on whether OPF is very challenging in the oral communication classroom. The result shows that most students strongly agree, some only agree and a small number of them tend to disagree. Students strongly agree that OPF is very challenging in oral communication classrooms as they have to give the best performance by always learning from the previous feedback and avoid making the same mistake when speaking again in front of their classmates.

Finally, the tenth statement points out whether OPF motivated the students to perform better in the future, and the result shows that a large number of students strongly agree. The percentage score showed that OPF pushes the students into self-developing themselves over time and they will keep evolving by always practicing OPF.

To sum up, the students' assessment results on oral peer feedback in oral communication classrooms were mostly positive. Most participants believed that the provision of peer feedback in oral form can help them in improving their comprehension of speaking English by practicing with friends. Listening to different persons' opinions and their corrections engage the student to improve the performance more. The students agreed that their skills in English have improved such as pronouncing words, learning new vocabulary and also their grammar by practicing in the classroom using OPF. Moreover, the students also learned from peers' feedback so that they can fix their mistakes to perform better in their future performance.

2. To what extent do the students perceive that peer feedback has developed their critical thinking in an oral communication class?

To answer the second research question, each of the students was interviewed after being asked to fill in the questionnaire and a lot of them gave the same responses as follows:
One student felt that her critical thinking improved because of oral peer feedback that was implemented in the oral communication classroom. The lecturer helped her in practicing the ways to criticize someone by the means of OPF. The student engaged her critical thinking when giving her friends some feedback to elaborate between her friend's performance and the real situation that happened. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *"During the lecture in this semester, I felt that my critical thinking improved because in the class, the lecturer practiced us to practice the way how to criticize someone or something by means of OPF."*

The excerpt above also implies that the student had a strong feeling about the activity. She felt that the activity of giving each other input and correcting friends' mistakes was very

useful, especially to enhance their critical thinking skills. By looking at the data, we can also assume that peer feedback can also be carried out in the following semester, maybe even in a different subject.

The second student also felt that her critical thinking also improved. She learned to identify her friend's weaknesses and give comments on them instead of looking for their mistakes so that may give useful comments or advice for that person's performance.

> *"My reason is that when we use critical thinking .we do not look for the mistakes but we try to comment on the weakness of her/him."*

In the excerpt, it appears that students is not looking for mistakes, but trying to make comments. This means that this activity is actually not an opportunity to show the weaknesses of students, but gives them an ample opportunity to comment on their peers' performances.

Then, the third student felt the improvement in her critical thinking because at the beginning of the class she could not give any feedback to her classmates. Then after few weeks, she was able to give comments and corrections to her friends' performance to analyze their strengths and weaknesses or what they are missing from their speaking performance so they can revise and improve it. Her statement from the interview is as follows:

> *"Yes, it does. Because it will help students to know what the strenghts are and weaknesses or what are missing from their speaking performance so they can revise and improve it by our critical thinking. It can make the students to contribute actively in the classroom."*

The aforementioned excerpt implies that the student was being introspective to himself that he/she made mistakes or not on his speaking. The student also clarified that through peer feedback which is given from a friend helped them to recognize a fault on speaking then being critical to find an idea in revising a friend's utterance.

Furthermore, the other student felt that improving his critical thinking is necessary to give and take opinions from his classmates. Another student said that learning from previous mistakes would improve the skills as well as critical thinking.

> *"Giving feedback means I have to give something that can make my friends' performance improved. Thus, I am demanded to have critical thinking, this is because I have to give some inputs to my friends in the whole aspects in order to improve their performance. They have given their good feedback for me, so I have to do the same as theirs."*
>
> *"Yes of course. I think I use my critical thinking cause when I get many correction, it can be make my speaking skill more better for my future."*

These two excerpts also show that the student has realized that he should be fair with his peer in terms of taking and giving feedback. Hence, no wonder that he was motivated to improve his own critical thinking skill.

By the previous excerpt, students who are being corrected are very open for some correction. This means the student has a belief that the correction would be a very beneficial thing for the improvement of their speaking.

In summary, the results revealed that almost all participants think that getting and providing feedback to their classmates in an oral communication classroom may improve their speaking ability and critical thinking. It is related to Yastibaş & Yastibaş (2015) who stated that peer feedback enables students to experience an enjoyable classroom atmosphere in a student-centered class, while at the same time promoting their critical thinking skill. Additionally, oral peer feedback may also pursue engaged and reflective roles in learning speaking in the classroom.

So far, this research has found some data about the importance of feedback in learning, especially oral communication. Feedback is nothing new in the world of teaching, neither is peer feedback. However, the uniqueness in this study may be related to how students can think critically when they give feedback to their friends or classmates who make mistakes. By using a qualitative design and some additional quantitative calculations in the form of a percentage, this study has tried to dig deeper into students' perceptions of the use of peer feedback associated with their critical thinking skills. The data from questionnaires and interviews have produced clear data, in which most students responded positively to all statements.

Regarding the first research question about "How does peer feedback affect students' critical thinking?", the data from the questionnaire showed some encouraging things. To all positive statements, students' responses are in agreement. Many of them also responded "strongly agree" toward some statements. First, peer feedback helped them to improve their comprehension in speaking. The feedback given by their peers turned out to have given them an understanding of what was right and what was wrong so that in the end this peer feedback also helped them to make their speech more well-organized. In oral communication, well-organized utterances will sound more logical and easier to understand. In more detail, students also mentioned that peer feedback made their pronunciation better, enriched their vocabulary, and corrected their grammar. Pronunciation and grammar are two aspects that are misused frequently because students in Indonesia learn English as a foreign language, so they cannot have ample opportunities to practice English in daily oral communication. Although grammar sometimes does not become a focus or oral communication, its correct use will certainly increase understanding of the intent of the speaker in a communication. Vocabulary is of course also very necessary in speaking. People will feel difficult to express their intentions verbally if their vocabulary is limited. Peer feedback, therefore, is very important because every student with different vocabulary mastery can share their acquired vocabulary with each other. In other words, without using a dictionary, students have gained a lot of new vocabulary.

In addition to the above findings, peer feedback also provides other positive things that are indirectly beneficial for the success of oral communication. For example, students are more motivated to do better in the future. This can be understood because of the course students want to get a good response to their performance. In terms of speaking opportunities, especially critical speaking, it turned out that peer feedback activities also provided a lot of exposures for students to further enhance their critical thinking skills.

The next finding is about students' perspectives on the development of critical thinking skills through peer feedback. Data from interviews showed that students felt their critical thinking skills has increased because they were required to be able to criticize the words or statements of their friends. By giving feedback to each other, it means they also criticize each other. With frequent criticism, critical thinking will certainly be enhanced and developed.

Some of the findings in this study are certainly very useful. All in all, it can be concluded that all participants, with various levels of awareness, agreed with the fact that peer feedback activity had influenced their oral communication skills. In this sense, several participants claimed that they started to be simply "aware" as soon as they received feedback from their classmates. In the meantime, most of them were indicated to be at a higher level of awareness since they could also give useful feedback to their classmates.

In addition to increasing our understanding of peer feedback, the research findings also reinforce some of the findings in previous studies. For example, the results of data analysis in this article reinforce the results of Lee's (2017) quantitative research that have found that

peer feedback is effective for improving EFL university students' oral proficiency. In addition to strengthening the results of the research, this study is more enriching in terms of variables, because it turns out that critical thinking skills can be positively affected by the use of peer feedback. Also, the findings in the article reinforce the findings of Alnasser and Alyousef (2015) and Ting & Qian (2010) that peer feedback is indeed very useful, not only in writing skills but also in speaking and critical thinking skills.

The findings are also in harmony with Ekahitanond's research results which was conducted in 2013 in Thailand. As has been pointed out previously, this previous research focused on critical thinking skills and peer feedback activity, which are very similar to this present research article. The findings show that there is an increase in the posttest results, which means that students' critical thinking skills has developed significantly after joining a peer feedback activity. Furthermore, a positive attitude towards learning was also indicated in the questionnaire. The students were more motivated, and were more confident when discussing with friends in online forums. All these findings suggest that peer feedback is undoubtedly useful for students' critical thinking skill enhancement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It has been pointed out earlier that previous studies on oral peer feedback did not pay attention to its effects toward critical thinking in oral communication class. Thus, the authors provide conclusions to describe how the findings of this study have filled in the identified gap. First, peer feedback has made the students think critically, as admitted by most of the participants, because they were required to be able to criticize the words or statements of their friends. In this sense, they become accustomed to realizing and correcting mistakes. Second, peer feedback also made the learning process in the classroom more interactive and less stressful for the students. This atmosphere will certainly enable them to think more critically. In short, the results of this study suggest that peer feedback activity is worth doing in an oral communication class. The data in this research focused more on what students felt about peer feedback, which means that it still needs more evidences, especially quantitative evidence. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies explore the extent to which these peer feedback activities have a quantitative effect on students' critical thinking skills.

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