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Enhancing engagement in the oral communication classroom through cloud-based peer assessment

Norman Fewell

*Meio University, Japan
norman@meio-u.ac.jp*

George MacLean

*University of the Ryukyus, Japan
george.university@gmail.com*

This paper presents a practical framework for integrating student peer evaluation into participation scores for oral presentations using Google Workspace tools. It addresses the common pedagogical challenge of student disengagement in the audience role after their own presentation is complete. Building on classroom experience, this paper demonstrates how common applications (e.g., Google Forms, Google Sheets) can be used to collect and quantify peer feedback, incorporating it into a documented and traceable grading process. The discussion outlines, step-by-step, how to design forms for peer ratings, process data in spreadsheets, and calculate participation scores from a record of student work, a process requiring no advanced technical knowledge. This approach promotes active engagement and reflective learning and utilizes the accessibility of cloud computing, making it particularly timely amid the expansion of online and hybrid education. The outcomes include a practical guide for generating participation scores grounded in evidence of engagement with peers' work and a discussion of best practices for promoting a collaborative classroom. This paper contributes to CALL practice by offering an accessible, scalable method to assess engagement beyond impression-based participation marks, enhancing both pedagogical traceability and student accountability.

Keywords: Peer assessment, oral communication, student engagement, cloud computing, CALL

Introduction

In university-level Oral Communication courses, presentations are a cornerstone of the curriculum, designed to develop students' public speaking skills, confidence, and ability to convey information coherently. A persistent pedagogical challenge, however, is that unstructured group activities can lead to disengagement among students in the audience role; in the context of peer presentations, this can manifest as inattentive listening once students have completed their own presentation, which undermines the effectiveness of the exercise if not properly managed (Fewell & MacLean, 2018). This disengagement deprives presenters of an attentive audience and misses opportunities for audience members to build critical listening and analytical skills. Traditional participation grades are prone to subjectivity and often fail to motivate students. This paper proposes a systematic peer-assessment methodology using Google Forms and Sheets to address such challenges. This approach repositions audience members as active evaluators, generating a participation score grounded in a documented record of engagement with peers' work. By quantifying peer feedback, this system boosts student attentiveness and critical analysis, ensuring engagement is meaningfully aligned with the course's pedagogical goals and making students accountable for their participation.

Literature review

The role of peer assessment in higher education

Peer assessment, defined as a process in which learners evaluate the quality of work produced by peers of comparable standing (Topping, 1998), has been a subject of pedagogical research for several decades. Its benefits are well-documented, extending beyond the simple easing of an instructor's grading workload. When structured effectively, peer assessment can provide students with valuable learning experiences, allowing them to understand assessment criteria more clearly by applying it to the work of their peers and internalize the standards of quality work, which can, in turn, improve their own performance (Yin et al., 2022). Furthermore, Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000), in a meta-analysis of peer assessment studies, found a high degree of reliability between peer and teacher marks when the assessment task was well-defined and based on clear criteria.

In the context of language learning, well-implemented peer assessment can generate a rich source of information for students, leading to meaningful revisions in areas like content, organization, and vocabulary (Hansen & Liu, 2005). It also helps develop valuable skills in giving and receiving constructive criticism, which is essential for professional and academic development (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). However, the effectiveness of peer assessment can be undermined by students' varied and sometimes inconsistent rating patterns, highlighting the need for proper training to help them develop and apply clear assessment criteria (Matsuno, 2009). The framework proposed herein seeks to address these challenges in two complementary ways. To improve the consistency of peer ratings, the framework incorporates a brief training session in which assessment criteria are explained and modelled before the peer assessment activity begins. To formalize and streamline the

process itself, the framework requires feedback submission through Google Forms, grants credit for completed evaluations, and anonymizes student identities before redistributing peer feedback.



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Technology and student engagement

The use of technology to facilitate classroom interaction is a central theme in CALL research (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Student response systems (SRSs), often known as “clickers,” were an early example of using technology to increase engagement and to provide real-time feedback (MacLean & Elwood, 2009). These systems demonstrated that when students are given a structured way to participate, even anonymously, their attention and involvement increase. SRSs primarily target behavioral engagement, measured through participation rates and in-the-moment responsiveness. Structured peer assessment differs in that it also recruits cognitive engagement, requiring students to attend closely to peers’ work and apply explicit criteria when evaluating it. Cloud-based tools extend this affordance: rather than capturing only a tally of responses, they enable the collection of substantive evaluative comments alongside ratings. Further advancements in cloud-based applications have enhanced the feasibility and scalability of interactive methodologies, opening up new pedagogical possibilities.

Google Workspace has been noted for its utility in educational settings due to its accessibility, collaborative features, and zero cost for educational institutions (Nguyen, 2023). Tools like Google Forms allow for the easy creation and distribution of surveys and quizzes, while Google Sheets provides a powerful platform for automatic data aggregation and analysis. Using these tools for peer assessment of presentations is well suited to the task: Forms can deliver structured rubrics during transitions between speakers, while Sheets aggregates the resulting ratings and comments for later processing, yet it remains under-utilized (Ingham, 2022). To address this gap, this paper provides a pedagogical and technical framework that outlines a clear assessment procedure.

A practical framework for implementation

The framework described here was developed for a typical Oral Communication course at a Japanese university, in which students meet weekly across a 15-week semester and English is the target language. Class size averages 20–25 students, and the core assessment is a final solo presentation on a self-selected topic, weighted at 50% of the final grade; the remaining 50% is distributed across other components, including a peer-assessed participation score generated through this framework. The procedures described below can be readily adapted to other contexts: instructors teaching shorter terms, larger or smaller classes, or different course types can adjust the timing, weighting, and rubric to suit their own settings.

Phase 1: Designing the peer assessment instrument

The instructor first creates a Google Form to serve as the peer assessment tool. The design of this form is critical to the success of the system. The form is configured to collect responses in a single, linked Google Sheet. It is simple enough to be completed quickly during the transition between speakers but detailed enough to provide meaningful data. The following items are recommended for inclusion in the form:

1. Assessor Identification: A single dropdown menu where students select their own name or set an auto-identification sign-in. This is used to track who has submitted feedback, ensuring every student participates.

2. Presenter Identification: A dropdown menu listing all students in the class, from which the assessor selects the name of the person who had made a presentation.

3. Evaluation Criteria: This section contains five items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Needs Improvement, 5 = Excellent). The criteria should be directly linked to the learning objectives of the course:

- a. Organization & Clarity: Was the presentation easy to follow?
- b. Content: Was the information interesting and well-researched?
- c. Delivery: Did the speaker use effective eye contact, gestures, and vocal variety?
- d. Visual Aids: Were the slides (or other aids) clear, professional, and supportive of the content?
- e. Overall Engagement: How effectively did the presentation hold your attention?

4. Constructive Comment: A single, mandatory short-answer question: “Provide one piece of constructive feedback (e.g., something the presenter did well, or a suggestion for improvement).” Whether students respond in English or in their L1 is a pedagogical choice for the instructor. In lower-proficiency classes, allowing the L1 reduces the cognitive load of giving feedback in the moment and tends to elicit more substantive comments; in higher-proficiency classes, requiring English makes the activity an additional opportunity for productive output. Whatever the policy, it should be stated explicitly during the training session described in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Classroom procedure

Before engaging in the peer assessment activity, students attend a 15-minute training session led by the instructor, who explains the peer assessment rationale, walks students through the grading rubric with worked examples illustrating the difference between, for instance, a score of 3 and a score of 5 on each criterion, and models constructive comments alongside vague or unhelpful ones. A copy of the rubric is distributed during this session and made available throughout the semester. A QR code and URL can be provided for the Google Form. During the 2–3 minute transitions between speakers, students can use their personal devices to submit feedback for the presenter who just finished. The instructor can monitor this process in real time.

Phase 3: Data processing and quantification

After all presentations are completed, the data collected in the Google Sheet is processed to calculate a participation score for each student. This process involves two main calculations:

1. Submission Score: A simple check is performed to see if each student submitted a feedback form for every presenter (including themselves). A student who submits all required forms receives a full score (e.g., 100%) for this component.

2. Feedback Quality Score (Effort Metric): This metric evaluates the assessor's level of engagement. The instructor reviews the open-ended comments submitted by each student and scores each comment on a 3-point scale:

- a. **2 points:** Thoughtful, specific, and constructive comment.
- b. **1 point:** Vague or generic comment (e.g., "Good job").
- c. **0 points:** No comment, an irrelevant comment, or a disrespectful one.

Once each comment has been scored, the average of the comment scores is calculated for each student to yield that student's Feedback Quality Score. The final peer-assessed participation score for each student is then a weighted average of their Submission Score (e.g., 40%) and their Feedback Quality Score (e.g., 60%). It is worth noting that the 3-point scale described above functions primarily as an instructor grading tool rather than a criteria-referenced learning rubric: it allows the instructor to apply consistent standards across submissions, but it is the assessment criteria taught during the training session (Phase 2) that scaffold students' understanding of what counts as high-quality feedback.

Outcomes, limitations, and pedagogical implications

The primary outcome of this framework is the continual generation of a participation score for every student, derived from documented evidence of engagement with peers' presentations, which can then be integrated into the final course grade. This approach does not eliminate instructor judgement; rather, it relocates it from a global, impression-based assessment of participation to a more circumscribed, criterion-referenced judgement of comment quality, while making that judgement traceable to a record of student work that both the instructor and the student can revisit. The final grade breakdown for the course can be designed to reflect the importance of both individual performance and engagement with peers' work.

Despite the benefits, some limitations exist. First, the instructor's evaluation of the open-ended comments, while systematic, contains an element of subjectivity. Second, the framework as described does not feed peer ratings directly into the presenter's grade; the participation score belongs to the assessor, not the presenter. However, instructors who choose to use peer ratings as one input to the presentation grade should be aware that students may rate friends more favorably, an effect that is diluted when feedback is aggregated across a larger class but that may need to be moderated in smaller groups. Finally, the system relies on students having access to

a web-enabled device and a stable internet connection in the classroom, which may not always be available in low-tech environments.

Conclusion

Traditional participation assessment in oral presentations often suffers from subjectivity and from disengagement among students in the audience role. This paper outlines a practical, technology-enhanced framework that uses peer assessment to generate a participation score using Google Forms and Sheets, offering an accessible and scalable method to replace impression-based participation marks with scores grounded in a documented record of student engagement with peers' work. Implementation of this framework may promote active listening and grading fairness, through a systematic channel for self/peer feedback. Transforming students into accountable audience members enhances classroom dynamics and promotes the kind of attentive, accountable participation that an oral communication course depends on. Combining peer assessment pedagogy with cloud tools and a replicable model for collaborative learning may help instructors manage challenges in any course with a presentation component. Future research could explore long-term effects on presentation skills, cross-disciplinary applications, and machine learning for analyzing qualitative feedback.

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Author biodata

Norman Fewell has been teaching English at several universities in Japan for the past thirty years. He is a professor of applied linguistics and TESOL in the Department of International Cultural Studies at Meio University. His current research interests are peer feedback and assessment, and multimodal collaborative language learning.

George MacLean is a professor at the University of the Ryukyus. He has taught at primary-junior high and university levels in Japan and in the international school system. His research interests include SLA and ICT implementation. He is active in JALT, and regularly presents at language teaching and technology events.