# INSIGHTS INTO PEER SUPPORT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: EFL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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#### ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

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The objective of this qualitative research is to investigate the intricate role that peer support plays in enhancing the outcomes of English language acquisition. The study conducts in-depth interviews with six students to EFL students' perspectives of peer support in English language learning. The findings suggest that emotional support is a factor in the establishment of a constructive learning environment, which in turn enhances both motivation and resilience. Tutoring and other forms of collaborative learning are two examples of academic assistance that significantly improve students' capacity to grasp and retain the material they are studying. It is also possible that the offer of mentoring from peers may support the development of essential skills such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking to a greater extent. After completing the study, the researchers concluded that peer support is a highly valuable resource for language learners. This is because peer support provides a multitude of benefits that go beyond the realm of academic achievement.

230(04): 120 - 128

# NHỮNG GÓC NHÌN MỚI VỀ SỰ HỖ TRỢ ĐỒNG ĐẮNG TRONG VIỆC HỌC TIẾNG ANH: QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA SINH VIÊN TIẾNG ANH NHƯ MỘT NGOAI NGỮ

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#### TỪ KHÓA

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### TÓM TẮT

Mục tiêu của nghiên cứu định tính này là khảo sát vai trò phức tạp của sự hỗ trợ từ bạn bè trong việc nâng cao kết quả học tập tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu tiến hành các cuộc phỏng vấn sâu với sáu sinh viên để hiểu rõ quan điểm của sinh viên học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ. Kết quả cho thấy sự hỗ trợ về mặt cảm xúc là một yếu tố quan trọng trong việc tạo ra môi trường học tập tích cực, từ đó thúc đẩy cả động lực và khả năng phục hồi. Hỗ trợ học tập, chẳng hạn như việc kèm cặp và các hình thức học tập hợp tác khác, là hai ví dụ về sự hỗ trợ học thuật giúp cải thiện đáng kể khả năng hiểu và ghi nhớ kiến thức của sinh viên. Ngoài ra, việc nhận được sự cố vấn từ bạn bè có thể hỗ trợ phát triển các kỹ năng quan trọng như giao tiếp, hợp tác và tư duy phản biện ở mức độ cao hơn. Sau khi hoàn thành nghiên cứu luận rằng sự hỗ trợ từ bạn bè là một nguồn lực vô cùng giá trị đối với người học ngôn ngữ. Điều này là do sự hỗ trợ từ bạn bè mang lại nhiều lợi ích vươt xa thành tích học tập.

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230(04): 120 - 128

#### 1. Introduction

English plays a crucial role in various fields, including economics and politics, in countries worldwide. For Vietnam, it presents a significant opportunity for the younger generation to develop in all professions that are closely related to the current international labor market. Moreover, according to Vu [1], English is not only a communication tool but also a key to unlocking job opportunities and career advancement in the era of globalization. Meanwhile, Pham [2] argues that English is not only a vital language in Vietnam's international integration process but also a primary language taught in the Vietnamese education system, especially at the college and university levels. Thus, the role of teaching and learning specialized English in universities and colleges is currently immense and decisive for the quality of international integration. Furthermore, English will serve as a gateway to early job opportunities for fresh graduates, as suggested by Tran [3].

The teaching of English language in Vietnamese universities and colleges has experienced substantial improvements in recent years. Nonetheless, several constraints persist. Hoang [4] emphasizes that the English proficiency of prospective university and college students remains comparatively low, which presents challenges for effective teaching. Moreover, several instructors persist in using conventional pedagogical approaches, emphasizing grammar and vocabulary at the expense of fostering communication skills, as noted by Nguyen [5]. A fundamental problem is that graduates' English competence often does not meet employers' expectations, as noted by Trinh [6].

In recent years, especially in the context of globalization, peer support a method of learning in which students help one another out has become more popular in Vietnam's higher education institutions. According to Vu [7], this method gives students more chances to speak English, which improves their ability to communicate practically. The confidence of students in their ability to use English is bolstered by the support and encouragement of their peers, as per Songsiri [8]. Furthermore, Do [9] posits that peer support fosters students' self-directed learning, research capabilities, and problem-solving skills, consequently augmenting their comprehension of information. Newton [10] asserts that peer support cultivates an open and amicable learning atmosphere, allowing students to feel at ease with making errors and eager to learn.

Peer support is a study subject garnering heightened interest within the domain of higher education. Previously and contemporary research has shown several substantial advantages of this methodology for students, particularly in enhancing academic achievement and cultivating soft skills. Specifically, Tran [3] has pointed out that several elements affect non-English majors' English language acquisition, such as learners' requirements, instructors, learning environment, materials, motivation, and future career. Furthermore, Truong [11] contends that motivation is the principal element influencing students' performance in English language acquisition. Saito [12] underscores the importance of happy emotions, as they enhance both cognitive and motivational dimensions of foreign language acquisition while also fostering general pleasure. Consequently, several elements, such as family, friends, and teachers, impact any successful learning pursuit. Newton [10] posited that "peer support" is a collaborative educational process in which students aid one another in mastering a topic, irrespective of their social standing. It may also be characterized as the transmission of experience and information from one person to another. Although all studies agree on the role of peer collaboration in the educational process, it has been defined variably by different scholars. Whitman [13] originated the phrase "near-peer teaching," but Iwata [14] characterized this procedure as "peer tutoring." Nonetheless, Manning [15] favored the phrase "peer support." The essential framework of peer support entails partnering a less proficient student with a more accomplished counterpart to enhance the former's academic achievement without the imposition of authority, such as that of a teacher. However, as Tella [16] underscores, peer support should not replace teacher education but rather function as an adjunct.

Schleyer [17] posits that using peer support in several dimensions helps bolster students' self-confidence, communication abilities, and feelings of accountability, and creates a more conducive learning atmosphere. This research seeks to investigate EFL students' beliefs and practices about peer support in English language acquisition. The research will provide ideas to enhance existing teaching techniques and increase students' English language competency based on the results.

230(04): 120 - 128

#### 2. Methodology

# 2.1. Participants

This study included interviews with a total of six students, comprising two female and four male students. All participants were first-year students at the College of Technology and Industrial Management in District 7, Ho Chi Minh City. The group consisted of two students majoring in e-commerce, two students from the business administration department, and two students from the accounting department. All students were between the ages of 18 and 20. Every participant attended an English class taught by the same teacher during the experiment. All students who participated in the interview had an average English score of 8.0 or higher.

#### 2.2. Data collection instruments

According to Mackey [18], interviews are a common instrument for qualitative research because they enable researchers to explore difficult-to-observe phenomena and triangulate data sources. Peer cooperation is a complex learning environment that cannot be fully understood by evaluating friendship-interaction conversation data. Interviews, then, may be a valuable source of information on participants' perceptions of pair work as well as the difficulties they had when completing the task. The 18 interview questions were categorized into three main themes: Emotional Support, Academic Assistance, and Skill Development.

# 2.3. Procedure of data collection

The data collection process commenced approximately three weeks following the approval granted by the head of the foreign language department at the institution. Participants involved in the study were provided with a 5 to 10-minute preview of the interview questions, which were printed in Vietnamese. Subsequently, each participant engaged in a 10 to 15-minute interview session.

To ensure a systematic approach, the researcher conducted interviews with two students per week, scheduling them on two distinct days each week. Predominantly, these interviews took place immediately after the conclusion of morning classes. Upon the completion of each interview, the researcher presented the participants with a notebook as a token of appreciation. The recording device utilized for capturing the interviews was a mobile phone equipped with a recording function.

The structured nature of the data collection process facilitated the efficient gathering of qualitative data, ensuring consistency and reliability across all interview sessions.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Results

## 3.1.1. Emotional Support

Emotional support plays a crucial role in an individual's overall well-being and mental health. It involves providing empathy, care, and reassurance, helping individuals manage stress and navigate challenging situations. The study of Ganster [19] indicates that emotional support can act as a buffer against the adverse effects of stress, significantly improving resilience and psychological health. In educational settings, emotional support from peers and teachers fosters a positive learning environment, enhancing students' academic performance and social skills as

230(04): 120 - 128

Wentzel [20]. This kind of support is essential in developing a sense of belonging and security, which in turn promotes personal growth and development.

Providing support to peers struggling with English language learning often requires a delicate approach. An accounting student suggested

"I would try to build a rapport with my friend and suggest we study together. If they were reluctant, I would find other ways to assist them, such as providing study tips or offering help with class assignments. This gradual and supportive approach can be beneficial for both parties." (S1)

Building positive relationships is facilitated by mutual respect. An accounting student highlighted the importance of a supportive and encouraging approach, stating;

"To foster a positive learning environment, it is essential to avoid negative comparisons and criticism when providing support to peers." (S5)

The majority of students expressed a consensus on providing support to their peers experiencing difficulties in English language learning. This support often involved active listening, offering encouragement, and developing tailored strategies. For instance, a business administration student stated:

"I would thoroughly investigate the root cause of my friend's problem and create a specific, simple plan to alleviate their academic stress. Additionally, I would share my own experiences with similar challenges." (S3)

Trust is a crucial factor in peer support. If a peer declines assistance, it may indicate a lack of trust in the helper's abilities. An e-commerce student explained:

"While I would respect my friend's decision, I would also acknowledge that there might be underlying reasons for their hesitation. I would be prepared to offer support again in the future if the circumstances changed." (S2)

When conflicts arise during peer support, it is important to de-escalate the situation and find a mutually agreeable solution. One business administration student suggested:

"If a disagreement arises, I would suggest taking a short break to calm down and re-evaluate the situation. For minor issues, I might try to lighten the mood with humor. For more serious problems, I would suggest temporarily pausing our activities to avoid further escalation." (S4)

Emotional support plays a crucial role in facilitating effective peer-to-peer language learning. By providing empathy, encouragement, and understanding, peers can create a supportive learning environment that promotes both academic and personal growth.

As highlighted by the findings, students recognize the importance of building strong relationships based on trust and respect. Effective communication, active listening, and constructive feedback are key components of fostering positive interactions. By tailoring support strategies to individual needs and preferences, students can maximize the effectiveness of peer support. However, challenges such as personality clashes, time constraints, and differing learning styles can hinder the effectiveness of peer support. To overcome these challenges, it is important to establish clear expectations, maintain open communication, and practice empathy. By addressing these issues proactively, students can create more effective and supportive learning relationships. To summarize, peer assistance is a crucial resource for language learners. Students can improve their language skills and academic performance by creating a happy learning atmosphere, offering emotional support, and encouraging teamwork.

#### 3.1.2. Academic Assistance

Academic assistance is pivotal in helping students navigate their educational pathways, providing essential support that enhances learning and achievement. Topping [21] indicated peer tutoring and collaborative study sessions significantly improve students' comprehension and retention of material. This form of support encompasses tutoring, access to educational resources, and structured study groups, which collectively foster an environment conducive to learning and

collaboration as Johnson [22]. Furthermore, academic assistance has been shown to boost students' confidence and performance, particularly in challenging subjects, by providing tailored help and continuous feedback as Kulik [23]. These resources empower students to overcome academic challenges and reach their full potential.

230(04): 120 - 128

Participants emphasized the importance of tailoring learning experiences to individual needs. One business administration student explained:

"I would conduct research to identify my friend's learning style and preferences, and then create a personalized learning plan. For instance, if my friend is extroverted, I might suggest engaging in conversational activities, while for an introverted friend, I would provide structured materials and opportunities for one-on-one discussion.' This highlights the significance of flexibility and adaptability in peer support." (S1)

Setting clear boundaries is essential in providing effective peer support. An accounting student explained:

"It is important to avoid crossing personal boundaries and to focus solely on academic assistance. Negative comments or personal attacks can undermine the supportive relationship and hinder the learning process." (S3)

Participants emphasized the importance of active listening in fostering effective peer support. An e-commerce student stated,

"Listening is a cornerstone of effective communication and plays a vital role in building strong relationships. By actively listening to our peers, we can better understand their needs and challenges, thereby providing more targeted and effective support." (S2)

Peer feedback plays a crucial role in fostering a collaborative and supportive learning environment. An accounting student highlighted the importance of sharing new knowledge and insights with peers, stating:

"Whenever I come across new methods or trends that could be beneficial to my peers, I try to apply them to real-life examples that they can relate to. By providing practical examples and guidance, I aim to make the new information more accessible and memorable." (S5)

When faced with a non-compliant peer, it is important to address the issue directly and establish clear expectations. An e-commerce student stated,

"If a peer is not fulfilling their responsibilities, I would have a serious conversation with them about the importance of teamwork and mutual respect. If the situation persists, I would focus on my own work and collaborate with other team members who are committed to the group." (S4)

The present research emphasizes the critical importance of peer support in improving academic performance and creating a happy learning environment. By providing tailored assistance, constructive feedback, and emotional support, peers can significantly impact one another's learning experiences. Effective peer support involves a combination of factors, including active listening, empathy, and effective communication. It is crucial to establish clear expectations, set boundaries, and maintain a respectful and supportive atmosphere.

However, challenges such as personality clashes, time constraints, and differing learning styles can hinder the effectiveness of peer support. To overcome these challenges, it is important to develop strong interpersonal skills, effective communication strategies, and a willingness to adapt to different learning styles. By addressing these challenges and implementing effective strategies, peer support can be a powerful tool for enhancing student learning and academic success.

Furthermore, institutions can play a significant role in fostering a supportive learning environment by providing opportunities for peer interaction, training students in effective peer support techniques, and recognizing and rewarding peer support efforts. By investing in peer support initiatives, institutions can create a more inclusive and collaborative learning community.

# 3.1.3. Skill Development

Skill development is a crucial component of personal and professional growth, equipping

individuals with the abilities needed to excel in their respective fields. According to Cummings and Worley [24], effective skill development involves a combination of technical, interpersonal, and cognitive skills that enable individuals to perform tasks efficiently and adapt to changing environments. Training programs and practical experiences are essential for enhancing these skills, as they provide hands-on opportunities for learners to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world situations as Kirkpatrick [25]. Additionally, continuous learning and skill development are vital in a rapidly evolving job market, where staying updated with the latest tools and techniques can significantly impact career advancement as Noe [26]. Thus, a strong focus on developing a diverse skill set is essential for achieving long-term success and competitiveness.

A significant challenge lies in persuading peers to trust one's ability to guide and share knowledge in English language learning. This necessitates a high level of proficiency, effective communication skills, and a sense of responsibility. A business administration student noted,

"I believe that actively participating in class discussions and achieving high academic performance can help establish credibility among peers. However, continuous self-improvement is essential to maintain confidence in one's ability to provide support." (S3)

An accounting student shared a similar perspective, stating:

"To build trust with peers, I focused on both academic excellence and active engagement. By participating enthusiastically in class discussions and providing clear explanations to classmates' questions, I aimed to establish myself as a reliable and knowledgeable resource." (S2)

Simultaneously, students who actively support their peers in English language learning have encountered numerous challenges, leading to a decline in their enthusiasm. Some common difficulties include personality clashes, limited knowledge of the other person's learning style, ineffective communication, and time constraints. An accounting student objectively observed:

"Supporting peers in English language learning can be challenging, particularly when there are disagreements about learning methods and awareness levels. Resolving such conflicts requires time and effort, and if not addressed appropriately, can negatively impact the mental well-being of both individuals involved." (S1)

Celebrating successes is a crucial component of fostering motivation and engagement in learning. Some students suggest that activities such as group outings, class applause for correct answers, and positive reinforcement can be effective in boosting morale. An accounting student shared:

"My team and I celebrate our successes by going out for a meal and sharing our experiences. We also document our journey and achievements on social media, offering mutual encouragement." (S5)

This study underscores the multifaceted nature of peer support in English language learning. While it offers numerous benefits, including improved motivation, enhanced language proficiency, and stronger interpersonal relationships, it also presents significant challenges. To be effective, peer support requires individuals to demonstrate competence, reliability, and strong communication skills. Active participation in class, consistent effort, and a willingness to share knowledge are crucial. Furthermore, building strong relationships through open communication, empathy, and constructive feedback is vital. Recognizing and accommodating individual differences, such as learning styles and personality types, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of peer support. Additionally, celebrating successes and providing positive reinforcement can boost motivation and create a positive learning environment. However, challenges such as personality clashes, time constraints, and differing learning styles can hinder the effectiveness of peer support. Addressing these challenges requires careful planning, effective communication, and a commitment to fostering a supportive learning community.

# 3.2. Discussion

The presented research delves into the multifaceted nature of peer support in English language learning, highlighting its potential to enhance learning outcomes, foster emotional well-being,

boosting motivation and fostering a sense of accomplishment.

and cultivate essential skills. The discussion emphasizes the crucial role of emotional support in creating a positive and encouraging learning environment. By providing empathy, encouragement, and understanding, peers can build trust and rapport, fostering a sense of security and belonging that is conducive to language acquisition. The findings emphasize the importance of active listening, constructive feedback, and a supportive and respectful atmosphere. However, establishing clear boundaries and recognizing individual needs are crucial to navigate personality clashes and differing learning styles, ensuring that peer support remains constructive and beneficial. Academic assistance emerges as another key dimension of peer support. Collaborative learning through tutoring sessions, study groups, and knowledge sharing empowers students to tackle challenging concepts. Tailoring support strategies to individual learning styles - be it through engaging discussions for extroverts or structured materials for introverts – maximizes the effectiveness of peer assistance. Research participants underscore the significance of active listening, clear communication, and constructive feedback in providing targeted academic support. Setting boundaries also proves essential to avoid undermining the learning process with negativity or personal attacks. The discussion further explores the role of peer support in skill development. By actively participating in class discussions, sharing knowledge, and providing clear explanations, individuals establish themselves as reliable resources, fostering trust and credibility among peers. This highlights the importance of ongoing self-improvement and a commitment to developing strong communication skills. Challenges such as personality clashes and differing learning styles can, however, lead to frustration and diminished enthusiasm. The research suggests that proactively addressing these challenges through open communication, empathy, and a willingness to adapt can create a more supportive learning environment. Celebrating successes, both individual and collective, also emerges as a powerful tool for

230(04): 120 - 128

Numerous studies have explored the concept of peer support, each focusing on different aspects. However, no research has comprehensively investigated the multifaceted role of peer support in enhancing English language learning outcomes. This study aims to address this gap by employing in-depth interviews with a diverse group of students to explore the impact of their beliefs and practices in peer support on their overall learning experience. Truong [11], for instance, highlighted the significance of belief in one's ability to succeed as a key factor influencing student outcomes. Moreover, values such as intrinsic value, attainment value, and importance value were found to be closely related to student engagement in English courses. Family values were also identified as indirectly impacting learning outcomes and participation, while directly influencing attainment value. In the study by Pan and Yuan [27], the importance of peer support in fostering a positive learning environment and enhancing learning motivation was emphasized. Emotional self-regulation efficacy was identified as a crucial factor in managing emotions and maintaining learning motivation. The findings of the study may offer valuable insights for designing English language learning programs that promote peer support and the development of emotional self-regulation skills. In addition, Sari's study [28] revealed that mutual support had a positive impact on the academic achievement of students with low academic achievement, aligning with previous research. Conversely, for students with high academic achievement, no significant difference in academic achievement was observed between the support and non-support groups. However, participation in support groups may have positively influenced the attitudes and soft skills of these students.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research underscores the multifaceted nature of peer support in English language learning. While challenges such as personality clashes and time constraints may arise, the potential benefits of peer support are significant. By fostering emotional well-being, providing targeted academic assistance, and facilitating skill development, peer support can significantly

impact the learning experiences of individuals striving to master the English language. The research underscores the importance of active participation, effective communication, a commitment to continuous learning, and a willingness to adapt to individual differences. Furthermore, by providing opportunities for peer interaction, training students in effective support techniques, and recognizing these efforts, institutions can play a critical role in fostering a supportive learning environment that maximizes the benefits of peer support for all students.

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230(04): 120 - 128

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