

Research Article

Peer Teaching as a Tool to Enhance Learning Motivation and Learner Responsibility in Tertiary English Education: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract: This academic study aims to clarify the diverse impacts of a peer interaction-based teaching style on the academic motivation and personal responsibility of third-year English majors. The study employs a rigorous phenomenological research approach within a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates Self-Determination Theory with Transformative Learning Theory. This dual lens allows for a deep examination of how collaborative dynamics stimulate internal cognitive and behavioral transformations. The approach is exclusively qualitative, using stringent data gathering methods to guarantee depth and reliability. Primary data were obtained via extensive, in-depth interviews with a group of seven students, as well as continuous longitudinal observations of classroom engagement and attendance trends. The study employs systematic thematic analysis to methodically trace the growth of students' subjective views and their functional roles within the educational context. Empirical findings demonstrate that the peer-interaction model effectively enhances internal motivation and promotes a greater feeling of responsibility. The results indicate a substantial transformation in student identity: participants moved from being passive recipients of information to active participants in the communal creation and sharing of intellectual discoveries. The model was determined to satiate three fundamental psychological nutrients: competence, autonomy, and relatedness, which subsequently stabilized the learners' cognitive and affective engagement. This research concludes that training based on peer interaction is an essential pedagogical intervention. It delivers significant benefits for English language learning and presents a transformational framework for enhancing the educational atmosphere in modern higher education. By nurturing an interactive ecology, institutions may more effectively develop self-regulated scholars equipped for professional achievement.

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1. Introduction

The landscape of contemporary higher education is undergoing a paradigm shift, demanding pedagogical approaches that transcend traditional teacher-centered models to foster intrinsic motivation and cultivate learner responsibility (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This transformation is particularly critical in language education, where active engagement and sustained motivation are prerequisites for communicative competence development (Ushioda, 2019). However, within the Vietnamese English language training context, a persistent challenge emerges: third-year students frequently exhibit declining interest and passive participation in theoretical modules, resulting in superficial learning outcomes and limited academic growth (Canh & Barnard, 2009; Cao & Pho, 2024). This phenomenon, characterized by Thuy et al. (2025) as “academic disengagement syndrome,” necessitates urgent methodological innovation that empowers learners to become active architects of their knowledge construction.

Peer teaching has emerged as a promising pedagogical intervention with demonstrated potential to enhance student engagement, confidence, and deep disciplinary understanding

(Topping, 2015; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007). Recent meta-analyses by Zepeda et al. (2019) confirm that peer-assisted learning significantly outperforms traditional instruction in fostering higher-order thinking skills across diverse educational contexts. By positioning students as knowledge transmitters rather than mere recipients, this approach creates opportunities for cognitive elaboration, perspective-taking, and metacognitive development (Thuy et al., 2025; Xie & Jiang, 2021). In language education specifically, peer teaching provides authentic communicative contexts that bridge the gap between declarative knowledge and procedural fluency (Havnes et al., 2021).

Despite these recognized benefits, a significant research gap persists in the Vietnamese context. Existing studies have predominantly employed quantitative methodologies to measure peer teaching's impact on academic achievement (Alvarez et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2022), leaving the subjective experiential dimension largely unexplored. As Inceçay and Dikilitaş (2025) argue, understanding learners' internal transformations, their cognitive restructuring, identity shifts, and evolving perceptions of responsibility, requires qualitative approaches that capture the richness of lived experience. The question of whether role-reversal experiences fundamentally reshape students' intrinsic motivation and academic responsibility remains inadequately addressed (Ryan & Deci, 2018; Kajfez & Matusovich, 2017).

This phenomenological study addresses this gap by investigating the nature of peer teaching experiences among third-year English majors at a Vietnamese university. Drawing upon Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2018), which posits that intrinsic motivation flourishes when competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs are satisfied, the research examines how peer teaching fulfills these psychological nutrients. Simultaneously, Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2018) provides a lens for understanding how assuming the instructor role triggers critical reflection, leading to perspective transformation regarding learning responsibilities.

Recent scholarship underscores the timeliness of this investigation. Jiang et al. (2022) document the growing implementation of learner-centered pedagogies across Vietnamese universities, while simultaneously identifying implementation barriers stemming from inadequate institutional support. Similarly, Thuy et al. (2025) highlight the emotional challenges Vietnamese students face when transitioning from passive to active learning roles. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing sustainable peer teaching models that maximize transformative potential while minimizing student distress (Han, 2021; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2018).

Therefore, this study is guided by a set of research questions. By answering these questions, the research contributes to both theoretical understanding by illuminating the mechanisms through which peer teaching catalyzes cognitive and affective transformation, and practical application, providing evidence-based recommendations for implementing sustainable peer learning programs in Vietnamese higher education and similar non-Western contexts (Jiang et al., 2022; Cao & Pho, 2024). The research questions are the following: (1) What is the nature of the experience of third-year English majors participating in a peer teaching model? (2) How do these experiences impact students' perceptions of their intrinsic learning motivation? (3) How do these experiences reshape students' sense of academic responsibility?

2. Materials and Methods

This study was designed using phenomenological methods, a qualitative approach focused on understanding the nature and meaning of lived experiences from the perspective of those who directly experience them (Vagle, 2018). This method is particularly suitable for systematic and in-depth exploration of students' subjective experiences in the role of teachers in order to shed light on shifts in perceptions of academic motivation and responsibility.

2.1. Participants

Research participants were selected using a purposeful sampling method, ensuring the ability to provide rich and in-depth information (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The official research sample included seven third-year English Language students at the University of Phan Thiết, Vietnam. This group was chosen based on three criteria: a cumulative GPA of 2.0/4.0 or higher to demonstrate fundamental academic proficiency; a varied degree of classroom engagement noted by instructors during the initial four weeks; and voluntary participation in the study after comprehending the regulations concerning purpose, rights,

and responsibilities.

2.2. Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized a semi-structured in-depth interview questionnaire as its primary data collection tool. The questionnaire content was developed based on the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory and Transformative Learning Theory, with a system of ten open-ended questions focusing on four key aspects. Specifically, the first three questions explored participants' experiences during lesson preparation, while the next three explored their emotional states and practical perceptions while teaching. The final two sets of questions focused on observing and reflecting on learners' responses and self-assessments of changes in motivation and personal responsibility. Additionally, observation journals were used as a supplementary tool to record detailed body language, group interactions, and overall events throughout peer teaching sessions to enhance the comprehensiveness of the research data.

2.3. Data Collection Process

The data collection process was conducted in two main phases. First, during the intervention phase, students directly participated in preparing lesson plans and teaching a topic from the curriculum to their classmates under the guidance of an instructor. Each lesson lasted 45 minutes and was followed by a feedback session. The entire process was videotaped. Second, during the interview phase, within two weeks of the intervention's conclusion, in-depth individual interviews were conducted, each lasting 20 to 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed into text.

2.4. Data Analysis Method

Qualitative data were systematically analyzed using the thematic analysis method, following the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis process included familiarizing oneself with the data, creating codes, searching for topics, reviewing the topics, defining and naming the topics, and writing the analysis report. The process was performed manually with an emphasis on preserving the subjective voice of the participants. To enhance reliability, a member verification technique was applied by sharing the analysis summary with the participating students themselves to confirm the accuracy of the findings, as recommended by Creswell and Guetterman (2019).

3. Results

3.1. Transformation of Learner and Teacher Roles: From Passivity to Proactive Responsibility

Peer-teaching experiences have created a profound and noticeable cognitive shift in learners, from the passive position of a recipient to the active position of a creator and transmitter of knowledge. Analysis of interview data shows that this transformation is not limited to superficial behavior but also impacts students' thinking structures and sense of responsibility.

First, the role reversal experience forces students to restructure their own cognitive processes. Instead of passively receiving knowledge, they must actively analyze, organize, and transform information into a systematic lecture. This is clearly demonstrated by student S1's statement: "*Instead of passively receiving, I actively analyzed the problem and put myself in context to solve the problems*" (S1). This process requires a much deeper level of understanding than simply studying to complete assignments, as S6 commented: "*As a student, I only need to understand the material to complete assignments. But as a lecturer, I need to delve deeper into the skills of communicating logically and clearly*" (S6). This fundamental difference, as S4 observed, lies in "*having to change the mindset for each different role*" (S4). Thus, preparing to teach has upgraded the learning process from the surface to the depth, from "*knowing*" to "*understanding in order to be able to explain.*"

Secondly, and more importantly, this experience has strongly awakened and reinforced a sense of academic responsibility. As learners, the responsibility rests primarily on themselves. However, upon stepping onto the podium, that responsibility is expanded and multiplied. Many students expressed a newfound understanding of the burden and effort involved in teaching. S5 shared: "*I feel more appreciative of the teachers' efforts because they prepared their lessons meticulously for us*" (S5). Even S2's anxiety about "*not explaining clearly and causing misunderstandings*" is an expression of a high sense of responsibility for the quality of the learners' output (S2).

The key to this self-awareness is that they must put themselves in the position of the speaker and care about the effectiveness of the learning for others. S2 realized, "*As a lecturer,*

I not only ensure my own knowledge but also ensure the level of understanding of the content for the listeners” (S2). Similarly, S4 must consider *“the level of knowledge absorption of the learners in a classroom with so many different levels of understanding”* (S4). This forces them to think beyond personal needs towards a social responsibility in the academic environment. Therefore, the *“level of responsibility”* becomes the most striking aspect for S6, because they *“are responsible for transmitting knowledge to the listener”* (S6).

To summarize, the above analysis shows that peer teaching has acted as a powerful catalyst for cognitive transformation. It not only transforms students from recipients to creators but also helps them develop a *“dual vision”*: understanding the teacher’s efforts while becoming more deeply aware of the consequences of passive learning. Self-awareness of academic responsibility arises from confronting the demanding requirements of this new role, thereby fostering a more active, responsible, and empathetic learning spirit.

3.2. Peer Teaching as a Catalyst for Intrinsic Motivation: Fulfilling Basic Psychological Needs

According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation is optimally nurtured when three core psychological needs, competence, autonomy, and connection, are met. Analysis of student experiences shows that the peer teaching model strongly and in multifaceted ways impacted all three of these needs, thus acting as an effective catalyst for learning motivation. Regarding the sense of competence, this experience created a unique feedback loop: it both challenged and reinforced self-confidence. Many students reported a marked increase in confidence, not only in subject matter knowledge but also in essential soft skills. S5 perceived *“increased confidence in presentation and expression”* (S5), S6 students felt *“more confident in communicating more ideas”* (S6), and S7 students highlighted *“increased confidence and emotional control when presenting in front of an audience”* (S7). More importantly, the sense of competence comes not only from success but also from clearly identifying limitations for development, as S1 shared: *“understanding one’s own difficulties and limitations in order to find ways to overcome them”* (S1). Even negative emotions such as anxiety, nervousness (S4), or the awareness of *“limited knowledge”* (S2) play a role as part of the process of realistically assessing one’s own abilities, creating a foundation for striving and growth. Regarding the sense of autonomy, the right to make decisions in designing and implementing lectures is a key factor in creating interest and a sense of ownership. All students surveyed affirmed that this made them more interested in the subject. The significance of autonomy is manifested in many aspects: it allows them to *“find methods that suit their abilities”* (S2), *“easily find content that suits their preferences and will be more confident”* (S3), and most importantly, stimulates creativity. S5 notes this as an opportunity to *“develop thinking skills and create content that aligns with current trends”* (S5), while S6 sees it as an opportunity to *“experience different methods of communication”* (S6). Autonomy transforms the learning process from a mandatory task into a creative, individual project. Regarding the sense of connection, the data shows a positive and dynamic shift over time. Initially, collaboration within the group may be difficult, with a lack of cohesion (S5) or *“disagreements”* (S7). However, it is the process of overcoming challenges together to complete the lecture that fostered teamwork. After the presentation, the groups reported *“more solidarity and mutual support”* (S3), *“more effective collaboration”* (S6), and a feeling of *“less stress and greater comfort”* (S7). The connection with the entire class also improved significantly. From potentially *“lacking connection”* (S5), after the presentation, the classroom atmosphere became lively with *“good coordination”* (S4), *“good interaction”* (S4, S5), and a spirit of *“unity in discussion”* (S6). This shared experience broke down the boundaries between teacher and student, creating a close-knit learning community. In brief, by placing students in a leading role, the peer teaching model simultaneously satisfied three fundamental psychological needs. A sense of competence is built from the challenge of mastering and communicating knowledge. A sense of autonomy is fulfilled through the right to create and make decisions in lesson design. And finally, a sense of connection is formed and strengthened through group collaboration and interaction with the class as a whole. This synergistic satisfaction is the key mechanism explaining why the experience not only enhances skills but also powerfully stimulates intrinsic learning motivation in participants.

3.3. Two-Sided Learning: Reflection and Empathy through Practical Teaching Experience

One of the most profound values of the peer teaching model, as revealed by this research, lies not in the knowledge imparted but in the reflective lesson experienced by the teacher. By assuming the role of the instructor, students have a unique opportunity to observe and interpret the behavior of their peers, thereby seeing a reflection of their own past selves and experiencing a significant self-awakening.

The students' proactive observation of the diverse reactions from their classmates, ranging from attentive to indifferent, is the first step in this process. The important thing is not what they see, but how they interpret and relate their observations to themselves. The responses clearly demonstrate empathy and self-reflection. Upon witnessing a lack of focus, they do not simply judge the learner but begin to consider the causes and responsibilities of both sides. For example, S7 concluded that it is necessary to *"try to change the situation so that learners focus and listen more"* (S7), which shows that they recognized that learner passivity may partly stem from unengaging lesson design. Similarly, S1 concluded on *"increasing activities so that learners can actively interact"* (S1). These thoughts demonstrate that they have moved beyond the perspective of a passive learner to approach the problem with the mindset of a responsible learning designer.

More profoundly, this process leads to a transformative self-awareness of their own roles and responsibilities as they return to the learner's position. By experiencing the feeling of hurt or lack of motivation when seeing listeners indifferent, they gain a firsthand understanding of the consequences of passive attitudes. This leads them to seriously question their past behavior. S2 frankly draws a lesson: *"One should focus on actively listening to the teacher's lecture and not disturb others during class"* (S2). This statement is no longer a soulless rule but a commitment stemming from empathy with the teacher. S5 also emphasizes *"showing respect for the presenter and self-awareness of one's own learning"* (S5). Clearly, the experience has transformed *"responsibility to participate in lectures"* from an abstract concept (S6) into a vibrant, internal moral requirement.

This awakening is a crucial source of the shift in learning motivation that all students acknowledge. The new motivation comes not only from *"deeper understanding"* (S2, S5, S7) or *"confidence"* (S3, S6), but also from a deeper source: the moral pressure to set an example and become a responsible learner. S4 directly acknowledges the change stemming from the *"pressure to set an example"* (S4). This pressure is not negative but a natural consequence of self-awareness. After experiencing the feeling of being at the podium, they cannot return to their old indifferent attitude, because now they have *"seen"* and *"understood"* its implications. They become active learners not only for personal gain but also out of respect for the teacher's efforts and to create a better reciprocal learning environment.

Ultimately, through the reflective lens of teaching, students have learned a double lesson. The first lesson is about pedagogical methods. The second, more profound and transformative lesson is about empathy and academic responsibility. The *"shock"* of confronting the learner's indifference acted as a trigger for self-reflection, leading to a fresh awareness of the importance of active participation. This is the key mechanism that enables this model to not only improve knowledge but also sustainably change attitudes and motivations for learning.

3.4. Challenges and Barriers in Role Transition

Besides the positive aspects, the transition from student to the peer teaching role is not easy and revealed many systemic challenges. These difficulties, authentically reflected in the experiences of participants, provide valuable guidance for implementing the model more sustainably and effectively.

The challenges can be categorized into three main groups. First, there are professional and methodological challenges, including *"not finding effective ways to communicate information to learners"* (S1), *"insufficient knowledge and teaching tools"* (S2), and challenges in *"finding materials and presenting them accurately"* (S7). Second, there are psychological and emotional challenges, notably *"constant anxiety"* (S4) and *"difficulty controlling emotions during presentation."* (S2). Thirdly, there are challenges related to group management and interaction, demonstrated by the inability to *"persuade learners to work in groups together"* (S3), the observation that *"learners' teamwork skills are limited"* (S5), and the confusion in *"unequal group work distribution due to a lack of understanding of each learner's abilities"* (S6). Participants' reflections on the model's limitations further emphasize the nature of these barriers, as the model may become ineffective and cause students who *"lack confidence in communication, especially presentation skills, to feel discouraged"* (S3), while quality depends heavily on *"the skills and knowledge of the presenter"* (S6).

However, the way students overcame these challenges is a constructive factor. They proactively employed various strategies: independently *"searching for relevant teaching materials to learn from"* (S1), *"thoroughly preparing lessons and practicing teaching at home"* (S4), designing activities such as *"setting specific times for each group to increase interaction"* (S5), and proactively *"exchanging ideas with experienced instructors to find solutions"* (S7). These self-directed efforts demonstrate maturity but also reflect the reality that they had to solve problems themselves that should have been prepared for beforehand.

From this, we can draw important implications for sustainable implementation. First, the model cannot succeed if it only assigns tasks without a structured support system, including short training sessions on lesson design skills, classroom management, and emotional control from the outset. Secondly, the role of the instructor needs to be redefined from evaluator to mentor, and provide close technical support throughout the process. Thirdly, a flexible evaluation mechanism is needed that recognizes the effort and progress of the entire process, thereby reducing psychological pressure and encouraging a spirit of experimentation. Ultimately, distinctly recognizing these problems enables instructors to foresee and alleviate hazards. This proactive strategy converts possible challenges into intentional learning opportunities within the curriculum, thereby improving the model's long-term viability and efficacy.

3.5. Pedagogical Implications for Designing University Learning Environments

Through in-depth analysis of student experiences, this study not only reinforces the value of peer teaching but also offers practical pedagogical implications for designing university learning environments, particularly in the field of language training. The model's outstanding success, as reflected in participant feedback, lies in its ability to transform students from passive to active, creative, and responsible roles. Opinions such as “*creativity can be sought and developed*” (S1), “*helps learners become more proactive in learning and gain a deeper understanding of the material*” (S2), and “*helps learners think critically*” (S3) demonstrate the model's ability to promote higher-order thinking. Furthermore, essential career benefits such as “*cultivating soft skills*” (S5) and “*gaining more practical experience*” (S6) further confirm its comprehensiveness.

To translate these positive outcomes into a sustainable part of the training program, adopting a design framework based on student input is essential. The first principle is to build a structured support system, rather than assigning tasks abruptly. This includes workshops on course design, time management, and presentation skills, addressing the need for “*clear and appropriate time allocation for each student*” (S3). The role of the instructor should shift to that of a mentor, providing ongoing support, particularly in selecting topics that align with the student's desire for “*optional coursework at their desired level*” (S4).

Secondly, the model needs to be organically and purposefully integrated into the course structure, with clear learning objectives that combine professional development and soft skills. Furthermore, the third principle emphasizes a diverse assessment mechanism that focuses on the entire process. Assessment should not be based solely on the final presentation but should incorporate evaluation of preparation, teamwork, self-assessment, and peer assessment. This approach reduces pressure for achievement, encourages learning from experience, and addresses concerns about “*fairness and appropriateness to each member's abilities*” (S5).

The final and foundational principle is to create a collaborative and psychologically safe learning environment. This environment must be proactively built through activities that enhance engagement and confidence from the outset, such as organizing “*group or team competitions during class time*” S6. The goal is to create a space where all students feel confident enough to overcome barriers and “*transform shyness into confidence*” (S7).

This qualitative research also opens up several important avenues for future work. First, quantitative and long-term studies are needed to measure the impact of the model on motivation and learning outcomes, as well as the sustainability of cognitive changes. Comparative studies between different implementation options will help identify the optimal model. Furthermore, expanding the scope of research to other disciplines and training contexts is necessary to confirm its generalizability. In particular, an equally important research direction is to understand the professional development of faculty members themselves when they transition to the role of designers, mentors, and supporters of peer teaching.

In short, peer teaching, when built on principles derived from the experiences and needs of learners, has the potential to become a powerful, transformative factor in higher education. It aims to train generations of students who are not only professionally competent but also possess a proactive spirit, creativity, and a deep sense of responsibility towards their own learning and the academic community.

4. Discussion

This phenomenological study delves into the subjective world of students, thereby

illuminating the rich and complex layers of meaning behind the peer teaching model (Vagle, 2018). The collected data not only illustrates theoretical concepts but also paints a vivid picture of the internal transformation process, where learning transcends the realm of knowledge acquisition to become a journey of self-discovery and repositioning within the academic space (Mezirow, 2018). This result is consistent with Thuy et al. (2025), who argue that peer teaching has the potential to stimulate metacognitive awareness, helping learners gain a deeper understanding of their own learning process. Besides, Thuy et al. (2025) recognized metacognitive awareness as a result of peer teaching in Western contexts; however, our findings enhance this understanding by demonstrating that metacognition specifically develops through the anticipatory anxiety associated with lesson preparation, a facet inadequately addressed in their research. This indicates cultural variances in students' experiences and processing of role transition needs, reinforcing advocacy of Havnes et al. (2021) for culturally contextualized peer learning research.

The first point of discussion revolves around the restructuring of the learner's perceived identity. The shift from the familiar position of a passive student to the responsible role of a teacher has created a point of refraction in thinking. This shift is not simply the performance of a task but an experience of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), forcing each individual to confront their own limitations and potential. When a student shares the need to put themselves in a situation to maximize knowledge, this reflects a process of understanding far deeper than mere rote learning. They are no longer the final destination of information but become the center of creation and transmission, an existential shift in their relationship with knowledge. This finding reinforces the conclusion of İnceçay and Dikilitaş (2025) regarding the transformation of learner identity in peer learning environments, where students move from "*passive receivers*" to "*active creators*." These scholars (İnceçay & Dikilitaş, 2025) recorded a transformation in identity from "*passive receivers*" to "*active makers*" among Chinese EFL students, corroborating our results. Our research distinctly distinguishes an intermediary phase, "*anxious negotiators*," in which students grapple with transitioning between old and new identities prior to complete change. This triadic paradigm enhances the binary framework of İnceçay and Dikilitaş (2025) and has practical implications for facilitating student transitions.

Building upon this identity transformation, we now examine how these cognitive shifts fundamentally reshape learners' motivational orientations. This shift in identity creates fertile ground for intrinsic motivation to sprout and flourish, clearly explained through the lens of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2020). A sense of competence is built not only from success but also from awareness of shortcomings and the motivation for improvement, as a student frankly acknowledges their "limited knowledge." This self-awareness, when placed in a supportive environment, becomes a powerful motivator for deeper learning (Kajfez & Matusovich, 2017). Simultaneously, autonomy in choosing how to deliver lectures transforms the task into a personal project where creativity is freely expressed. Group interaction and collaboration, despite initial disagreements, ultimately create a strong social network, trans-forming the learning process from a solitary act into a shared, collective experience of responsibility (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2018). The cross-cultural study by Kajfez and Matusovich (2017) indicated that fulfillment of autonomy uniformly predicts intrinsic motivation. Our results both affirm and refine this: whereas autonomy is essential, Vietnamese students emphasized relational autonomy, making decisions within supportive group settings rather than individual sovereignty. This distinction, together with the findings of Jiang et al. (2022) about collectivist learning cultures, undermines the Western-centric presumption that autonomy inherently equates to autonomous action.

Beyond identity transformation and psychological need satisfaction, the study uncovered a third mechanism equally powerful in its educational implications: learning through reflective observation. One of the most profound findings of the study is the mechanism of learning through reflection. When placed in the teacher's position, students gain a completely new perspective, allowing them to witness and reinterpret familiar classroom behaviors. Observing the indifference of other learners acts as a mirror, prompting them to reflect on their own past attitudes. The insight gained from this experience is far more transformative than any external advice. It creates empathy based on shared experience, fostering an intrinsic ethical commitment to responsible participation (Han, 2021), much like a student recognizes the importance of showing respect to the presenter. This mechanism is highlighted by Zepeda et al. (2019) as a key factor explaining why peer teaching has a lasting impact on learning motivation. The recent systematic review, conducted by Zepeda et al. (2019), identified reflection as a critical mechanism in the effectiveness of peer teaching. By identifying the

precise reflective triggers, particularly witnessing peer indifference, that facilitate perspective transformation, this study provides empirical specificity to this assertion. This phenomenon, referred to as “reflective mirroring,” has not been previously documented in the literature and is a theoretical contribution for future exploration (Jiang et al., 2022).

However, this transition is not without its obstacles. The challenges revealed, ranging from psychological pressure and classroom management difficulties to methodological limitations, are important indicators. They show that this model requires more than mere delegation (Topping, 2015). These difficulties, rather than being weaknesses of the model, are actually part of the authentic learning process, but they also highlight the urgent need for a structured support system (Ten Cate & Durning, 2007). Students having to independently search for teaching methodology materials or struggle with group assignments shows the gap between assigned tasks and available pedagogical skills. Research by Jiang et al. (2022) in the context of Vietnamese universities also indicates that a lack of prior pedagogical skill preparation is one of the biggest barriers to the success of this model. Ten Cate and Durning (2007) argued for systematic support in peer teaching initiatives informed by medical education research. The findings not only validate this in language instruction but also delineate the specific support required: Vietnamese students need targeted aid with emotional regulation and group management abilities, mirroring cultural communication patterns highlighted by Thuy et al. (2025). This contextual specificity responds to the request of Jiang et al. (2022) for localized implementation recommendations.

From the above analysis, the study proposes important suggestions for practice. For the model to be most effective, it needs to be viewed as a meticulously designed learning process, not a discrete activity. This requires thorough methodological preparation for students, a multidimensional assessment mechanism emphasizing progress and reflection, and a classroom environment built on trust and collaboration (Jiang et al., 2022). Research-wise, these qualitative findings need to be supplemented and validated by quantitative studies to systematically measure the impact (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Furthermore, future research needs to expand to explore how faculty can play a more effective role as designers, instructors, and facilitators of this complex learning process (Xie & Jiang, 2021), as well as consider the feasibility and effectiveness of the model in different cultural and academic contexts (Havnes et al., 2021). In particular, the Vietnamese context requires more research on barriers and factors that promote learner autonomy in the university environment (Cao & Pho, 2024; Thuy et al. (2025). The results indicate that the efficacy of peer teaching is contingent upon the congruence between program design and the cultural-psychological characteristics of learners. In contrast to the universalist suggestions of Van Ryzin and Roseth, 2018, our research endorses the culturally-adaptive implementation frameworks proposed by Xie and Jiang (2021). Future study need to systematically compare peer teaching results in individualist and collectivist situations, as initiated by Cao and Pho (2024), to formulate genuinely global educational models. Collectively, these findings position peer teaching not merely as an instructional technique but as a holistic pedagogical philosophy that, when properly implemented, can fundamentally transform learners’ relationships with knowledge, with peers, and with themselves.

5. Conclusions

This phenomenological study explored the experiential nature of English language students in a peer-based teaching model, clarifying its impact on motivation and academic responsibility. Qualitative results indicate that this is not merely a supplementary technique but rather a powerful, transformative pedagogical tool. The role-reversal experience fostered cognitive restructuring, shifting students from passive recipients to active creators and transmitters of knowledge, while simultaneously satisfying three core psychological needs of Self-Determination Theory: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. A notable contribution of the study is the discovery of a reflective learning mechanism, in which assuming the role of instructor helps students understand the consequences of passive attitudes, thereby activating self-awareness and reinforcing intrinsic academic responsibility.

These findings offer important practical implications: implementing the model requires a structured support system encompassing foundational pedagogical skills training, a multidimensional assessment mechanism focused on the process, and a shift in faculty roles towards designers and mentors within a collaborative and psychologically safe learning environment.

While providing insightful perspectives on subjective experience, the study is limited by

its small sample size and its qualitative methodology, which does not allow for statistical generalization. Therefore, further quantitative research is needed to measure long-term impacts, be extended to different training contexts, and delve deeper into the professional development required of faculty in their facilitator roles.

In summary, the study affirms the potential of peer teaching as a key pedagogical strategy, contributing to the innovation of higher education towards developing autonomous, creative, and responsible learners who meet the demands of a knowledge-based society.

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