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LEARNING FROM PEERS: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PEER TEACHING IN BASIC GRAMMAR FOR ESP COURSES

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Abstract

This study explores students' perceptions of peer teaching in a Basic English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course in an Indonesian private university. The research investigates how peer teaching influences learners' understanding of grammar and vocabulary, their confidence, and their classroom engagement. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through a focus group discussion with six fifth-semester students. Findings reveal that peer teaching creates a relaxed learning atmosphere that reduces anxiety and increases students' willingness to ask questions. Participants reported deeper comprehension of grammar when peers provided simplified explanations, although complex structures still required clarification from the lecturer. Peer interaction increased students' confidence, encouraged active participation, and strengthened their learning autonomy. However, participants emphasized the need for better tutor preparation, clearer guidelines, and stronger lecturer support to ensure accuracy and coherence during instruction. The study concludes that peer teaching effectively complements lecturer-led instruction by fostering supportive learning environments and enhancing grammar-focused learning. The implications highlight the importance of structured peer-teaching design, adequate tutor training, and balanced integration with teacher-led explanations to maximize learning outcomes in ESP contexts.

Keywords: ESP, Grammar, Peer Teaching

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become an essential component of higher education programs, particularly in fields such as Architecture, Information Technology, Agrotechnology, and English Education. As global academic and professional communication increasingly depends on discipline-oriented English competencies, universities must design ESP courses that are both relevant and engaging for diverse learners (Basturkmen, 2021). However, many ESP learners experience challenges related to low confidence, limited vocabulary, and insufficient opportunities to practice speaking within authentic or semi-authentic contexts (Ruiz-Garrido, 2021). These issues are heightened in large, heterogeneous classes where teacher-centered instruction dominates, and students have minimal interaction time.

In response, peer teaching has emerged as a promising pedagogical alternative that aligns with constructivist and collaborative learning theories. Peer teaching encourages students to take active roles as both facilitators and learners, helping them build disciplinary understanding while simultaneously developing communication skills (Cui, 2022). Recent studies have demonstrated that peer-led activities can increase engagement, improve comprehension, and foster learner autonomy in ESP settings (Nguyen & Pham, 2023). Importantly, peer teaching also supports affective outcomes such as self-confidence, sense of community, and willingness to communicate—critical

components for effective speaking development in ESP classrooms (Reinders & Benson, 2022).

Within Basic ESP courses, peer teaching provides structured opportunities for students to practice discipline-related communication tasks using accessible language and collaborative scaffolding. Students working in pairs or small groups often feel more comfortable expressing ideas and negotiating meaning, which contributes to improved speaking fluency and reduced anxiety (Alharbi, 2020). Despite its potential, the success of peer teaching depends heavily on students' perceptions of its usefulness, clarity, and relevance. Positive perceptions are strongly associated with increased motivation and deeper participation, whereas negative perceptions may limit the effectiveness of peer-led instruction (Kurniawan & Wahyuni, 2021).

Despite these promising findings, existing research has largely focused on general English or isolated ESP contexts, with limited attention to students' perceptions of peer teaching in Basic ESP grammar courses across different academic disciplines. This gap is significant because grammar forms the foundational linguistic component of ESP learning and is often perceived by students as difficult, abstract, and anxiety-provoking. In Basic ESP courses, where students from various study programs share the same instructional space, understanding how learners perceive peer-led grammar instruction is crucial for evaluating its pedagogical effectiveness and relevance. Therefore, this study seeks to explore students' perceptions of peer teaching and examine how peer teaching influences grammar learning in ESP contexts. By focusing on learners from different academic disciplines, the study aims to provide insights that can inform more responsive and discipline-sensitive ESP pedagogy. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are students' perceptions of peer teaching?

RQ2: How does peer teaching influence grammar learning in ESP?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to explore students' perceptions of peer teaching in Basic ESP courses across different academic disciplines. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to examine how individuals interpret experiences and construct meaning within specific contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mohajan, 2018). This approach is particularly suitable for capturing nuanced insights, emotions, and reflective interpretations of learning experiences that may not emerge through quantitative instruments. In line with Saldaña (2011), this design allows for a rich portrayal of participants' voices and lived experiences in peer-led ESP classrooms.

Participants and Sampling

This study utilized purposive sampling to select six students from three academic programs at a private university in Yogyakarta: Architecture, Information Technology Communication (ITC), and Agrotechnology. Two students from each program participated in the study. Participant information is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Name	Study Program	Sex	Semester	Course
Alyssa	Architecture	Female	1	Basic Grammar for ESP
Andrew	Architecture	Male	1	Basic Grammar for ESP
Brianna	Information Technology	Female	5	Basic Grammar for ESP
Brandon	Information Technology	Male	5	Basic Grammar for ESP
Chloe	Agrotechnology	Female	1	Basic Grammar for ESP
Christopher	Agrotechnology	Male	1	Basic Grammar for ESP

All participants had completed a Basic ESP grammar course and had experience with peer-teaching activities, making them appropriate informants. The participants represented varied academic backgrounds and genders, providing diverse perspectives on peer teaching in discipline-integrated ESP classes.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which was chosen for its capacity to generate rich, interactive, and dialogic data. FGDs encourage collaborative meaning-making and allow participants to reflect on and respond to one another's experiences (Guest et al., 2012). The discussion was guided by open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to peer teaching.

Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures. After informed consent was obtained, a 30-minute FGD was conducted in a quiet classroom setting to ensure participant comfort and minimal distraction. The session was audio-recorded, and field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and group dynamics. All audio data were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained through institutional procedures. To protect participants' identities and ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned

2 to all participants and used consistently throughout transcription, analysis, and reporting. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. All identifiable information was removed or anonymized, and digital recordings and transcripts were securely stored with restricted access. These procedures reflect adherence to established ethical standards in qualitative research and ensure respect, beneficence, and minimization of risk.

Data Analysis

4 Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, involving an iterative process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. 4 Initially, transcripts were read repeatedly and systematically coded to identify meaningful units and recurring patterns. 18 The codes were then organized into categories and themes using tables and matrices to facilitate comparison across participants. Interpretation involved examining relationships among themes and cross-checking findings among participant groups.

3 To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by returning transcripts to participants for verification of accuracy and intended meaning. Peer debriefing among the research team was also undertaken to challenge interpretations, minimize researcher bias, and strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. 16

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents four major themes that emerged from the voices of six participants—Chloe, Andrew, Alyssa, Brandon, Christopher, and Brianna—and interprets them using relevant theories and recent literature. The findings show how peer teaching shaped their speaking confidence, anxiety, grammar awareness, and willingness to communicate.

Reduced Speaking Anxiety through Supportive Peer Interaction

A consistent theme across participants was the noticeable reduction in speaking anxiety when learning grammar through peer-teaching activities. Many of them reported feeling more relaxed, less judged, and more willing to participate compared to traditional lecturer-led sessions. As Chloe expressed:

“In peer teaching the classroom feels more relaxed, not as tense as in a normal lecture. Because it's my friends who explain, I don't feel judged or afraid of making mistakes. The atmosphere just makes me want to try speaking even if my grammar is not perfect.”

Participants consistently reported that peer teaching reduced their speaking anxiety during grammar-focused activities. The peer-led classroom was perceived as relaxed and non-threatening, allowing students to participate without fear of being judged.

Chloe explained that learning from classmates encouraged her to speak even when her grammar was imperfect.

Rather than viewing grammar activities as evaluative, students experienced them as collaborative and supportive. The reduced authority distance helped create emotional comfort and encouraged participation.

This statement illustrates a lowering of the affective filter in peer-led sessions, as proposed in Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. When learners experience reduced anxiety, often due to diminished authority distance and increased relational closeness, they become more receptive to input and more willing to speak. This aligns with research indicating that peer interaction fosters a sense of "social comfort," which plays a crucial role in alleviating language anxiety (Zarrinabadi & Rezazadeh, 2020).

In relation to RQ1 (students' perceptions of peer teaching in learning English for ESP), this finding shows that students perceive peer teaching as emotionally supportive and less intimidating. In relation to RQ2 (the influence of peer teaching on grammar learning in ESP), reduced anxiety enabled students to engage more actively with grammar during speaking activities.

Chloe's experience also reflects key aspects of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as conceptualized by Horwitz et al. (1986), particularly the fear of negative evaluation. In peer-teaching contexts, such evaluative pressure is diffused because feedback and correction come from fellow learners rather than an expert figure, making the environment feel less threatening. This reduced fear enhances participation and encourages more authentic communication. Similar findings have been reported in recent studies, which show that peer-mediated instruction can significantly lower speaking anxiety levels in EFL learners (Sari, 2022; Baralt, 2023), further supporting the effectiveness of peer-led grammar activities in creating an emotionally supportive learning space.

Increased Self-Efficacy and Confidence to Speak

Participants also reported noticeable improvements in their self-efficacy, particularly in their belief in their ability to produce spoken language during grammar-focused activities. Many described feeling more confident using English when explanations, examples, and encouragement came from classmates who shared similar proficiency levels. Peer explanations were perceived as more relatable and less intimidating, which helped them attempt speaking tasks they might normally avoid in lecturer-led settings. This sense of being "on the same level" reduced the psychological barriers associated with making mistakes and increased their willingness to try. As Alyssa explained:

“When my friends explained grammar, I understood faster because they used simple examples. That made me feel like ‘Oh, I can actually do this.’ So, after that I was more confident to speak or answer questions. I didn’t feel stupid anymore.”

12 Alyssa’s narrative illustrates how mastery experiences—identified by Bandura (1997) as one of the strongest sources of self-efficacy—were supported through peer-mediated explanations that felt more accessible and less intimidating than traditional teacher-led instruction. These peer-generated scaffolds allowed her to experience small but meaningful successes in producing language, thereby reinforcing her belief in her own capability.

This observation aligns with the findings of Gotch and French (2020), who emphasize that peer instruction enhances learners’ perceived competence by presenting input in a relatable and cognitively manageable form. Alyssa’s account also resonates with Teng (2021), who noted that scaffolding provided by classmates not only enriches cognitive processing but also strengthens learners’ emotional readiness to speak, contributing to a higher willingness to engage in oral tasks. Thus, peer teaching supports both the cognitive construction of grammatical knowledge and the emotional empowerment of learners—an essential combination for improving oral performance in ESP contexts.

Addressing RQ1, students perceive peer teaching as confidence-building and empowering in learning English for ESP. Addressing RQ2, peer teaching influences grammar learning by making grammatical concepts easier to understand and apply in spoken ESP contexts.

Enhanced Willingness to Communicate through Non-Threatening Interaction

The participants also described a noticeable increase in their willingness to communicate, an essential component of successful EFL speaking development. Many of them reported that peer-led activities made them more inclined to initiate conversation, ask questions, and volunteer answers during grammar tasks. This increased readiness to speak stemmed from the supportive atmosphere created when working with classmates of similar proficiency levels. Students felt that mistakes were more acceptable, interactions were less hierarchical, and communication felt more natural and collaborative. These conditions reduced the psychological barriers that typically inhibit learners from speaking in English, especially in formal classroom settings. As Andrew shared:

“Usually, I am quiet in grammar class because I’m afraid of being wrong, but in peer teaching I talked more. I asked questions and even gave examples. I felt like it was okay to make mistakes because we were learning together.”

6

Andrew's words demonstrate a clear shift from passive engagement to active participation in classroom communication. This transformation is closely tied to the reduced fear of negative evaluation, a factor highlighted by Gregersen (2020) as one of the major psychological barriers to speaking. When learners feel less scrutinized, they are more willing to take communicative risks—an essential condition for developing Willingness to Communicate (WTC) as described by MacIntyre et al. (2022).

Peer teaching appears to create precisely this type of low-pressure environment, where students perceive interactions as collaborative rather than evaluative. As a result, communicative load becomes more manageable, and learners feel safer contributing, even when unsure of their answers. This observation mirrors the findings of Cao (2020), who emphasizes that non-threatening peer interaction enhances emotional security, thereby increasing WTC.

With regard to RQ1, students perceive peer teaching as interactionally supportive in learning English for ESP. With regard to RQ2, this supportive interaction increases opportunities to practice and use grammar through spoken communication.

Peer-Mediated Grammar Learning Supports Clarity and Practical Understanding

Unlike lecturer-led explanations, which some learners described as fast-paced or overly technical, peer explanations were perceived as more accessible and aligned with their current level of understanding. This relatability helped reduce cognitive overload and allowed students to process grammar structures more effectively. Several participants stated that they could finally “see” how grammar worked in real communicative contexts after hearing peers break it down in manageable terms. As Brandon explained:

“Grammar felt easier in peer teaching because my friends used examples from our daily life, not complicated sentences. That helped me understand how the rule works, especially simple present and simple past. I realized grammar is not that scary if explained clearly.”

Peer instruction was perceived as more accessible and aligned with students' learning pace. This finding highlights the effectiveness of peer scaffolding, a process grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, in which learners support one another through shared linguistic, cognitive, and cultural resources. Because peers often experience similar learning challenges, they can explain concepts in ways that resonate more directly with fellow students—sometimes addressing gaps or misunderstandings that teachers may inadvertently overlook (Topping, 2020).

1

Peer-led clarification also allows learners to ask questions more freely, negotiate meaning collaboratively, and revisit difficult points without the pressure often associated with teacher-led discourse. This dynamic is supported by Chen and Liu's (2023) recent findings, which indicate that peer-mediated grammar instruction enhances comprehension by creating more equitable interaction patterns and reducing teacher dominance in classroom talk.

The reflections expressed in Iqbal's narrative further affirm that grammar learning becomes more meaningful, contextualized, and less intimidating when delivered by peers, ultimately fostering deeper understanding and a more supportive learning atmosphere.

This finding directly answers RQ2 by showing how peer teaching influences grammar learning in ESP through clearer, more practical explanations. It also informs RQ1 by reflecting students' positive perceptions of peer teaching as an effective learning approach.

Peer Teaching Encourages Reflection and Ownership of Learning

Several participants also reported that peer teaching encouraged them to become more reflective learners. They described how preparing explanations, listening to peers, and comparing their own understanding with others prompted deeper metacognitive engagement. Through these interactions, students became more aware of how they learned grammar, which strategies worked for them, and which areas still required improvement.

This reflective process was often triggered by observing classmates' reasoning, noticing different approaches to solving grammar problems, and evaluating the clarity of peer-delivered explanations. Such moments pushed learners to think more critically about their own knowledge and to reassess how they applied grammar in speaking tasks. As Christopher expressed:

“When I became the peer teacher I learned a lot more. I had to prepare the material and practice explaining it. It made me realize what I really understand and what I still need to study. Teaching others made my grammar stronger.”

Peer teaching positioned students as active participants in the learning process. This observation is consistent with research on learning-by-teaching, which has been shown to enhance long-term retention and promote deeper cognitive processing of material (Fiorella & Mayer, 2021). When learners take on a teaching role, they engage in higher levels of metacognitive activity, such as evaluating their own understanding, identifying gaps in their knowledge, and monitoring the clarity of their explanations.

This process encourages students to move beyond passive reception toward active reconstruction of grammatical concepts.

Peer teaching, therefore, does more than facilitate cooperative learning—it cultivates learner autonomy by prompting students to assume responsibility for both their own comprehension and the support of their peers. This finding resonates with Muranoi’s (2023) work, which emphasizes that peer-led instructional activities foster a stronger sense of ownership and agency in language learning.

Christopher’s reflection illustrates that peer teaching operates not merely as a classroom technique but as a transformative learning experience, one that consolidates grammar competence through the cognitive demands of teaching preparation and delivery.

In relation to RQ1, students perceive peer teaching as meaningful and empowering in learning English for ESP. In relation to RQ2, peer teaching influences grammar learning by promoting reflection, deeper understanding, and learner autonomy.

Peer Support Builds Communal Motivation and Collective Efficacy

The final theme emerging from the data concerns the role of social motivation and camaraderie in shaping students’ learning experiences. Many participants described peer teaching as socially engaging, noting that working with classmates fostered a sense of closeness, mutual support, and shared responsibility. This positive social climate contributed to stronger motivation, as students felt encouraged by their peers’ presence and more comfortable participating in collaborative tasks.

Several learners mentioned that the friendly atmosphere reduced the tension often associated with grammar learning and made the class feel more interactive and enjoyable. These social dynamics not only enhanced participation but also strengthened group cohesion, which participants perceived as an important factor in maintaining engagement during challenging grammar activities. As Brianna noted:

“I felt motivated because we were helping each other. When someone didn’t understand, we tried to explain together. It felt like teamwork, not individual competition. That motivated me to do better.”

The supportive group atmosphere sustained engagement with challenging grammar content. This theme reflects the concept of collective efficacy, defined by Bandura (2000) as the shared belief among group members that they can successfully accomplish learning tasks.

Within peer-teaching sessions, students experienced a sense of collective purpose—supporting one another, celebrating small successes, and collaboratively overcoming grammatical difficulties. This shared commitment aligns with findings by Derakhshan

et al. (2023), who report that collaborative learning structures significantly enhance emotional engagement and sustain learners' motivation in EFL contexts.

Moreover, the social support generated through these peer interactions contributes to greater emotional resilience, helping students cope with anxiety or frustration during complex tasks. This perspective is echoed in the work of Resnik and Dewaele (2021), who highlight how positive peer relationships create an emotionally sustainable learning environment. Thus, peer teaching not only facilitates academic understanding but also nurtures a socially cohesive atmosphere that strengthens learners' motivation, persistence, and overall well-being.

Addressing RQ1, students perceive peer teaching as socially motivating in learning English for ESP. Addressing RQ2, increased motivation supports sustained engagement with grammar learning tasks in ESP contexts.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that peer teaching functions as a multi-dimensional support system that simultaneously addresses learners' emotional, cognitive, and social needs. It effectively reduces foreign language anxiety by lowering perceived authority and promoting a more relaxed learning atmosphere. At the same time, it enhances students' self-efficacy by providing attainable mastery experiences through peer led explanations and collaborative problem-solving. The increase in learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) further demonstrates how peer interaction fosters a safer communicative space, where students feel encouraged to speak and take risks. Peer teaching also simplifies grammar learning by transforming complex concepts into relatable, student-friendly explanations, making grammar more meaningful and approachable. Additionally, the reflective demands of teaching peers stimulate metacognitive awareness, prompting learners to monitor their understanding and take greater ownership of their learning. The strong sense of camaraderie and collective motivation observed among participants indicates that peer teaching supports not only individual development but also group cohesion and shared responsibility.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the argument that peer instruction is a highly effective pedagogical strategy for grammar-focused speaking classes (Topping, 2020; Baralt, 2023), particularly in Indonesian EFL contexts where students frequently fear making mistakes or speaking in front of authority figures. Peer teaching aligns closely with key affective and sociocognitive frameworks—including Krashen's affective filter, Bandura's self-efficacy theory, and MacIntyre's WTC model—demonstrating its capacity to deliver emotional safety, cognitive clarity, and social connectedness. Compared to traditional teacher-fronted grammar instruction, peer teaching offers a more holistic learning environment that nurtures confidence, participation, and meaningful engagement with the target language.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that peer teaching in a grammar-focused speaking class provides significant affective and cognitive benefits for learners. This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of peer teaching in learning English for ESP, particularly in a grammar-focused speaking course. Overall, students perceived peer teaching positively, viewing it as a supportive, non-threatening, and engaging approach that facilitated both linguistic understanding and affective comfort in ESP learning contexts. The findings indicate that peer teaching reduced speaking anxiety by creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere where students felt less fear of negative evaluation. It also enhanced self-efficacy and confidence, as peer explanations were perceived as clearer, more relatable, and cognitively accessible. In addition, students' willingness to communicate increased, with learners becoming more active in asking questions, sharing ideas, and participating in discussions. Peer-led instruction further supported practical grammar understanding, helping students apply grammatical knowledge more confidently in speaking tasks. Finally, peer teaching encouraged learner reflection, autonomy, and collective motivation, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collaborative learning. These findings carry several important implications. For teachers, peer teaching can be strategically integrated as a complement to lecturer-led instruction, particularly in grammar-focused ESP classes where anxiety is common. Teachers should provide clear guidelines, scaffolding, and ongoing monitoring to ensure accuracy and coherence. For students, peer teaching promotes active learning, confidence, and ownership of learning, positioning them not only as learners but also as contributors to others' understanding. At the institutional and curricular level, ESP programs and curriculum designers are encouraged to incorporate structured peer-assisted learning activities and provide training that equips students with basic pedagogical skills to maximize learning outcomes. Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The small sample size, single-institution context, and qualitative focus limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could involve larger and more diverse participant groups, compare peer teaching with other collaborative learning strategies, or adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine its long-term effects across different ESP disciplines and proficiency levels. Such investigations would further strengthen the understanding of how peer teaching can be optimally implemented in ESP education.

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