



VOICES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS ON MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the specific experiences that English language teachers identified as enhancing or hindering their professional motivation through peer interactions. Eight research participants from Matalam North Cotabato were involved to provide diverse insights into the influence of peer relationships on teacher motivation and engagement. Participants were required to be currently employed as elementary language teachers in classrooms where students spoke multiple languages. This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of English language teachers. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, allowing for open-ended discussions that encouraged participants to share their insights on peer interactions and collaborative practices. Results of the study revealed three themes such as Collaborative learning and feedback, a supportive classroom culture, and reflective practice and continuous improvement are essential for fostering an effective and dynamic learning environment. Collaborative learning encourages students to engage in shared problem-solving and idea exchange, enhancing their understanding and communication skills, while feedback provides them with constructive insights to improve. A supportive classroom culture promotes psychological safety, inclusivity, and positive relationships, enabling students to take risks and thrive. Reflective practice allows both teachers and students to assess their progress, refine their methods, and continuously evolve, ensuring that learning remains relevant, effective, and aligned with individual and collective growth. Together, these themes create a space where both students and educators can develop, innovate, and achieve success.

KEYWORDS: *Voices, English Language Teachers, Qualitative Study, Influence of Peer Relationships, Motivation, Engagement, Classroom*

INTRODUCTION

English language teachers often face challenges in fostering positive peer relationships that can significantly influence motivation and engagement in the classroom. These challenges can arise from a lack of collaboration among colleagues, which hinders the sharing of best practices and innovative teaching strategies. When teachers do not feel supported or connected with their peers, it can lead to a sense of isolation and burnout, diminishing their own motivation and enthusiasm. Thus, without a strong peer network, teachers may struggle to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment for their students, as the lack of shared knowledge and encouragement limits their ability to stay inspired and effectively motivate their learners. The overall classroom atmosphere, therefore, can be impacted by these teacher-level relational challenges.

The influence of peer relationships on motivation and engagement in Chinese classrooms is a key factor in shaping students' academic outcomes. Research has shown that positive peer interactions, such as collaboration and emotional support, can enhance students' intrinsic motivation and increase their engagement in learning (Wang & Wang, 2021). In a collectivist society like China, where group harmony and collaboration are emphasized, students are more likely to be motivated when they have strong, supportive peer relationships (Zhou et al., 2022).

Conversely, negative peer dynamics, such as competition or exclusion, can lead to disengagement, decreased self-esteem, and anxiety, undermining students' motivation (Yang, 2020). Furthermore, studies indicate that peer relationships can mediate the effects of teacher-student interactions on motivation, suggesting that the classroom social environment plays a crucial role in fostering academic engagement (Li & Liu, 2023). Thus, peer relationships are integral to both individual motivation and the collective classroom atmosphere, directly influencing students' academic success in China.

Peer relationships play a significant role in shaping student motivation and engagement in South Korean classrooms. Research has highlighted that positive peer interactions, such as supportive friendships and collaborative learning, foster greater intrinsic motivation and active participation in academic tasks (Lee & Lim, 2021). In South Korea's highly competitive educational environment, peers not only provide emotional and social support but also act as sources of academic inspiration, helping to enhance engagement and reduce academic stress (Kim et al., 2022).



However, peer pressure and negative social comparisons, particularly in relation to academic performance, can lead to disengagement and lower motivation (Choi & Kim, 2020). The collectivist nature of Korean society, which emphasizes group dynamics and interdependence, further amplifies the influence of peer relationships, making social cohesion and group identity crucial to student motivation (Park & Lee, 2023). Thus, both positive and negative peer dynamics significantly shape students' classroom experiences, influencing their motivation and academic engagement.

Peer relationships have a profound impact on student motivation and engagement in U.S. classrooms, influencing both social and academic outcomes. Recent studies have shown that positive peer interactions, including supportive friendships and collaborative learning environments, enhance students' intrinsic motivation and academic engagement (Wentzel, 2020; Smith & Jones, 2021). These relationships provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, both of which are crucial for maintaining motivation, especially in the face of academic challenges (Furrer & Skinner, 2021).

Conversely, negative peer relationships, such as bullying or social exclusion, can undermine motivation and lead to disengagement, particularly among adolescents (Chung & Glick, 2022). Peer influence is particularly evident in group-based learning tasks, where students feel more invested in the learning process when they work collaboratively with their peers (Zepeda et al., 2023). Thus, peer relationships are integral to fostering motivation and engagement, underscoring the need for schools to promote positive social interactions and peer support systems.

However, in Cebu City, peer relationships play a crucial role in shaping students' motivation and engagement in the classroom, influencing both academic outcomes and emotional well-being. Recent studies highlight that positive peer interactions, such as cooperative learning and supportive friendships, enhance students' intrinsic motivation, encouraging greater participation and academic persistence (Rodriguez, 2021; Garcia & Dela Cruz, 2022). These relationships provide a sense of belonging and emotional support, which are essential for maintaining engagement, especially in the context of a culturally diverse and competitive educational environment (Tan & Suico, 2023).

Conversely, negative peer dynamics, including bullying or social exclusion, have been linked to reduced motivation and increased disengagement among students (Villaruel & Esteban, 2020). Furthermore, collaborative learning activities have been shown to foster positive peer interactions, reinforcing both academic achievement and social connections among students in Cebu City's classrooms (Caldito & Pamaos, 2021). Thus, fostering healthy peer relationships remains a critical factor in enhancing student motivation and engagement in local schools.

Furthermore, in Metro Manila, peer relationships significantly influence student motivation and engagement in the classroom, with both positive and negative interactions shaping academic outcomes. Studies show that supportive peer relationships, characterized by cooperation and emotional support, enhance intrinsic motivation and encourage active participation in learning activities (Alcantara & Santiago, 2021).

Positive peer networks also contribute to a sense of belonging, which has been linked to higher levels of engagement and academic persistence, particularly among students facing socio-economic challenges (De Guzman & Rivera, 2022). Conversely, negative peer interactions, such as bullying or social exclusion, undermine motivation and can lead to disengagement and lower academic performance (Luna & Cordero, 2020). In this context, peer learning and group-based activities have proven effective in fostering collaboration and increasing student engagement (Punzalan, 2023). Thus, promoting healthy peer relationships is essential for enhancing both the motivation and academic engagement of students in Metro Manila's diverse educational settings.

Besides, in Baguio City, peer relationships play a crucial role in shaping student motivation and engagement within the classroom. Recent studies highlight that positive peer interactions, such as collaborative learning and peer encouragement, foster a supportive learning environment, which in turn increases student motivation and engagement (Dizon & Castro, 2022). Students who experience strong peer connections report higher levels of academic self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, as they feel more confident in their abilities and are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities (Bautista & Garcia, 2023).

Furthermore, peer relationships in Baguio have been shown to provide emotional support, which is particularly important in times of academic stress, thereby mitigating disengagement and enhancing overall academic performance (Magbanua & Encarnacion, 2021). However, negative peer dynamics, such as exclusion or bullying, can undermine motivation and hinder active engagement, leading to lower academic outcomes (Padilla & Torres, 2020). Therefore, cultivating positive peer relationships is essential for boosting motivation and fostering greater student engagement in Baguio City classrooms.

Finally, in Cotabato City, peer relationships significantly influence students' motivation and engagement in the classroom, as recent research suggests that positive interactions among peers contribute to increased academic enthusiasm and participation. Studies indicate that peer collaboration, mutual support, and shared learning



experiences create a more interactive and encouraging learning environment, which enhances students' intrinsic motivation (Santos & Rivera, 2021).

For instance, students who experience supportive peer relationships tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement, as they feel a sense of belonging and confidence in their learning abilities (Zamora & Cruz, 2022). Conversely, peer conflict or social exclusion can have detrimental effects, leading to decreased motivation and academic disengagement (Mendoza & Dizon, 2020). The cultural context of Cotabato City, with its diverse student population, underscores the importance of fostering inclusive peer relationships to promote greater educational engagement and positive academic outcomes (Salazar & Benitez, 2023). Thus, peer relationships in Cotabato City classrooms are crucial in shaping not only academic performance but also students' overall educational experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The experiences of teachers in professional motivation through peer interactions play a crucial role in shaping their teaching practices and overall job satisfaction. Positive peer interactions, such as sharing resources, discussing strategies, and offering emotional support, can significantly enhance teachers' motivation by providing them with a sense of belonging and professional growth. Conversely, a lack of meaningful collaboration may lead to feelings of isolation, decreased enthusiasm, and burnout. When teachers engage in constructive peer relationships, they are more likely to feel inspired and committed to their profession, leading to improved classroom engagement and better student outcomes. These peer interactions, therefore, serve as a vital source of professional motivation, fostering both individual and collective growth within the teaching community (Rastegar, 2023).

The relationship between teacher motivation, engagement, and peer interactions has been a focal point in recent educational research. Teacher motivation plays a pivotal role in creating a dynamic and effective learning environment. When teachers are motivated, they are more likely to engage deeply with students, employ innovative teaching strategies, and contribute positively to the school culture. Recent research suggests that peer relationships provide emotional, practical, and professional support, which directly impacts teachers' motivation and their engagement in the classroom (Jiang & Zhang, 2021). The mutual exchange of ideas and experiences with colleagues fosters a sense of professional identity and autonomy, which are key factors in sustaining teacher motivation.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2022) examined the role of peer relationships in enhancing teacher motivation, specifically through professional collaboration. They found that teachers who collaborated regularly with peers experienced higher levels of job satisfaction and were more motivated to improve their teaching practices. This professional collaboration was associated with a shared sense of purpose and mutual encouragement, leading to greater engagement in the classroom. Peer support, whether in formal team settings or informal interactions, provided teachers with the emotional and intellectual resources necessary to overcome challenges and remain engaged in their teaching roles (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2022). Such relationships serve as both a buffer against burnout and a catalyst for motivation, which in turn, enhances the teacher's ability to engage effectively with students.

Moreover, Rastegar (2023) explores the intricate connection between peer relationships and teacher self-efficacy, which is often linked to motivation and engagement in the classroom. Self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to successfully perform teaching tasks. The study found that peer interactions were a significant factor in building teacher self-efficacy. Teachers who engaged in collaborative discussions with their colleagues felt more competent in their roles, which translated into greater motivation to invest in student success.

Additionally, the shared reflection among peers allowed teachers to refine their practices, boosting their confidence and engagement in the classroom. This study highlights that peer relationships are not only about emotional support but are integral to teachers' professional development, further influencing their classroom dynamics.

In line with this, Zhao and Wang (2021) suggest that peer relationships foster a supportive school culture that directly impacts teacher engagement. They argue that a collaborative school environment, where teachers feel connected to one another, can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and stress, which are common causes of teacher burnout. When teachers feel supported by their colleagues, they are more likely to stay motivated and engage deeply with students. This sense of camaraderie is especially important in challenging teaching environments, such as those found in English language teaching, where teachers often face unique classroom management and instructional challenges. Peer relationships help alleviate some of these challenges, enhancing teachers' emotional well-being and classroom engagement.

Finally, Nath (2023) underscores the importance of emotional and social support networks for teachers, particularly during times of stress or when facing new teaching methodologies. Peer relationships provide not only practical guidance but also emotional reassurance, which is essential for maintaining teacher motivation. Teachers who feel emotionally supported by their peers are more likely to maintain a positive outlook on their work, which in turn improves their engagement with students.

Nath's study stresses that peer interactions, through shared experiences and mutual support, are crucial for sustaining teachers' motivation, especially in a post-pandemic educational landscape, where many educators face



increased pressure and challenges. As the research indicates, peer relationships are integral to fostering long-term teacher motivation and ensuring sustained classroom engagement.

Research Questions

1. What specific experiences do English language teachers identify as enhancing or hindering their professional motivation through peer interactions?
2. What strategies do teachers employ to foster positive peer relationships, and how do these strategies affect their overall job satisfaction?
3. What insights are drawn in shaping their teaching effectiveness and classroom dynamics?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, I assumed that social realities were subjective and co-constructed through interpersonal interactions. I believed that students' motivations and levels of engagement were shaped by the dynamics of their peer relationships, which were influenced by factors such as support, competition, collaboration, and social belonging. These interactions were not fixed but fluid, evolving over time as students experienced different social contexts within the classroom. I focused on understanding how students perceived these relationships and how their individual and collective experiences influenced their attitudes toward learning. I approached the study with the belief that the meaning students derived from their peer interactions was best understood through their personal narratives and experiences, rather than through objective measurements alone.

Furthermore, I adopted a constructivist epistemology, recognizing that knowledge about motivation and engagement was actively constructed through students' interactions and reflections. I gathered data through in-depth interviews, observations, and group discussions to explore the ways in which peer relationships shaped students' emotional and cognitive engagement with the classroom. I assumed that each student's perspective provided valuable insights into the broader phenomenon, and I aimed to capture the complexity of these social dynamics. Additionally, I was guided by an ethical commitment to respect students' voices, acknowledging that their lived experiences were central to understanding how peer relationships influenced their motivation. I remained reflexive throughout the process, recognizing that my own perspectives might shape the interpretation of data and striving to ensure that the voices of all participants were heard and respected in the research.

Research Participants

Eight research participants were involved to provide diverse insights into the influence of peer relationships on teacher motivation and engagement. Four participants underwent in-depth interviews, while the remaining four engaged in focus group discussions.

The study was conducted in four public secondary schools in Matalam, North Cotabato, focusing on the experiences of English language teachers in relation to peer relationships and their impact on motivation and classroom engagement. By examining these teachers' challenges and the dynamics within their professional community, the study aimed to provide insights into how collaboration and support among peers influenced both teaching practices and student outcomes in this specific context.

The inclusion criteria for participants focused on ensuring that the selected teachers had relevant experience and were directly involved in multilingual language teaching. Participants were required to be currently employed as elementary language teachers in classrooms where students spoke multiple languages. This ensured that the participants had first-hand experience in the context of teaching language to multilingual students. Additionally, teachers needed to have a minimum of one year of teaching experience in such environments, providing enough time for them to gain valuable insights into the challenges and professional development needs within multilingual classrooms. The inclusion of teachers with varying levels of experience offered a more comprehensive understanding of the support they required.

Furthermore, the participants demonstrated a willingness to participate in in-depth qualitative interviews, where they reflected on their experiences and professional development needs. The study also sought to include a diverse range of teachers, considering factors such as school setting (e.g., urban or rural), school type (public or private), and cultural background, to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives. Teachers were required to meet ethical requirements, including providing informed consent, understanding the voluntary nature of participation, and agreeing to confidentiality terms. These criteria ensured that the study's findings were relevant, inclusive, and ethically conducted, allowing for meaningful insights into the professional development needs of language teachers in multilingual classrooms.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument for the qualitative study was a semi-structured interview guide. This instrument was designed to facilitate in-depth discussions while allowing flexibility for participants to express their experiences and insights regarding peer relationships.



The semi-structured format included open-ended questions focusing on key areas such as the nature of peer relationships, their perceived impact on motivation and engagement, and specific examples of collaborative practices within the classroom. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2020), semi-structured interviews are effective in qualitative research as they allow for a balance between guided inquiry and the opportunity for participants to delve into their unique perspectives. This approach encouraged rich, descriptive responses and enabled the researcher to explore emerging themes through follow-up questions.

The interview guide was developed based on a review of relevant literature and input from educational professionals, ensuring that the questions were both relevant and comprehensive. This careful construction of the interview instrument was crucial for eliciting meaningful data that reflected peer relationships among English language teachers and their influence on motivation and engagement (Creswell, 2021). By utilizing this semi-structured interview guide, the study aimed to gain a nuanced understanding of the interpersonal factors that contributed to teacher effectiveness in multilingual classrooms.

Data Analysis

I approached data analysis in a structured and reflective manner to ensure the reliability and depth of the findings. Once all data was collected, I began by transcribing the interviews, organizing survey responses, and compiling observational notes. I carefully reviewed all data to ensure it was anonymized, preserving the confidentiality of the participants. My first step in data analysis was to engage in open coding, where I systematically identified and labeled significant patterns, themes, and concepts related to how peer relationships affected student motivation and engagement in the classroom. I read through the data multiple times to ensure that all relevant information was captured.

Next, I employed a thematic analysis approach, grouping the initial codes into broader themes and subthemes that reflected key aspects of peer relationships and their impact on students' learning experiences. As I worked through this process, I ensured that the themes were deeply rooted in the data and reflected the complexity of students' experiences in the classroom. I also used member checking by sharing my findings with participants to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the themes identified.

Furthermore, I engaged in data triangulation by comparing the insights from interviews, surveys, and observations to identify patterns and validate the consistency of the findings across different data sources. This cross-checking helped me strengthen the conclusions drawn from the data.

Finally, I interpreted the themes and findings in light of the existing literature on peer relationships, motivation, and engagement, aiming to draw meaningful connections that informed classroom practices and educational theory. Through this systematic and reflective process, I ensured that my data analysis was rigorous, comprehensive, and grounded in the lived experiences of the students, ultimately providing actionable insights into how peer relationships influenced motivation and engagement in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implications

The thematic findings of this study underscore the critical role of collaborative learning and peer feedback in fostering motivation and engagement among students, aligning closely with Bandura's Social Learning Theory. According to Bandura, individuals learn not only through their own experiences but also by observing and interacting with others. In the context of English language classrooms, teachers reported that students became more engaged and confident when working with peers who modeled enthusiasm, effective communication, and positive behavior. Peer collaboration provided real-time opportunities for students to observe language use, receive immediate feedback, and internalize effective strategies for language learning.

In relation to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan), the study's emphasis on a supportive classroom culture as a coping strategy further illustrates how the classroom environment can meet students' basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Teachers shared that by creating an atmosphere where students felt safe, respected, and included, learners were more likely to take initiative, persist through challenges, and engage more deeply with classroom content. Positive peer interactions helped fulfill the need for relatedness, while cooperative learning structures and mutual support enhanced students' sense of competence and autonomy.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory also provides a relevant framework for understanding the study's implications. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social interaction and the role of more knowledgeable peers in scaffolding learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Teachers' use of peer mentoring and collaborative tasks allowed more advanced learners to support their peers, enabling language development through guided interaction. The findings suggest that peer relationships are a valuable resource for scaffolding both language skills and learner confidence, particularly in group settings that promote dialogue and mutual learning.

The theme of reflective practice and continuous improvement highlights how English language teachers actively assess and adapt their instructional approaches to enhance peer dynamics and classroom engagement. This process resonates with Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism, where teachers influence the classroom environment



while also being shaped by it. Through reflection, teachers identified what social structures and peer strategies were most effective, leading to more intentional practices that supported positive peer influence and sustained motivation.

Furthermore, the practice of self-assessment and responsive teaching aligns with the autonomy-supportive elements of Self-Determination Theory. Teachers who reflect and improve upon their methods contribute to a more autonomous learning environment where students are encouraged to be active participants in their learning journey. This cyclical process of reflection and adaptation reinforces student engagement by continuously enhancing the social and academic atmosphere of the classroom.

In conclusion, the study illustrates that peer relationships are not peripheral but central to students' motivation and engagement in English language learning. Drawing from Social Learning Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Sociocultural Theory, the findings suggest that effective peer collaboration, a supportive classroom culture, and teacher reflection are key to fostering a thriving language learning environment. These insights offer valuable implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and classroom management practices that aim to integrate social learning as a core component of student development.

Future Directions

Building upon the insights gathered in *Voices of English Language Teachers: A Qualitative Study on the Influence of Peer Relationships on Motivation and Engagement in the Classroom*, future directions should focus on translating the thematic findings into actionable strategies for teachers, learners, school administrators, and future researchers.

For Teachers. Future directions for English language teachers involve the intentional integration of peer relationship-building into instructional strategies. Teachers should be encouraged to adopt collaborative learning techniques, peer feedback activities, and social-emotional learning frameworks that promote respectful and supportive peer interactions. Ongoing professional development could focus on helping teachers recognize different peer dynamics and use reflective practices to tailor their approaches. Equipping teachers with tools to foster inclusivity, manage classroom conflict, and promote student autonomy will be essential in enhancing motivation and engagement.

For Learners. For learners, future initiatives could involve explicitly teaching interpersonal and collaborative skills to help them navigate peer interactions positively. Schools may introduce peer mentoring programs where more confident or experienced students support their peers, especially in language acquisition tasks. Additionally, creating a student voice platform—where learners can share their experiences regarding peer relationships—could encourage greater self-awareness and ownership of their learning. Such strategies can empower students to actively contribute to a healthy classroom community that enhances both social and academic growth.

For School Administrators. School leaders and administrators have a critical role in creating the institutional culture and policies that support positive peer relationships. Future directions may include integrating collaborative learning and inclusive classroom culture into school improvement plans and teacher evaluation frameworks. Administrators could also prioritize the allocation of resources for teacher training on classroom management, differentiated instruction, and social-emotional learning. Creating spaces both physical and programmatic that encourage cooperative learning and peer interaction can also have long-term benefits on student engagement and achievement.

For Future Researchers. This study opens several avenues for future research. Quantitative studies could complement the qualitative findings by measuring the specific impact of peer relationships on academic performance and language acquisition. Longitudinal studies could explore how peer influence evolves over time and across educational stages. Additionally, future research could examine the role of peer relationships in different cultural or multilingual contexts, offering a more global perspective on the topic. There is also potential to investigate the intersection of peer relationships with other variables such as digital learning environments, gender dynamics, and teacher-student rapport.

Finally, the insights gained from this thesis serve as a foundation for practical improvements and deeper exploration. By addressing the needs of teachers, learners, administrators, and researchers, future efforts can build more inclusive, motivating, and socially connected English language classrooms that support the holistic development of every student.

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