

## Reviewing *Learning a Language with Peers: Elevating Classroom Voices*

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[ **Abstract** ] This paper reviews *Learning a Language with Peers: Elevating Classroom Voices* by Rebecca Adams and Rhonda Oliver. The book, through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations of teachers worldwide, explores peer interaction in language learning. It shows teachers' positive stances on peer interaction, and delves into its application in reading, writing, and tech-related teaching. It also analyzes influencing factors, implementation problems, and teachers' views on research priorities. Although it has limitations like unfocused discussions and organizational flaws, the book offers valuable teachers' perspectives, enriching peer interaction research and practice.

[ **Key words** ] peer interaction; teachers' perspectives; language learning

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In recent decades, SLA researchers have extensively explored the facilitative role and influencing factors of peer interaction in language learning across diverse contexts (Lowen & Sato, 2018; Sato & Ballinger, 2016). Previous monographs or volumes on peer interaction (e.g., McDonough & Mackey, 2013; Philp, Adams & Iwashita, 2013; Adams & Oliver, 2019; García Mayo, 2021) have offered a thorough overview of research findings to teachers, intending to connect current empirical research trends to practical classroom applications. However, this often results in a one-way dialogue between researchers and teaching practitioners. Researchers, conversely, lack insight into teachers' actual practices of peer interaction in classrooms and have limited opportunities to hear their viewpoints. Rebecca Adams and Rhonda Oliver's new book *Learning a Language with Peers: Elevating Classroom Voices* presents a state-of-the-art exploration of peer interaction, drawing upon language teachers' practical experiences and perspectives in various contexts. It contributes to setting forth a research agenda on interaction firmly rooted in the realities of classroom language teaching.

The book is composed of three sections. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 make up the initial section. Chapter 1 explains why the authors wrote the book and the significance of peer interaction in language classrooms. It outlines theoretical approaches driving peer interaction and summarizes research on peer interaction. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the authors' study and each chapter's content.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the dataset used in the book, explaining the data collection process through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The survey reached 262 teachers from 42 different countries, gathering information on their backgrounds, teaching experience, and views on peer interaction. Sixteen teachers participated in interviews, sharing classroom practices and thoughts on peer interaction. Background information of these interviewees is provided as well. Additionally, 386 observation reports were collected from class sessions of 85 teachers, totaling 534 hours of classroom time.

Drawing upon the gathered data, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 which comprise the second section of the book delve into how teachers perceive and use peer interaction in their instructional practices across different contexts.

Chapter 3 first presents quantitative survey results on teachers' use and perception of peer interaction. Over 80% of the respondents use it frequently, with 86% supporting its importance in language teaching. The most selected benefit of peer interaction is fostering positive emotions and a conducive learning environment. Statistical analyses show no impact of teaching experience, background, or context on either teachers' frequency of using peer interaction or their perceptions of benefits in general. Qualitative findings from interviews and the open-ended survey questions reveal additional benefits not extensively discussed in the research literature, such as confidence-

building and fostering classroom community. Some benefits align with the research literature, while other benefits teachers observe in their classroom practice are less explored by researchers, like building confidence, increasing motivation, and developing social cohesion within the classroom. This suggests new directions for peer interaction research.

Chapter 4 analyzes teachers' use of peer interaction in reading and writing instruction, considering factors like educational background, years of experience, and attitudes toward peer interaction. It discusses the benefits and challenges of peer reading, including reported difficulties due to students' preference to read alone or teachers' lack of knowledge in arranging peer interaction activities effectively. Additionally, it examines how teachers employ peer writing activities to enhance linguistic accuracy and writing ability, emphasizing the importance of participants' affective experiences in collaborative writing. The chapter also touches on peer editing and introduces writing to speak which is rarely researched by scholars.

In Chapter 5, the book explores how technology influences teachers' integration of peer interaction in teaching. The data show that the majority of teachers rarely or never use technology in peer interaction activities, with frequency influenced by their perception of its importance. Technology serves various roles in peer work, including providing discussion topics, recording peer work for review, and creating new communication environments. Language teachers may encounter challenges in using technology during peer work, such as limited access to technology, unreliable Internet connection, and even difficulties in organizing technology-based peer interaction activities.

The book's final section (Chapters 6, 7, 8) shifts the focus to teachers' concerns regarding peer interaction and research in this area. Both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 examine the factors that influence the effectiveness of peer interaction in the classroom.

Chapter 6 explores teachers' views on factors that affect their use of peer interaction in class. Drawing from surveys, interviews, and observations, five significant thematic factors emerged, with an analysis of how teachers' backgrounds, education levels, and teaching experience affect these factors. Among the factors, top-down curriculum, class size, and age are considered both positively and negatively. Moreover, sociocultural factors such as students' language learning attitudes, religious background, and psycho-social level of development may also impact collaborative task performance. When it comes to affective factors, students' unfamiliarity with peer work and shyness may reduce motivation, but some teachers believe experience in peer work can enhance enthusiasm. The chapter highlights research gaps in age and emotion. For instance, there has been little research on the comparison between younger and older learners' peer work, and the impact of peer interaction on students' motivation for second language learning.

Different from Chapter 6, Chapter 7 delves into teachers' problems and strategies in planning and executing peer interaction. It starts by examining the common issue of "students' resistance" during peer interaction, stemming from factors like a preference for teacher-led classes, lack of familiarity with peer learning, and concerns about their own and their peers' language proficiency. Teachers address this by explaining the importance of peer interaction and motivating active participation. They also carefully plan to tackle issues like misunderstanding instructions, irrelevant discussions, and overreliance on native language, considering learners' age, interests, proficiency levels, and social relationships. Support is provided through modeling peer tasks, providing language frames, content organizers, and more. During the execution of peer interaction, challenges mainly arise from students' inexperience, prompting teachers to assist in developing effective communication strategies and boosting their own monitoring and intervening skills. This chapter highlights the need for further research on peer interaction, particularly regarding motivation, the influence of learners' proficiency on topic selection, and the effects of group size and social identities on peer work.

Chapter 8 focuses on teachers' perspectives on recent peer interaction research, illuminating their views on research priorities with two identified themes. The first theme is about implementing peer interaction, which includes addressing logistical challenges, language skills improvement, and learning assessment. The second theme

pertains to grouping students effectively for peer interaction based on individual factors like age, gender, and proficiency. Additionally, the chapter outlines six practice-based research agendas covering various aspects of peer interaction.

Certainly, as a much-needed contribution, this book offers an in-depth exploration of teachers' viewpoints and insights into peer interaction, incorporating a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. To authentically convey teachers' voices, direct quotes from them are featured in italics throughout Chapters 3—8.

What's more, the book establishes a meaningful dialogue between peer interaction research and pedagogy. For instance, the research findings serve as a foundation for the survey conducted among teachers. As delineated in Chapter 3, regarding the question "What are the benefits of peer interaction" posed to teachers, the available list of benefits was created based on research literature. Additionally, the authors compare the data gathered from teachers with that from the research literature throughout the book, highlighting both points of convergence and divergence.

Some limitations should be noted.

In Chapter 3, the authors' discussion on peer interaction loses focus when comparing teacher practice knowledge with peer research findings. Initially, the benefits of peer interaction, such as "building confidence" and "increasing motivation and positive emotion" are outlined based on teachers' classroom experiences. However, it then deviates by linking these benefits to theories from other domains like "general learning theory" and "acculturation theory" rather than staying centered on peer interaction. Ultimately, it concludes a notable disparity between the observed benefits of peer interaction in teaching settings and research findings.

In Chapter 5, the authors analyzed peer interaction frequency across various activities, including technology-embedded, reading, writing, and oral communication activities. However, comparing these activities may not be meaningful as they belong to different conceptual dimensions. Reading, writing, and oral communication focus on language skills, while technology use is associated with how people interact. Additionally, the utilization of language skills may involve the use of technology, and the purpose of technology use may be to enhance one or several language skills.

Also, the organization of Chapter 5 needs improvement. For instance, "Peer Games" is segregated as a distinct section, whereas it could be more suitably integrated into the section "Collaborative Technology-mediated Activities". Moreover, there is an overlap between the content of the "Task Creation" within the "Technology for Research and Task Creation" section and that of "Collaborative Technology-mediated Activities". Similarly, in Chapter 7, the two subsections "Student Inexperience with Peer Learning" and "Developing Teaching Strategies" within the "Supporting Peer Interaction" section are not parallel. The former refers to student issues, while the latter relates to the measures that should be adopted by teachers.

Despite its limitations, this volume offers valuable teachers' perspectives that can enrich the exploration of peer interaction by incorporating real classroom experiences. This renders it a valuable resource that would interest a wide audience engaged in either the practice or research of peer interaction.

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