

CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ROOTS OF PEER NON-RESPONSIVENESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Received: 19/6/2025	This research examines the psychological and cultural aspects that affect students' indifference towards or lack of response to their classmates' comments in English as a foreign language classroom in Vietnam. Data were gathered via a qualitative phenomenological approach through semi-structured interviews with five final-year English language students at a college. The investigation revealed three primary categories of factors contributing to the avoidance of peers' input. The first factor is the passive learning habit rooted in cultural roots, shaped by a conventional school environment that prioritizes conformity and the avoidance of disagreement. Psychological impediments, including uneasiness while expressing oneself, fear of adverse judgment, and a deficiency in self-confidence, represent the second category. The third factor is a classroom climate that fails to provide psychological safety. Alongside evaluating the present circumstances, students suggested several enhancements, such as modifying the asking technique, facilitating more adaptable study groups, and fostering a welcoming and open learning environment. The research enhances empirical insights into learning behavior within certain cultural settings and offers a practical foundation for educators to develop more suitable interactive activities in English as a foreign language classroom.
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NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỊNH TÍNH VỀ NGUỒN GỐC TÂM LÝ HỌC CỦA HÀNH VI NÉ TRÁNH PHẢN HỒI BẠN HỌC TRONG LỚP TIẾNG ANH

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 19/6/2025	Nghiên cứu này xem xét các khía cạnh tâm lý và văn hóa ảnh hưởng đến sự thờ ơ hoặc thiếu phản hồi của học sinh đối với các bình luận của bạn cùng lớp trong các lớp học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ tại Việt Nam. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua phương pháp tiếp cận hiện tượng học định tính thông qua các cuộc phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc với năm sinh viên năm cuối chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại một trường cao đẳng. Cuộc điều tra đã chỉ ra ba loại yếu tố chính góp phần vào việc tránh tiếp thu ý kiến của bạn bè. Yếu tố đầu tiên là thói quen học thụ động bắt nguồn từ gốc rễ văn hóa, hình thành từ môi trường học đường thường coi trọng sự tuân thủ và tránh bất đồng quan điểm. Những trở ngại về mặt tâm lý, bao gồm sự lo lắng khi thể hiện bản thân, sợ bị phán xét bất lợi và thiếu tự tin, đại diện cho loại thứ hai. Yếu tố thứ ba là bầu không khí lớp học không mang lại sự an toàn về mặt tâm lý. Bên cạnh việc đánh giá các hoàn cảnh hiện tại, học sinh đã đề xuất một số biện pháp cải thiện, chẳng hạn như thay đổi kỹ thuật đặt câu hỏi, tạo điều kiện cho các nhóm học tập thích nghi hơn và thúc đẩy môi trường lớp học cởi mở và môi trường lớp học mở. Nghiên cứu này tăng cường hiểu biết thực nghiệm về hành vi học tập trong một số bối cảnh văn hóa nhất định và cung cấp nền tảng thực tế để các nhà giáo dục phát triển các hoạt động tương tác phù hợp hơn trong các lớp học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ.
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1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, English plays a key role in education, economics, and international integration. However, the teaching and acquisition of English as a foreign language in many Asian countries, including Vietnam, faces a notable challenge: learners' passivity in group interaction activities, as noted by Johnson [1]. The phenomenon of students not responding or not reacting to their classmates' opinions unless explicitly requested by the teacher is a clear manifestation of this behavior. According to Astuti and Barratt [2], this situation reduces the effectiveness of cooperative learning methods and highlights the difference between contemporary pedagogical theories and the characteristics of school culture in Vietnam, as pointed out by Hofstede [3]. Krashen's [4] theory of language "input" suggests that exposure to the target language through social interaction is crucial to the acquisition process. Many Asian students are often anxious about giving or responding to their peers' opinions, largely due to psychological pressure and the influence of educational traditions that emphasize respect and conflict avoidance, according to Horwitz [5] and Nguyen [6]. Pham's [7] survey found that the majority of students in Hanoi felt uncomfortable criticizing their classmates' opinions for fear of causing offense and did not perceive any clear benefits in engaging with their peers' views. This phenomenon highlights two fundamental problems. First, students show a lack of intrinsic motivation, which hinders their active participation in the learning process, as noted by Deci [8]. Second, teaching methods have not really promoted safe and positive interactions in the classroom environment. Le and Barnard' [9] reported that most educators continue to use a teacher-centered model, while group activities often lack both structure and clear goals. Previous studies have shown that this phenomenon is deeply influenced by three main groups of factors:

The learning culture in Vietnam, which emphasizes respect for hierarchy and avoidance of conflict [2], along with passive learning habits formed from the traditional educational environment [8]. Psychological barriers such as language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of self-confidence [4], as well as a lack of intrinsic motivation due to learners feeling disempowered in the learning process [7]. Challenges in applying cooperative learning due to inflexible activity design, unclear instructions, and an unsafe psychological environment Johnson [1], Long [10], leading to group activities often being more formal than opportunities for real skill development by Van van [11], Canh [12] and Tran [13]. However, most previous studies have focused on quantitative perspectives or assessments from the teacher's side. The focus is on technical factors and teaching competencies, while ignoring the psycho-social aspects from the learner's perspective. The subjective experiences of learners in the context of Vietnam's unique educational culture have not been explored in depth.

This research gap requires a qualitative study using the phenomenological method, using learners' real-life experiences to clarify the root causes of indifference to peer feedback. To fill this gap, this study was conducted to answer three main questions:

1. *What psychological factors affect students' indifference to peer feedback?*
2. *What sociocultural factors influence the emergence of this phenomenon within English classrooms in Vietnam?*
3. *What solutions do learners suggest for enhancing the interactive learning environment?*

The three research questions show that the lack of interest in receiving peer feedback is influenced by many factors, including personal emotions, classroom environment, and the cultural context of Vietnam. The next section will establish a solid foundation for exploring this issue by integrating findings from related studies.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

This research focused on a target group of five final-year English language students from a college in District 7, Ho Chi Minh City. The participants, aged 18 to 24, including two males and

three females, were selected using purposive sampling to guarantee representativeness and the amount of information required for comprehensive qualitative research. Firstly, the selection criteria were rigorously defined, which included specific requirements for initial qualifications. Students were being in their last year and had accumulated a minimum of three years of experience in an English language major, guaranteeing a substantial degree of exposure to specialized academic procedures. Secondly, participants exhibited a range of engagement levels in interactive learning activities, encompassing both active and passive students, which elucidates variations in attitudes and behaviors regarding feedback reception in the classroom. Lastly, all participants volunteered after being thoroughly informed about the research objectives, personal rights, and confidentiality protocols. Concentrating on final-year students not only guarantees cognitive maturity but also yields intricate thoughts and views from persons who have garnered substantial practical experience in studying English within a professional context.

2.2. Data collection instruments

This study used semi-structured interviews with 10 open-ended questions to collect data, aiming to explore students' practical experiences in group work, psychological barriers affecting interaction, the influence of socio-cultural factors on attitudes towards learning English, and suggestions for improving teaching methods from the learners themselves. The interview questions were designed to be open and adaptable, facilitating adjustments based on the conversation's natural progression, thereby encouraging participants to share their personal experiences in depth and with honesty. The interview was conducted in Vietnamese to facilitate participant comfort and expression. The data collection period was conducted over one week, involving five students through individual appointments. Alongside verbal responses, audio recording equipment was utilized, following participant consent, to enhance data accuracy and integrity. Additionally, detailed observation diaries were maintained to document significant non-verbal expressions, thereby enriching the analysis and facilitating the interpretation of underlying factors present in direct speech during the data analysis phase.

2.3. Procedure of data collection

The data collection process was conducted in three primary stages over the course of a week to ensure scientific rigor, reliability, and adherence to ethical standards in qualitative research. Initially, in the pre-interview phase, the study sought permission from the school's language department head to ensure compliance and obtain administrative support. Participants were directly approached with a comprehensive introduction to the study's objectives, content, and benefits. The scheduling of interviews was flexible, with an emphasis on selecting quiet locations to enhance data quality. The subsequent phase involved interviews, each lasting between 30 to 45 minutes, conducted with full consent from the participants and recorded in their entirety. The researcher recorded significant non-verbal expressions, including gestures, eye contact, and hesitation, to enhance the data analysis process. In the post-interview stage, the complete content was transcribed and subsequently returned to the participants for accuracy verification using the member checking method, a widely recognized technique for authenticity validation in qualitative research as outlined by Guba and Lincoln [14]. The process was conducted rigorously, adhering to research ethics standards, particularly the principles of voluntariness, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality of personal information, thus ensuring trustworthiness and ethical integrity throughout the research process.

2.4. Data analysis method

The analysis employed a phenomenological approach, emphasizing the subjective experiences of learners. The analysis process comprised three stages: open coding, axial coding, and the identification of common phenomenological patterns. The author conducted the analysis manually,

employing continuous comparison of responses to identify intersections and differences, rather than utilizing coding software. Furthermore, observation diaries and non-verbal expressions served as supplementary data to elucidate the underlying meanings of the utterances. Participants S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 represent the five individuals who were interviewed.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Results

This study explored how final-year students in Vietnam avoid giving and receiving peer feedback in English classes based on their experiences. The main manifestations include passive attitudes, avoiding dialogue, and negative stereotypes. Three main groups of causes were identified: psychological barriers, cultural factors, and learning environment. Psychological barriers include fear of being judged and the worship of "*knowledge hierarchy*." Cultural factors were expressed through passive learning habits and pressure to conform to groups. The learning environment was identified as having inflexible activity designs and content that is far from reality.

To overcome this, students proposed practical solutions: organizing small group classes with familiar topics, building a safe, non-judgmental space, and applying the "*curiosity-inducing question*" method. These findings demonstrate the complexity of the phenomenon, reflecting the overlap between individual psychological pressures, cultural educational specificities, and limitations in learning environment design.

3.1.1. A phenomenological inquiry into collaborative interaction patterns

This study applied a phenomenological approach to explore and analyze collaborative interaction models in English classrooms through the subjective experiences of five research subjects. The analysis results showed the presence of three main aspects that govern the interaction process: classroom atmosphere, individual behavior, and the impact of emotional factors. Regarding the classroom atmosphere aspect, the data collected from the research subjects reflected the diversity in the interaction state. Student S1 described a clear polarization phenomenon: "*Everyone often listened attentively; some students actively volunteered, while many others did not pay attention and used their phones.*" In contrast, student S2 emphasized discipline and structure when saying, "*Everyone focused on listening and taking notes to prepare the correct answers.*" In particular, S4 pointed out three different emotional states of the classroom: "*excited when students want to answer, quiet when avoiding, and passive when losing focus,*" while S5 mentioned the phenomenon of social bias: "*I pay more attention to my best friend's answers than other members feel anxious when being called on.*" This analysis highlights the heterogeneity in the learning environment, reflecting the diversity of students' motivations and confidence levels, thereby posing the requirement for flexibility in designing collaborative interaction models suitable for different groups of subjects. In addition, the study also showed that individual behavior in the learning environment manifests on a spectrum from active to passive, reflecting three main forms of interaction. The first form is active interaction through reflective learning, as demonstrated by S1's statement, "*Actively listen, give additional feedback,*" and S2's, "*Compare information with personal answers; discuss if there are any discrepancies.*" The second form is passive interaction based on dependence on authority, illustrated by S3's comment, "*Just wait for the teacher to provide the correct answer,*" and S5's, "*Listen passively to avoid heated debate.*" The third form of interaction is supportive interaction, as demonstrated by S4's sharing, "*Positive feedback makes classmates feel more confident.*" It is worth noting that this interaction behavior is strongly influenced by classroom culture and each individual's intrinsic motivation, in which active students often express clear learning goals, whereas passive students are often dominated by fear of making mistakes or lack of confidence. From a theoretical perspective, this result is consistent with previous studies in educational psychology particularly Deci & Ryan's [8] self-determination theory regarding intrinsic motivation, Johnson

& Johnson's [1] findings on cooperative learning structures, and Horwitz [5] research on foreign language classroom anxiety, and also expands the understanding of learning motivation in a multicultural context.

Furthermore, the analysis of the impact of emotional factors on classroom apathy revealed three main factors. The first factor is the "*self-sufficiency*" effect when students stop listening due to a sense of mastery, as in the case of S1: "*When I know the answer, I don't care about your answer,*" and S3: "*Just wait for the teacher to confirm the correct answer.*" The second factor is related to the double standard in evaluating the contributions of classmates, as shown in the statements of S2: "*The answer is not serious; the information is not complete,*" and S4: "*Your answer is off-topic.*" The third factor is the influence of time conditions on the ability to concentrate, as shared by S5: "*The class is almost over; I am tired and do not want to learn.*" These findings highlight that apathy is not simply a result of individual attitudes but is also influenced by interaction quality and environmental conditions. Therefore, the design of group activities should take into account flexibility and attractiveness to maintain learners' active participation throughout the learning process. In summary, through a phenomenological lens, this study has shed light on the complex nature of collaborative interaction models in English classrooms. By analyzing learners' subjective experiences in depth, the study has shown that effective collaborative interaction models need to be designed with consideration of students' diverse learning motivations, self-efficacy, and emotional factors. From a practical application perspective, these findings have important implications for improving teaching methods and designing language learning environments, aiming to optimize learning experiences and promote learners' language abilities in higher education contexts.

3.1.2. Psychosocial barriers to active participation

The phenomenological analysis of psychosocial barriers affecting active participation in foreign language learning environments has revealed three main barriers based on learners' experiences. The first barrier relates to academic self-confidence, in which students often feel anxious and shy when faced with situations where they have to demonstrate their abilities in front of a crowd. Specifically, S1 admitted, "*I feel shy and worried when I am judged as incompetent through the way I ask questions,*" reflecting deep concerns about personal image and professional competence. Similarly, S2 also shared a feeling of lack of confidence when stating, "*Because I feel unconfident and my answers are not informative enough,*" indicating the pressure to meet expectations about the quality of contributions in an academic environment. Notably, S4 described in more detail the negative emotional chain that arose from the lack of background knowledge: "*When I did not master the information of the lesson that day, leading to a lack of knowledge to respond and share information with my classmates, I would have different emotions such as anxiety, shyness, and lack of motivation.*" These experiences not only illustrate the "*fear of negative evaluation,*" a common psychological barrier in foreign language learning, but also highlight the complex relationship between cognitive ability and emotional response.

In addition, the data showed that the second barrier is related to the difference in the way information is received from teachers and classmates, creating a phenomenon of "*knowledge power hierarchy*" in the classroom. In this regard, S1 clarified the distinction in reception: "*For lecturers, listening requires high concentration because it is the core information of the lesson. As for other members of the class, I have to pay attention to how they express themselves and the content they share to gain experience.*" This statement is further reinforced by S3's sharing: "*The difference here is that classmates share information according to their perception and understanding of each lesson, while for lecturers, it is information from the course series,*" showing a higher appreciation for the systematic and comprehensive nature of knowledge from lecturers. Similarly, S4 emphasized the value of information from lecturers: "*Listening to information from lecturers requires high concentration, because not only does it expand*

knowledge but also improves and reinforces my incorrect perspectives." More interestingly, S5 summarized this difference clearly: "Each way of listening has its own uniqueness; for example, listening to the lecturer is to gain new knowledge based on their experiences, and listening to classmates is to listen to their perspectives." Notably, S2 expressed the opposite view when she said, "Because for the teacher or other classmates, I have to try to listen and analyze the content...," reflecting the diversity in learning styles and information processing strategies.

Furthermore, social motivation emerged as a third barrier, strongly influencing the level of student participation in collaborative learning activities. In this regard, S3 showed positive motivation when she saw participation as an opportunity to verify knowledge: "I think this is a way for me to check the information of other members in the class with my prepared answers." In contrast, S5 expressed apathy stemming from a feeling of disrespect: "Because I realized that my friends were not interested in my answers, I did not need to respond or give them feedback." This contrast clearly illustrates the "reciprocity principle in social interaction," a social psychological phenomenon in which the level of individual investment in the interaction process depends on the perception of investment from others. In particular, S5's statement shows that a lack of recognition from the learning community can lead to a negative spiral of apathy and self-isolation, thereby reducing the quality of academic interactions in the classroom.

In summary, the phenomenological analysis of psychosocial barriers has clarified three main barriers affecting students' active participation: academic self-confidence, differences in information reception, and social motivation in interaction. These findings not only enrich our understanding of the psychological factors that influence language learning but also provide a theoretical basis for designing supportive learning environments and developing teaching strategies to overcome these barriers. From a practical perspective, teachers should focus on creating psychologically safe learning spaces, providing opportunities for students to develop self-confidence through structured interactions, and promoting a culture of respect and recognition of each individual's contributions within the learning community.

In summary, three main psychosocial barriers that affect students' active participation include lack of confidence when being publicly evaluated, perceived asymmetry between peer and teacher feedback, and learning motivation affected by recognition from the classroom community. These barriers are not only individual in nature but also deeply reflect the cultural structure of foreign language classrooms in Vietnam.

3.1.3. Socio-cultural drivers of peer non-responsiveness in classroom interaction

The phenomenon of apathy in receiving feedback from peers in the classroom is not only a purely individual behavior but also reflects deep-rooted sociocultural factors in the learning environment in Vietnam. Data from five students show that this apathy stems from systemic and long-term factors, in which passive learning habits play a central role. S1 stated that "Vietnamese students in general have become accustomed to traditional passive learning methods in the past" and "the lack of specific interaction in the classroom is the main reason why students are less interested in class." This view reflects a classroom cultural context where peer interaction is limited, reducing the motivation to receive feedback from friends.

Furthermore, S3 emphasized that "just waiting for the teacher's response" created a passive learning state, which made "feedback from peers seem 'redundant.'" This view is consistent with S1's observation and contributes to the hypothesis that the teacher-centered classroom model is a major sociocultural factor that reduces the role of feedback from other students. S4 added that "long-term habits that have influenced the way students learn in the past" have "gradually become difficult to change," thereby highlighting the inherent and difficult-to-change nature of the current learning model.

On the other hand, contemporary personal and social factors also contribute to shaping this apathy. S2 mentioned "using phones during class for non-study purposes" as an important cause

of disruption to the process of receiving information from peers. At the same time, this student stated that *“not everyone can be confident and courageous enough to provide feedback to others,”* implying a sociocultural barrier in communication and fear of being judged in the school environment. Meanwhile, S5 mentioned the aspect of intrinsic motivation and career orientation when stating that *“those students do not like the subject and that subject is not in their future career orientation”* combined with *“individual self-discipline”* to create apathy. In addition, lack of interest in the lesson content and physical factors were also noted as causes of apathy. S4 stated that *“boredom”* comes not only from *“uninteresting lesson content”* but also from *“poor health, feeling tired... and the influence of games,”* emphasizing the intertwined personal-social factors outside the classroom. Similarly, S2 also used the word *“Boring!”* to describe the dominant feeling of their classmates in the class, a feeling that may be a result of the lesson design not being dynamic enough or not being interactive enough.

Another important aspect is how students evaluate peer feedback. S1 said that feedback that is *“too long or too confident”* can make others feel uncomfortable, while S5 said that sharing *“too much irrelevant information is considered ‘showing off.’”* This reflects a rather sensitive communication culture, where modesty and restraint are highly valued, and any behavior that falls outside of this norm may be considered deviant.

Overall, from the shared data, it can be seen that the indifference to receiving feedback from peers is the result of the intersection of traditional learning culture factors, limitations in teaching models, social pressures in academic communication, and individual learning motivation. These factors need to be taken seriously when designing interactive learning environments in order to enable students to not only listen but also appreciate the role of peer feedback as an essential part of the language learning process.

3.1.4. Learner-initiated educational innovations

In the context of the modern classroom shifting from a traditional teaching model to a learner-centered model, listening to and taking on board suggestions for innovative learning methods from students themselves those who directly experience the learning process is especially necessary. Data collected from five students revealed a number of practical and authentic recommendations, reflecting the urgent need for changes in classroom organization and pedagogical interactions.

First of all, a common point that emerged from the sharing was the desire for teachers to create a friendly, open, non-judgmental learning environment while also focusing on structuring learning activities. S1 suggested that *“teachers can change the way they ask questions, choose topics that are close to students, and divide into small groups to solve problems,”* which shows an interest in personalizing learning content and enhancing group interactions. Furthermore, S1 emphasized that students *“are willing to participate in learning activities if the teacher is comfortable, does not make negative comments, and provides specific guidance.”* This is clear evidence that a safe psychological atmosphere plays a decisive role in learners' active participation.

Similarly, S2 recommended that the lecturer should address *“sensitive issues”* and *“give timely suggestions”* to avoid students *“being confused about finding answers.”* This reflects an expectation of the lecturer's flexible support role and also shows that students expect the discussion issues to be realistic and relevant to life. As S2 shared, *“I am willing to participate in the activities of the lesson when there are specific, interesting, and practical suggestions.”*

Another notable aspect is the desire to respect privacy and avoid feeling controlled, especially expressed by S3: *“I am willing to participate in activities on the condition that no strangers will monitor my activities.”* At the same time, S3 proposed the method of opening up by *“wrong questions that attract attention”* to stimulate learners' participation, showing that they value curiosity and surprise in approaching knowledge. Meanwhile, S4 showed a more reserved attitude, saying that *“I am not willing to participate in the activities of the lesson because I feel uncomfortable and forced.”* However, this student still proposed a specific solution: that the

lecturer should “*check the soundness and attractiveness of the questions*” as a way to increase attraction. This shows that, even in a passive state, students are still capable of reflecting and suggesting improvements to teaching methods if they are asked seriously and respectfully.

Finally, S5 offered a more flexible approach by suggesting that “*depending on each class, lecturers should facilitate group discussions instead of just asking questions.*” However, this student also expressed that he would only participate in activities *if he was compelled to do so, unless he could contribute ideas privately and without pressure.* This emphasizes the need for respect for individual voice and voluntary participation in learning.

According Carless [15], these recommendations are consistent concept of “*feedback literacy*,” which emphasizes that learners need to be equipped with the skills to receive, evaluate, and use feedback from peers, an element that is lacking in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment in Vietnam.

In the process of shifting to a learner-centered education model, pedagogical suggestions from students themselves represent a practical vision for classroom reform. Research data shows that three key solution axes are formed from learners' needs. First, restructuring interactive activities through practical topic discussion groups combined with the use of a system of questions to stimulate creative thinking to replace the traditional question-and-answer format. Second, building a psychologically safe environment requires teachers to apply encouraging rather than judgmental language while respecting privacy and allowing anonymous feedback to minimize social pressure. Third, optimizing academic content by choosing topics that both address pressing social issues and are closely linked to personal career orientation, thereby turning language knowledge into a tool to solve real-life situations. Overall, these recommendations not only reflect learners' critical thinking abilities but also provide a framework for developing reflective thinking abilities in the context of foreign language education in Vietnam.

Practical suggestions from students show that when listened to and respected, learners are able to reflect and come up with highly constructive solutions. This is an important basis for redesigning the learning environment in a learner-centered direction, ensuring emotional, motivational, and cultural factors in the process of organizing interactive activities.

3.2. Discussion

The findings from this study confirm that the phenomenon of students avoiding peer feedback in EFL classes is not simply a result of individual characteristics but rather a result of a systemic socio-cultural and psychological structure. The results are consistent with the argument of Hofstede [3] and Le & Barnard [9] that Vietnamese education is strongly influenced by a culture of power and the traditional teacher-student teaching model, where learners tend to limit their initiative in expressing their views in the learning environment. At the same time, the study also reinforces theoretical arguments in educational psychology, especially the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation by Deci [8], when it indicates that students lack intrinsic motivation to participate in interactive activities, mainly due to a lack of empowerment and a lack of a psychologically safe learning environment. In addition, the phenomenon of lack of “*feedback capacity*” is also clearly shown when students do not know how to handle or evaluate feedback from classmates effectively [15].

Compared to previous studies, the novelty of this study lies in the application of a phenomenological approach to deeply explore the subjective experiences of learners in the EFL context in Vietnam. Not only stopping at listing the causes, the study has shown the connection between feedback avoidance behavior and deep feelings about the learning role, fear, and need for recognition. These are aspects that have not been deeply studied in existing quantitative works in Vietnam. Unlike previous quantitative findings on peer-critique discomfort, this qualitative study provides a more profound understanding of the negative emotional cascade experienced by learners, namely anxiety leading to lack of confidence, which then manifests as

avoidance behavior. In particular, the analysis shows that a perceived lack of recognition emerges as a key barrier to effective peer critique.

In terms of practice, the research results provide empirical data for teachers and curriculum designers to adjust the organization of group activities, questioning methods, and classroom design to increase students' participation in the interactive learning process, one of the important factors contributing to improving the quality of English teaching in the context of higher education in Vietnam.

4. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that peer non-responsiveness in Vietnamese EFL classrooms is not merely a matter of individual student behavior but rather a reflection of deeply rooted cultural and institutional dynamics within the educational environment. Contributing factors include culturally ingrained passive learning habits, fear of peer judgment, and the absence of psychologically safe learning spaces. At the same time, student-generated feedback has offered new perspectives on the desire for recognition, support, and more flexible and learner-centered classroom conditions.

Academically, the study contributes to EFL research in Vietnam through the application of a phenomenological approach, an underutilized method in this context, to deeply examine learners' subjective experiences. Practically, the findings offer concrete suggestions for teachers and curriculum designers to better identify psychological and sociocultural barriers and accordingly redesign group activities, questioning strategies, and classroom environments to better support Vietnamese learners.

However, the study has certain limitations. The small sample size, limited to five students from a single college in Ho Chi Minh City, restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of English majors across Vietnam. Moreover, the reliance on relatively short, self-reported interviews may introduce emotional or memory-related biases. Despite these constraints, the use of member checking and observational triangulation helped strengthen the reliability and depth of the data.

The core purpose of this study is to decipher the psychological-cultural mechanisms that govern the avoidance of peer feedback in English classrooms in Vietnam. By exploiting learners' subjective experiences, the study aims to provide empirical data for designing effective language interaction environments. The results provide an application foundation for educators in developing group activities, adjusting questioning methods, and creating psychologically safe learning spaces, thereby promoting feedback capacity, which is a key factor in foreign language training in the Vietnamese context.

Future research should expand the participant pool and incorporate mixed-methods approaches to validate and extend the emerging themes identified here. In addition, experimental implementation of pedagogical interventions, derived from these findings, is essential to translating theoretical insights into effective classroom practices.

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