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Exploring peer support among young learners during regular EFL classroom lessons

Tomas Kos

Department of English and American Studies, Humboldt University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Correspondence
Tomas Kos, Department of English and American Studies, Humboldt University of Berlin, Unter den Linden 6, 10117 Berlin, Germany.
Email: tomas.kos@hu-berlin.de

Abstract

This study explored peer support among grade 5 learners of English as a foreign language *(N = 24)* interacting during regular lessons. Grounded in sociocultural theory and applying mixed-method research methodology, this study explored to what extent and how young learners support one another during classroom tasks targeting lexical phrases. Moreover, it investigated to what extent such support accounts for learning opportunities. Students relied mainly on linguistic support through suggesting or using resources while social–emotional support such as offering support, giving positive feedback, or inviting partners' participation was limited. The analysis also revealed instances of lack of support in the form of reprimanding, impatience, expressing a lack of awareness of the partner's contribution, or disrespecting peer's linguistic resources which, however, differed widely across pairs.

KEYWORDS

EFL classroom, language-related episodes, peer support, sociocultural theory, young learners, peer support, junge Lernende, Englisch als Fremdsprache, sprachbezogene Episoden, soziokulturelle Theorie

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Zusammenfassung

Diese Studie untersuchte den Peer Support von Lernenden der 5. Klasse im Englischunterricht ($N = 24$), die während des regulären Unterrichts interagierten. Auf der Grundlage der soziokulturellen Theorie und unter Anwendung der Mixed-Methods-Forschungsmethodik wurde untersucht, inwieweit und wie sich junge Lernende gegenseitig bei Lernaufgaben, die auf lexikalische Phrasen abzielen, unterstützen,. Darüber hinaus wurde untersucht, inwieweit diese Unterstützung Lernmöglichkeiten beeinflusst. Die Lernenden verließen sich primär auf sprachlichen Support durch das Vorschlagen oder Verwenden von sprachlichen Ressourcen, während sozial-emotionale Unterstützung wie das Anbieten von Support, das Geben von positivem Feedback oder das Einladen des Partners zur Mitarbeit nur in begrenztem Umfang erfolgte. Die Analyse ergab auch Fälle von mangelnder Unterstützung in Form von Ermahnungen, Ungeduld, mangelnder Wahrnehmung für den Beitrag des Partners oder der Respektlosigkeit gegenüber den sprachlichen Ressourcen des Partners. Diese Fälle unterschieden sich jedoch von Paar zu Paar stark.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Pair and small group work is a commonly used method in language classrooms to afford students opportunities to interact with their peers and practice using the language that they are learning (Adams & Oliver, 2019). This is also the case for young learners (YL), which is a term used for children in the age range of 7 to 11 (Berman, 2004; Philp et al. 2014). Research on YL has informed us that children in the age range of 7 to 11 are in the midst of rapid cognitive and metalinguistic development which helps them to "focus on and manipulate language form, to treat language as an object of inspection and analysis and to make comparisons between languages" (Tellier & Roehr-Brackin, 2017, p. 24). What is more, they can resolve difficulties with certain linguistic forms if supported by the use of these forms in meaningful contexts (Berman, 2004; Philp et al., 2014). Studies have also shown that YL of low FL proficiency can interact and negotiate meaning (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015). Studies on peer support (sometimes referred to as *peer assistance* or *peer scaffolding*) in foreign (FL) and second language (SL) classrooms have shown that YL can support one another when working collaboratively on classroom tasks and use a variety of strategies when doing so (Azkarai & Agirre, 2016; Davin & Donato, 2013; Gagné & Parks, 2013; Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017; Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martinez, 2022; Pinter, 2007). YL assist one another primarily by correcting each other, other repetitions, or completing utterances that a partner is having difficulty with (Davin & Donato, 2013; Gagné & Parks, 2013). Doing so, they may fill gaps in their partners' and their own understanding, correct their misconceptions about language, or strengthen connections between the new language and previously learned language (Philp et al., 2014). Nevertheless, this line of research has predominantly focused on the linguistic and cognitive nature of peer support while attending

much less to the social and emotional domain. This is a limitation because peer support implies qualities that go beyond the cognitive and linguistic realm and the social–emotional aspects are crucial. For example, peer support includes attributes such as empathy, encouragement, and compassion for the help receiver (Penney, 2018, p. 2). To be able to receive support and benefit from it, one needs to be willing to ask for it and open oneself to the experience with the help giver. What is more, the help-giver benefits as it makes the helper feel valued and needed (Penney, 1985, p. 4).

Little is known about the links between peer support and language learning in FL classrooms, as only two studies are available. However, the study by Pinter (2007) involved only one pair, and the study by Davin and Donato (2013) explored only one task. It follows that more descriptive research on peer support in FL classrooms is needed to understand the complex nature of peer support among YL and its role in language learning. Moreover, such kind of support appears to be crucial for mutual understanding and the creation of a social space for sharing aspects of the given situation and addressing linguistic problems that may arise. Studies without such accounts ignore the role of social–emotional factors impacting learning opportunities during peer interactions.

Moreover, bearing in mind that social–emotional factors are essential to peer support and that cognition and emotion are inseparable (Swain, 2013), the study had two main aims. The primary aim was to investigate to what extent and how 11-year-old primary school students organized in similar proficiency pairs support one another during common classroom lessons in EFL classrooms. The focus of the study is on pairs of similar proficiency in which there is no clear expert and in which the flow of support may not be directed by one student but rather distributed across both students of the pair during collaborative activity. The secondary aim was to explore to what extent peer support accounts for learning opportunities. This exploratory study contributes to the available body of EFL pedagogy by providing a picture of how YL support one another during regular classroom activities.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Sociocultural theory

This study is grounded in sociocultural theory, in which research on peer support has been generally framed and which asserts that children develop cognitively as they interact with a teacher, parent, or a more skilled peer and that this process is mediated by language (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, it is through language (including speaking and writing activity) that cognitive functions such as voluntary memory, reasoning, or attention develop (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). It follows that interaction between two learners working together to complete a language task has the potential to mediate learning.

2.1.1 | Language-related episodes

Swain (2006) coined the term *languaging* which "refers to the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language. Languaging is when language is used to mediate problem solutions, whether the problem is about which word to use, or how best to structure a sentence" (p. 98). In the context of peer interaction, research has shown that episodes during which learners talk about language use mediate the construction of linguistic knowledge and that this process of joint construction contributes to L2 development (Swain, 2010). This is because as learners attempt to solve a linguistic problem, they construct and analyze the new linguistic forms, which enable them to learn a new language or knowledge about language, thus improving their language use. These episodes are commonly referred to as language-related episodes (LREs) and were defined by Swain and Lapkin (1998, p. 326) as "any part of a dialogue where language learners talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others." What is more, LREs mediate assistance because as learners reflect on the language they are producing, they often seek, provide, and receive assistance from their partner (Swain & Lapkin 1998). Therefore,

students' engagement with LREs and their resolution may be an indication of both language learning opportunities and the extent of support provided. Nevertheless, research with YL involving LREs is not clear-cut and has indicated that although YL tend to engage in and correctly resolve LREs, their focus is predominantly on lexical LREs attending much less to grammatical and mechanical (punctuation, spelling) ones (Calzada & García Mayo, 2020; see also García Mayo, 2017).

2.1.2 | Zone of proximal development

According to sociocultural theory, in order to develop, the novice (learner) needs effective assistance within his or her *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) which refers to:

> […] the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978; p. 86).

What matters for learning within the ZPD is that support (or mediation) provided by the expert is contingent on the student's actual need and that it is removed when the student demonstrates the ability to function independently (Lantolf et al., 2015). Only such contingent and developmentally appropriate support can lead to independent performance. Nevertheless, research on peer support conducted mainly with adult students (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2000) has underscored a different perspective of the ZPD, namely that ZPD does not necessarily imply an interaction between an expert and a novice in which the expert eventually hands down knowledge or ability to the novice (see also Xi & Lantolf, 2021 for discussion on ZPD and scaffolding). Moreover, unlike in peer learning situations among adult learners, YL may neither be able to provide such contingent support nor may they feel responsible for supporting one another. Rather than embracing the task as a language-learning activity, YL are more likely to be concerned with task completion (Guk & Kellogg, 2007). They may not even comprehend the task before they engage in it and support one another. As Stone (1993), puts it, "in a scaffolding situation, the child is led to participate in an activity whose full meaning has yet to be fulfilled. That is, the child is acting in anticipation of full understanding and must develop an understanding from the actions in which he or she is led to engage" (p. 354). Hence, ZPD is more likely to be adjusted to the needs and abilities of each member of the pair/group in interaction in the process of learning. This may also involve changing relationships in the zone in the course of interaction (Lantof & Poehner, 2008). This interpretation of ZPD as a process or transformation resonates with Holzman's (2009) view of ZPD as a social activity rather than a zone, space, or distance. It also reflects Vygotsky's (2004, p. 202) perspective of ZPD as a "collective form of working together"; a social process that does not necessarily involve a heterogeneous relationship. The perspective of ZPD that people are doing something together and that they are "active agents who change themselves as well as the activity itself through the activity they are engaged in" (Wertsch 1991, p. 8) may be more plausible to depict what occurs during peer interactions.

2.2 | Research related to peer support among young learners

This view seems to be, to a certain extent, reflected in research on YL which has indicated that they can engage in what Donato (1994) called collective scaffolding. In other words, YL can be sources of new orientation for each other and are capable of pooling their linguistic resources in order to guide each other through complex linguistic problem-solving (Davin & Donato, 2013; Pinter, 2007). For example, Davin and Donato (2013) found that students, organized in mixed-proficiency dyads, supported each other by creating a list of questions in Spanish as a foreign language. Researchers claimed that with early language learners, in particular, grouping learners "based on compatible personalities is more important than grouping based on proficiency level" (p. 46). Pinter (2007) explored 10-year-old Hungarian children's

ability to interact with each other in an EFL classroom while using a spot-the-difference task. The children were asked to practice with several sets of similar spot-the-differences tasks, and the analysis focused on the observable changes from the first to the last repetition. Pinter showed that in order to collaborate effectively, children needed to take full responsibility for one's own utterances and appreciate their partner's needs. Using an example of one pair interacting twice on the same task, Pinter's study revealed that both children assisted each other, appreciated this assistance, and immediately made use of the assistance made. Importantly, Pinter points to task features mediating effective assistance. The spot-the-difference task applied in this study allowed the learners to tackle the same type of problem, produce the same type of language within the same task, and use the target language comfortably in a meaningful situation.

It has to be, however, mentioned that research findings are rather mixed with regard to what extent YL can collaborate, how their ability to collaborate affects learning, and what factors are at play. While some studies have indicated that, regardless of age, YL work well together, overcome disagreements, and resolve conflicts (Oliver, Philp, & Duchesne, 2017), some have shown that YL may often establish non-collaborative patterns of interaction (Azkarai & Kopinska, 2020; García Mayo & Agirre, 2019). Although YL tend to participate equally during pair work, they seem to lack the ability to engage with each other's contributions (Azkarai & Kopinska, 2020), which indicates a low degree of mutuality and a non-collaborative pattern of interaction (Storch, 2002). In a similar vein, YL may not feel responsible for supporting one another or helping each other's learning (Azpilicueta-Martinez, 2020; Pinter, 2006). Although YL seem to prefer pair work to individual work, they may be more focused on the task when working individually (Kopinska & Azkarai, 2020).

Studies have also explored strategies employed by YL when working collaboratively on classroom tasks. For example, Gagné and Parks (2013) investigated how children in an intensive elementary-level Grade 6 class for English as a second language (ESL) scaffolded each other while carrying out cooperative learning tasks. With regards to the strategies used, students used predominantly two strategies, namely *request for assistance* and *other-correction* accounting for 77.8% of the total number. In contrast, *comprehension checks* were rare (9%). It is worth mentioning that in contrast to Guk and Kellogg's (2007) study in which students' focus tended to be more on task completion, the students in this study regarded the task as an opportunity for language learning. Importantly, the nature of their support seemed to have arisen from the already established classroom helping culture. In fact, the teacher's perspective was that assisting one another in performing a task is a "good thing" and that cooperation often leads to a rewarding completion of a task for all students involved. In their investigation of 20 pairs of 11-year-old learners of English in a CLIL context, Ibarrola and Hidalgo (2017) showed that children supported one another while resorting to strategies such as utterance completions, acknowledgments, or repetitions. The researchers stressed the necessity to attend to the functions that the strategies perform. For example, in order to confirm successful communication (*I want to let my partner know that I have understood what she said*.), students may use acknowledgments or utterance completions. Importantly, the researchers underlined that students were not necessarily using these strategies to signal a lack of comprehension but to indicate their concentration on each other's messages (see also Foster & Ohta, 2005). Slightly different findings come from a study conducted by Lázaro-Ibarrola and Azpilicueta-Martinez (2022), which has shown that L1 Spanish children learning EFL engaged in as much negotiation of meaning as L1 Spanish adults performing a storytelling task. For example, children generated significantly higher rates of acknowledgments and the same amount of conversational adjustments as adults. Moreover, while adults generated more other repetitions, children produced more self-repetitions. The authors speculate that this is because "children are more reluctant than adults to consider their peers a reliable source of language that can be copied" (p. 480). On the other hand, a high number of comprehension checks produced by children were interpreted as an indication of awareness of their partners' needs as well as the task, which demanded full understanding to be accomplished. Likewise, a higher number of clarification requests suggest that children in this study were not reluctant to show non-understanding.

Furthermore, studies in general education have pointed to the complexity of peer support as students use simultaneously social, linguistic, and cognitive discursive strategies to engage their peers in literacy practices (see, e.g., Martin-Beltrán et al., 2017). Students may, for example, provide social support by building relationships during which

they show affection and care. Students engage in conversational joking and humor, acknowledge personal connections, show agreement, or recognize shared feelings/opinions (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2017). They may also use body language and physical closeness such as giving high fives, thumbs-ups, smiling, or patting someone on the back. They may support one another by redirecting and encouraging persistence (*You can do it!)* or by offering positive feedback and compliments (p. 156). Such kind of support enhances self- and peer regulation.

2.3 | Summary of research

Overall, studies on peer support among YL generally report positive findings in relation to the nature of support and learning benefits. They suggest that when interacting with one another, YL may be capable of collective scaffolding. Some studies have shown that YL can engage in strategies associated with negotiation of meaning. Some have signaled that they tend to rely mainly on strategies such as other-corrections, repetitions, or completions, which do not necessarily correspond to strategies typically referred to as negotiation of meaning (Forster & Ohta, 2005). Nevertheless, studies indicate that the extent to which peers benefit from their interaction is not merely limited to the tasks employed but also to students' personalities, social relationships, or the helping culture established in the classroom. In other words, they point to the importance of attending to the social–emotional aspects of peer support. The study focused on YL's support to complete tasks that neither of the students may be capable of completing individually because they may lack the necessary linguistic knowledge to do so. The study answers the following research questions.

Research questions

1. To what extent and in what ways do primary school learners organized in similar proficiency pairs support one another to complete classroom tasks?
2. To what extent does this support account for learning opportunities?

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Context and participants

This study was conducted during the school day as a part of regular lessons in two EFL primary school classrooms at an alternative school in Germany. Alternative schools are public or private schools, which have a special curriculum, offering a more flexible program of study than traditional schools. One of the school's main aims is to implement an individualized and learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. Hence, students are encouraged to learn at their speed and level and to accomplish their either individually or in small groups. English curriculum at the school involved three lessons a week. The participants were German students of EFL, and they were taught by one language teacher. For the purpose of this article, the findings of interactions among six pairs composed of grade five students of similar proficiency are reported (see Table 1 below). These pairs were formed based on the results of the proficiency test taken 4 months before this study. The teacher confirmed that all pairs consisted of either friends or acquaintances and confirmed that there were no objections on the students' part concerning the composition of pairs.

3.2 | Instruments and procedures

The data were collected during the winter term, over 1 week. Learners interacted on several classroom tasks and exercises during three common classroom lessons. The lessons involved a brief teacher introduction to the topic, a short

TABLE 1 Participants.

Pair	Name	Gender	Grade	PT
1	Mara	M	5	110
	Jenny	M	5	112
2	Fenna	F	5	114
	Nora	F	5	105
3	Wendy	F	5	111
	Gina	F	5	109
4	Elias	M	5	112
	Zak	M	5	110
5	Willy	M	5	102
	Leonardo	M	5	108
6	Wiebke	F	5	110
	Alina	F	5	108

Abbreviation: PT, proficiency test.

video involving a listening practice of conversations at a shop, and a range of pair work tasks and exercises. The final task was to write a similar dialogue that students watched on the video with a partner and present it to the class. The lessons targeted lexical chunks such as *Would you like a…/I'd like a …/Is that everything?/Thanks anyway* which were introduced to the students for the first time. The majority of these chunks cannot be directly translated into students' L1 and may, as a consequence, pose some difficulties to them.

3.3 | Data sources

Data were collected employing video and audio recordings of pair work interactions, unstructured classroom observation and notes of three lessons, and a documentary analysis of student written work.

3.4 | Classroom tasks

Some classroom tasks used in this study corresponded with the task-based language learning and teaching (TBLT) framework (Ellis, 2003), and some were mere language exercises. Students carried out 10 tasks during the week (see Table 2 below). It has to be mentioned that the majority of tasks were completed entirely in pairs, but some tasks involved instances of both individual and pair work, during which peers compared and discussed their answers (2, 3, 4, 8, 9). Each task took from 7 to 10 min to complete except for the dialogue task (20–30 min) and the picture matching and vocabulary box (3 min each).

4 | DATA ANALYSIS

The initial analysis stage of the analysis followed the principles of sociocultural discourse analysis (Mercer, 2005), which seeks to understand "how spoken language is used as a tool for thinking collectively…to study how people pursue joint educational activities" (p. 138), and because it is *in* and *through* the peer collaborative dialogue that

TABLE 2 Examples of classroom tasks.

Classroom tasks	Description
1. Preparation exercise	Who says it, a customer, or a shopkeeper? Put these phrases in the correct group.
2. Picture matching	Check your vocabulary about clothes and accessories. Write the correct word in the box below the picture.
3. Q & A matching	Match the question and the answer.
4. Multiple choices	Circle the correct option.
5. Gap-fill	Complete the dialogue with phrases from the box.
6. Ordering	Write a number (1—9) to put these sentences in order.
7. Reordering	Write the words in the correct order to make questions and sentences.
8. Discussion	Can you describe the shoes you're wearing now? What new words and phrases did you learn?
9. Vocabulary box	Write any new words you have learned in this lesson.
10. Dialogue	Write a dialogue with your partner. Present it to your class.

learning opportunities arise, it is through analysis of the moment-by-moment interaction which allows the researcher to investigate how YL support one another and how this support may account for learning opportunities.

RQ1) To what extent and in what ways do primary school learners organized in similar proficiency pairs support one another to complete classroom tasks?

The analysis of transcribed audio recordings was complemented by the analysis of video recordings and involved revising each transcript of the audio file and adding comments about non-verbal aspects of the event and other potentially relevant information (Mercer, 2005). The audio transcript data was segmented into on- and off-task talk. Although the focus of the analysis was on on-task talk, episodes of peer support to bring the partner's attention away from the off-task talk were also considered. Learners talked mainly about (1) the task at hand (task-related episodes) and (2) language use and choices (language-related episodes). As illustrated in Excerpt 1 below, task-related episodes (TREs) mainly involved negotiating or assigning roles and discussing the next stage in the task (Storch, 2001). The example comes from an interaction between Zak and Elias talking about how to go about completing the task at hand and assigning their roles. The utterances made in students' L1 German were translated into English and appear in italics. Additional contextual information appears in brackets (see Appendix for transcription conventions).

Excerpt 1

- 11. Z: *And now the dialog.*
- 12. E: *Here at the bottom comes* No, it's fine. (solving)
- 13. Z: No, we are going to start at the top!
- 14. E: Ok.
- *15.* Z: *Do you want to write?* (encouraging)
- *16.* E: *No, go ahead.*

Episodes during which learners talked about language use and their choices are referred to as LREs, which were coded based on Swain and Lapkin's (1998) definition provided in Section 2 above. Excerpt 2 below offers an example of a correctly resolved LRE from the interaction between Fenna and Nora. While Nora initiates the LRE (turn 136) and provides the English word *shelf* (turn 140), Fenna resolves the LRE by presenting the target-like *on the shelf* (turn 141).

Excerpt 2

- 136. N: *Where should we put the books?*
- 137. F: *Over there or something?*

- 138. N: Yes, the book is … (thinking)
- 139. F: *Wait a second… What means* Regal?
- 140. N: in the shelf *or something*.
- 141. F: On the shelf. *Let's write* on shelf six.

TREs and LREs were used as units of analysis for the investigation of peer support during which strategies of peer support in which students requested and offered support for peers were identified within these episodes (e.g., turns 139–140 in Excerpt 3). Strategies coded as *cognitive support* concerned mainly issues related to the task such as explaining the task procedure or checking the partner's understanding of the task. *Linguistic support* involved strategies related to lexis, morpho-syntax, pronunciation, and the content of the tasks such as learners suggesting a linguistic solution or checking the partner's understanding of the language (see Table 3 below for categories and examples from data). However, due to numerous overlaps between cognitive and linguistic support, no distinctions were made in coding cognitive and linguistic strategies. For example, explaining a task procedure and explaining a language problem were coded as explaining. Many other overlaps were to be attributed to the variety of pragmatic functions of each

TABLE 3 Categories, subcategories, and examples from the data.

Types of support	Description of support observed during peer interactions	Examples from data
Linguistic and cognitive	Using resources	A bottle of water *means* eine Flasche Wasser.
	Other-correcting (offering correct words or morphosyntax as a response to a use of incorrect language)	A: Let's see. W: *Not let see.* Let me see.
	Suggesting an idea related to the task procedure, morphosyntax, lexis, or spelling	*Shall we write the dialog down?*
	Other-repetition	W: How much is this watch? A: How much is this watch?
	Self-repetition	A bottle, a bottle.
	Completion	P: *So* can I help you *says…* N: the shopkeeper
	Explaining a linguistic feature or task procedure	*I think that we have to say* is *because it is only one bottle.*
	Checking understanding of language knowledge, task procedure, or content	*Look. What does the sentence mean?*
Socio-emotional	Inviting partner's participation	*Would you like to write now?*
	Encouraging to complete an utterance (continuer)	Hm, ok. They are…
Request for support	Requesting information	*Is* buy kaufen?
	Requesting confirmation	*We don't have to do the other exercise, do we?*
	Requesting clarification	*What are we supposed to do here?*
Lack of support	Impatience/reprimanding	*Just write now! (angry tone)* *You do the number four!* (angry tone)
	Expressing a lack of awareness of the partner's contribution	*Nora, you have to work with me. This is a dialog!* (angry tone).
	Disrespecting partner's linguistic resources	*You don't know what water means!* (angry tone)

particular strategy. For example, one problematic strategy was *suggested*. According to Wells (1999), a suggestion is a move that draws the other member of the pair into the decision-making process. However, unlike a request or a question, which requires a response, a suggestion may expect it but does not require it (Storch, 2001, p. 231). A typical suggestion identified in the data usually took the form of a statement uttered with a rising intonation. Such statements were mostly answered by a simple confirmation ("yes"), repetition, or disconfirmation ("no"), sometimes followed by a counter-suggestion (see also Storch, 2001). This is exemplified in excerpt 4 below in which Fenna suggests a solution. This is accepted by Nora who in turn suggests a solution for the next problem.

Excerpt 3

- 87. F: Thanks a lot *is number seven?* (suggesting)
- 88. N: *Yes*, *and then comes* here you are? (suggesting)
- 89. F: *Yes*.

Similar to suggesting, *requesting confirmation* (*confirmation check*) may involve a statement with a rising intonation. However, many instances, in which learners sought confirmation of their utterance being correct, actually implied a *suggestion*. In other words, those were instances in which learners seek "confirmation in response to one's own suggestion" (Storch, 2001, p. 165). Therefore, such strategies were coded as *suggesting*, as suggesting seemed to be the main pragmatic function of such utterances. In other words, a distinction was made between requesting confirmation as a request seeking confirmation of correct understanding (*And this one too*, *right?*) and suggesting as shown in Excerpt 4. It has to be, however, acknowledged that to suggest in order to confirm or disconfirm one's hypothesis can indeed be a form of an implicit request for support.

Furthermore, the analysis followed the suggestion of studies in mainstream education (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2017) to take into account strategies of social–emotional support. Two main strategies of social–emotional support were found. These were *encouraging to complete an utterance* (*continuer*) and *inviting partner's participation*. Continuer is an "instance where an interlocutor takes an interest in the speaker's utterance and encourages him/her to continue" (Foster & Ohta, 2005, p. 420) or when a speaker indicates to the interlocutor that the utterance is incomplete by rising intonation (Gagné & Parks, 2013, p. 207).

Excerpt 4

- M: Hm, ok. They are…?
- J: pounds.

Excerpt 5 below illustrates another social–emotional strategy, namely, inviting a partner's participation. Alina is holding a pen and is about to write. She notices that Wiebke is looking away and is inactive. Alina encourages Wiebke to join (turn 89) but Wiebke does not respond, looking rather sad (turn 90). Alina attempts to invite her again, but Wiebke expresses her negative stance with Alina taking fully over the role of a scribe (92). Alina then responds by allowing her to change roles (turn 93).

Excerpt 5

- (Wiebke is inactive)
- 89. A: *Ok*, *let's move on!* (encouraging W. to participate)
- 90. W: (not responding, looking sad and inactive)
- 91. A: *Common Wiebke!* (encouraging W. to participate)
- 92. W: *I don't want you to write everything!* (saying in an angry tone)
- 93. A: *Ok*, *you can write now*.

Furthermore, the analysis took into account how support was requested. *Requesting support* was adapted from Gagné and Parks (2013, p. 206) who used the term *request for assistance*. Requesting support was defined as "any

request by a speaker for help from his/her interlocutors to solve a problem related to the spoken or written language or the aspects of the task." The most salient ways of requesting support in the data were *requesting information*, *requesting clarification*, and *requesting confirmation* (see Table 3 below for examples). Requests for confirmation referred to here are mainly requests seeking confirmation of correct understanding of language or task (see also Foster & Ohta, 2005). Requests for information are requests eliciting lexis, morphosyntax, spelling, or pronunciation. Requests for clarification included requests eliciting responses such as explanations related to the linguistic problem at hand or the objective of the task. They also involved requests for clarification indicating a comprehension problem (Foster & Ohta, 2005). It also needs to be mentioned that learners may support each other by offering correct words or morphosyntax as a response to a hesitant use of incorrect language. As such, a hesitation may be considered as "an indirect request for assistance" (Foster & Ohta, 2005, p. 420). When such hesitations were detected, they were matched with one of the categories above depending on the context.

Finally, the analysis identified instances that were coded as *a lack of support* (see also Martin-Beltrán et al., 2016), which involved instances of *reprimanding* (Stop it!), *impatience* (Just write now!), *disrespecting peer's linguistic resources* (Don't you know what water is?), or *expressing a lack of awareness of partner's contribution* (Why didn't you mark it correctly?). Importantly, the analysis took into account *nonverbal support* such as using gestures, nodding, smiling, or pointing to a particular language feature using a finger or a pen. Non-word utterances such as "mm"/"ooh" were taken into account when they appeared to perform a communicative function (e.g., showing surprise or agreement) (Mercer, 2005, p. 149).

To show the overall distribution of strategies of support or a lack of support across pairs, the subsequent process of analysis continued by making a tally each time an episode of support was detected. Strategies of support were counted for each pair across tasks.

RQ2) To what extent does such peer support account for learning opportunities?

The next step of the analysis was to analyze LREs. Researchers have shown that LREs mediate assistance because as learners reflect on the language they are producing they often seek, provide, and receive assistance from their partner (Swain & Lapkin 1998). LREs were further categorized into correctly resolved, incorrectly resolved, and unresolved. They were counted for each pair across 10 tasks. The final step was to look for evidence of language learning opportunities that could be linked to peer support. To do that, linguistic items with which learners received support were identified. Subsequently, the researcher matched the episodes of support and examined whether the item was taken up by the learners as their interactions followed.

The transcripts were re-read several times, the accounts were checked and in this way, the codes were confirmed. Two researchers independently reviewed 25% of the transcripts. An agreement was reached in 84% of categories and subcategories. The majority of disagreements concerned the overlap between cognitive and linguistic and social–emotional support. A particular difficulty was in coding *suggesting* and *request for confirmation*. Disagreements were discussed and resolved and the inter-rater reliability using Cronbach's alpha was 0.92.

5 | FINDINGS

Overall, the findings show that students were able to support one another to complete tasks that were above each student's level. Although students relied on all types of support; cognitive, linguistic, and social–emotional, the instances of linguistic support were most common. Students resorted to a variety of strategies, but the two most frequently used were *suggesting* accounting for 24% and *using resources* (20.6%). Combined, these two strategies thus accounted for 54.6 % of strategy use. Excerpt 6 below provides a typical example of a suggestion in the data set. Elias attempts to complete the provided sentence starter (turn 11) with a correct word. Zak suggests the word *sweet* with a rising intonation (turn 128) which is questioned by Elias by providing two alternatives (turn 13). Zak provides the correct form (turn 14) which is accepted by Elias (turn 15). It can be said that Zak's suggestion attracted Elias's attention on

form, invited his further participation, and elicited his feedback, thus helping resolve this LRE. As such, it mediated both learners' mental activity in their social interaction (McCormick & Donato, 2000).

Excerpt 6

- 11. E: Gemma also buys some…(thinking)
- 12. Z: sweet?
- 13. E: Sweet or sweets?
- 14. Z: Sweets *yes*.
- 15. E: Ok.

Other strategies of support such as explanations (5%), other corrections (3.7%), other repetitions (4.9%), and self-repetitions (2.6%) were less frequent. Explanations tended to be short, lacked deeper reasoning, and some were even incorrect. (*I think that it is pounds because it is outside of Germany*.) Explanations such as the following were rare: *I think that we have to say* is *because it is singular, only one bottle*. Moreover, other repetitions were merely used to signal an error (Excerpt 7) and only in rare cases to encourage a peer to continue, to express understanding, or to distribute help (Davin & Donato, 2013).

Excerpt 7

- E: How much (pointing to the wrong column)
- Z: How much? *Here is* how much

Likewise, self-repetitions appeared to serve mainly the purpose to confirm one's own understanding (Ohta, 2005) or consolidate one's language use (*Let me see, they are 100 pounds. Let me see…they are hundred pounds*). Self-repetitions to offer support were rare. As indicated in Table 4 below, pairs engaged in social–emotional support, but these instances were relatively less frequent than linguistic and cognitive ones. Some pairs occasionally resorted to inviting the partner's participation (*Would you like to write now?)* or encouraging the partner to complete an utterance (continuer) *(Hm, ok. They are…)*. However, other ways of social-emotional support such as offering their resources or expertise

TABLE 4 Frequency counts for support strategy use.

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	N	PG	M	R
SUGG	37	41	29	33	21	17	178	24	29.7	17-41
UR	26	26	24	31	17	29	153	20	25.5	17-31
EXP	7	9	6	5	4	8	39	5	6.5	4-9
OR	6	5	4	10	5	6	36	4.9	6	4-10
COM	6	8	5	2	4	7	32	4.3	5.3	2-8
OC	4	3	4	3	6	8	28	3.7	4.7	3-8
SC	2	4	7	9	4	0	26	3.5	4.3	0-9
SR	3	2	3	3	5	4	20	2.7	3.3	2-5
NVS	0	2	2	0	3	5	12	1.6	2	0-5
CU	2	3	0	0	3	0	8	1	1.3	0-3
Social-emotional support										
INV	4	4	5	4	2	2	21	3.5	6.2	4-9
CON	3	5	2	4	1	1	16	2.8	2.7	1-5

Abbreviations: COM, completion; CON, continuer; CU, checking understanding; EXP, explaining; INV, inviting partner's participation; M, mean; N, number; NVS, non-verbal support; OC, other-correcting; OR, other-repeating; P, pair; PG, percentage; R, range; SC, self-correcting; SUGG, suggesting; UR, using resources.

(*Can I help you?/Shall I write it down for you*), providing positive feedback or praising (*Well done!*), showing affection and empathy (*I know that it's hard.*), or encouraging their partner's participation (*Ok, let's move on!*) were scarce. Moreover, to express agreement, students mainly resorted to nodding or short affirmations (*Yes/Ok.*). In addition, instances of nonverbal support such as using body language (gestures), visuals, or school objects to clarify the meaning of a text or word were rather unique (1.6%). The nonverbal support was mainly given by pointing to a particular language feature using a finger or a pen.

With regards to requesting support, the findings (Table 5 below) show that pairs relied predominantly on requesting information (*What is* buy *in German?*) accounting for more than half of all requests (53%). Requesting information was followed by requesting confirmation (*We don't have to do the other exercise do we?*) (25%) and request for clarification (*What are we supposed to do here?*) (22%). It can be said that support was requested more explicitly via requesting information and clarification than implicitly via requesting confirmation. Five out of six pairs relied mainly on requesting information and pairs requested confirmation more than clarification. Requests for information were used to elicit mainly lexis, spelling, or pronunciation while requesting information concerning morphosyntax which can be attributed to the fact that the tasks targeted mainly lexical features. Requests for clarification elicited predominantly responses such as explanations of the linguistic problem or the task while requests for clarification indicating a comprehension problem were rare.

Interactions of four out of six pairs contained instances of lack of support (Table 6 below), which involved mainly reprimanding and impatience (*Just write now!*) (70%) followed by expressing a lack of awareness of partner's contribution (*You have to work with me! This is a dialogue!*) (16%) and disrespecting peer's linguistic resources (*You don't know what water means?*) (14%).

Excerpt 8 below exemplifies an interaction containing a lack of support. It comes from an interaction between Wiebke and Alina working on the Preparation exercise. The interaction begins with Alina self-repeating the phrase *Would you like?* and requesting clarification (turn 6). Her request is, however, not responded to by Wiebke. Alina proceeds with the next example sentence (turn 8), requesting Wiebke's confirmation. Wiebke not only responds in an argumentative tone of voice but also writes down what she believes is the right solution to the problem without seeking Alina's agreement about the solution (turn 9). Wiebke is neither willing to engage with Alina's requests nor involve her in the joint work. Although Alina signals non-understanding, Wiebke simply moves to the next example without

TABLE 5 Requesting support.

Strategy	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	N	PG	M	R
RI	21	23	15	10	16	7	92	53	15.3	7-23
RCONF	6	3	9	7	8	10	43	25	7.2	3-10
RCL	2	9	4	10	4	8	37	22	6.2	2-10
Total	29	35	28	27	28	25	172		28.7	25-35

Abbreviations: M, mean; N, number; P, pair; PG, percentage; R, range; RCL, requesting clarification; RCONF, requesting confirmation; RI, requesting information.

TABLE 6 Lack of support.

Strategy	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	N	PG	M	R
REP/IM	0	11	4	0	6	14	35	70	5.8	0-14
EXP	0	2	0	0	1	5	8	16	3.5	0-5
DISR	0	0	0	0	0	7	7	14	1.2	0-7

Abbreviations: DISR, disrespecting peer's linguistic resources; EXP, expressing a lack of awareness of partner's contribution; IM, impatience; M, mean; N, number; P, pair; PG, percentage; R, range; REP, reprimanding.

even taking this into her consideration. It has to be, however, mentioned that Alina behaves similarly later on without involving Wiebke in the decision-making process.

Excerpt 8

- 6. A: Hi, would you like? Would you like? (reading)…*What does it mean?*
- 7. W: (not responding)
- 8. A: Two (referring to the second sentence). Can I help you? *Right?*
- 9. W: Wait. I have to read it first! (angry tone) … Hi, can I help you? (reading and solving)
- 10. A: Would you like…Hi, can I help you? (does not seem to understand)
- 11. W: *Next one!* (sounding irritated)

RQ2) To what extent does such peer support account for learning opportunities?

As pointed out above, LREs are episodes during which support is sought, provided, and received as learners are debating linguistic issues (focus on form). It follows that the occurrence of LREs may not only be suggestive of the extent of support provided but also of the scope of learning opportunities afforded by such support. Table 7 below shows that students frequently engaged in LREs and resolved 72.5% of them correctly. They resolved 12.5% incorrectly and left 15% unresolved. The table also reveals that there were great variations with regards to the LREs produced across pairs ranging between 6 and 30 and LREs correctly resolved (3–24). It also has to be noted that there were differences in the distribution of LREs across tasks which is to be mainly attributed to the nature of the tasks. For example, the Ordering task or the Dialogue generated a relatively higher occurrence of LREs than the Discussion task or picture-matching task.

The following excerpt provides a typical example of how peer support accounted for a resolution of an LRE. Mara requests clarification from Jenny concerning the correct pronunciation of the word *bottle* (turn 17). Jenny uses her linguistic resources and provides the correct pronunciation (turn 18), which is correctly repeated by Mara (turn 9) and again by Jenny who adds the word *milk* (turn 20). This is turn leads to Mara's request for confirmation (turn 21), which is responded to by Jenny offering two target-like options (turn 22). Mara chooses one and writes it down (turn 23).

Excerpt 9

- 17. M: bottl *or* bottel?
- 18. J: bottle (using her resources to provide the correct word)
- 19. M: bottle
- 20. J: bottle milk

TABLE 7 Occurrence and resolution of language-related episodes (LREs).

Pair	LREs	C	INC	UNR
1	30	24	3	3
2	18	12	2	4
3	24	15	5	4
4	15	12	1	2
5	6	3	1	2
6	27	21	3	3
Total	120	87	15	18
Percentage		72.5	12.5	15
Mean	20	14.5	2.5	3
Range	6-30	3-24	1-3	2-4

Abbreviations: C, correctly resolved; INC, incorrectly resolved; UNR, unresolved.

- 21. M: *Is it* bottle milk?
- 22. J: a bottle of milk *or* a milk bottle?
- 23. M. a bottle of milk. Can I have a bottle of milk? (writes it down)

On one hand, the example illustrates that learners were able to engage in collective scaffolding (Donato, 1994) and that peer support appeared to have contributed to the resolution of the LRE. On the other hand, it illustrates what was prevalent in the data, namely, that the talk is marked by short turns, LREs are short and elementary and contain either very basic or no explanations of language at all. Moreover, it was difficult to draw the connections between peer support and the extent of target-like use of lexical phrases. The next example from an interaction between Mara and Jenny illustrates one of 16 instances found in the data in which peer support appeared to have contributed to the target-like use of a lexical phrase; in this case, *Is that everything*? When working on the preparation task, Mara asks for the meaning of *Is that everything*? (turn 6). Jenny finds the word *everything* in the dictionary and provides the correct word (turn 7). Mara provides the German equivalent (turn 8) which is affirmed by Jenny (turn 9).

Excerpt 10

- 6. M: *What is* is that everything?
- 7. J: (begins to look in the dictionary)…*Here, I have found it*! Everything *means* alles.
- 8. M: Is that everything? Ist das alles? (German for Is that everything?)
- 9. J: Yes.

Toward the end of the first lesson during the Question and Answer matching task, Mara read the phrase *Ist that everything?* when they were checking the exercise together. Toward the end of the second lesson, during a task that required the students to put sentences into order, Jenny is thinking about the next sentence (turn 69). Mara correctly chimes in with *Is that everything? Ist das alles?*

Excerpt 11

- 68. M: That's two pounds.
- 69. J: Yes, …. (thinking)
- 70. M: Is that everything?. Ist das alles? (German translation)

Finally, toward the end of the third lesson, during the Dialogue task, Mara proposes *Is that everything* (turn 150) and even provides the correct spelling (153).

Excerpt 12

- 149. J: *What now?*
- 150. M: Is that everything?
- 151. J: *How do you spell that again?*
- 152. M: t-h-a-t that e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g everything
- 153. J: Ok.

Nevertheless, target-like use of lexical phrases used during interactions could not be linked entirely to the peer support provided but also to other sources such as the teacher's input or support during pair work, support from other students, the input from the video, or the worksheet. What is more, the lexical phrases with which support was provided by the partner were not necessarily used as the interactive work evolved. This occurred 15 times across all six pairs. In addition, nine times, lexical phrases with which support was provided by the partner were not taken up correctly. As the next example below shows, Fenna explains the meaning of the phrase *Would you like a bag?* (turn 55) which is repeated by Fenna (turn 56). However, later during the dialog writing task, Nora provides the non-target like *Do you like a bag?*

Excerpt 13

- 54. N: *What's* would you like a bag *again?*
- 55. F: Would you like a bag? Willst du eine Tasche? (translates into German)
- 56. N: *Yes*, *ok*. Would you like a bag?
- 124. F: *What are we going to write now?*
- 125. N: *How do you say* Möchtest du eine Tasche haben? Do you like a bag, right?
- 126. F: Would you like a bag?

Although peer support appeared to have afforded learning opportunities to a certain extent, a clear relationship between peer support and learning opportunities could not be established.

6 | DISCUSSION

Grounded in the sociocultural theory, the present study explored to what extent and how YL of average language proficiency organized in similar proficiency pairs supported one another when grappling with tasks that were above each individual level (Davin & Donato, 2013; Gagné & Parks, 2013; Pinter, 2007). In line with previous research, the study found that students supported one another cognitively, linguistically, socially, and emotionally (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2017). Nevertheless, while the linguistic and cognitive support strategies were most common, strategies coded as social-emotional support were much less frequent. This distinction is, however, ambiguous as some strategies such as *suggesting* contain characteristics of all categories. The study found that overall, students relied predominantly on two strategies, namely *using resources* and *suggesting*. The high occurrence of both strategies indicates that students were able to pool their resources and share them to complete the tasks at hand. This is in line with previous research on adult students as well as YL (Davin & Donato, 2013; Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2000). The high occurrence of suggestions is particularly positive because research has shown that suggestions are an important form of peer support. They are not only elicitation techniques but important semiotic tools with the capacity to mediate mental activity in a social context (McCormick & Donato, 2000). For example, suggesting may invite a partner's participation, attract his or her attention to the task, and maintain an ongoing interest in it (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Storch, 2001). Moreover, suggesting may focus the partner's attention on specific linguistic items, elicit feedback, or even confirm or disconfirm one's assumptions about language (Storch, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Consequently, a high occurrence of suggestions in an interaction may be beneficial to learning. However, the majority of suggestions found in the data were generally answered by a simple confirmation ("yes"), repetition, or disconfirmation ("no"). They were occasionally followed by a counter-suggestion and in rare cases by an explanation. In other words, learners elaborated on the suggestions given only to a limited extent, which appeared to have hindered learning opportunities generated by the suggestions.

Furthermore, in contrast to previous research with young and adult students (DiCamilla & Antón, 1997; Gagné & Parks, 2013) other correcting was used less frequently. This indicates that students were either reluctant to correct their peers or were not able to recognize errors that needed to be corrected. Also, in contrast to previous studies on YL (Gagné & Parks, 2013; Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017), other repetitions in the current study were less frequent (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martinez, 2022) and merely adopted to signal an error, and only rarely, they were applied to encourage a peer to continue, express understanding, or distribute help (Davin & Donato, 2013). Similarly, self-repetition appeared to serve mainly the purpose to confirm one's own understanding (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martinez, 2022; Ohta, 2005) or consolidate one's own language use. This indicates that the use of repetitions to offer social support by encouraging a partner to continue or distribute help (Ohta, 2005) may be less common among YL than using repetitions to monitor or consolidate one's language use.

With regards to requesting support, the data show that the most common way was requesting information (*What is* buy *in German?)*, followed by requesting confirmation (*We don't have to do the other exercise do we?*) and requesting clarification (*What are we supposed to do here?*). What is more, support was requested across all six pairs to a similar

extent. This is a positive finding as it suggests that the learners were not reluctant to ask for help, were willing to know the partner's perspective, and presumably engage the partner in the joint completion of the task. One possible explanation is that the relatively high occurrence of requests for support was mediated by the fact that most learners in this study have known each other for a longer period and have had many opportunities to work in pairs and do assignments together. Nevertheless, as exemplified by the interaction between Alina and Wiebke, YL may not only fail to respond to a request but they may also respond inappropriately. What is more, despite a clear disagreement concerning a linguistic choice, YL may not request justification from each other, thus inhibiting learning opportunities that may arise. In line with previous research, despite relatively equal participation and contribution to pair work, they were not able to engage with each other's contributions (Azkarai & Kopinska, 2020)

The study has found a relatively low degree of social–emotional support provided within pairs. Social–emotional support is important as research has shown that negotiating for support in the form of sympathizing, feeling for the other, or showing appreciation triggers opportunities for the co-construction of knowledge and language learning (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2016). It follows that frequent instances of reprimanding, impatience, or disrespecting peers' linguistic resources among some pairs could have negatively influenced interaction and learning. The same applies to the low occurrence of social–emotional support in the form of giving positive feedback or inviting a partner's participation. This is a rather surprising finding because it had been anticipated that children who had known each other for many years and had been used to working with each other would display more prosocial behavior. In a similar vein, the findings indicate that some YL may still lack the listening skills to wait for the partner to compose an utterance, to allow her/him to be a more active participant in the conversation. The analysis made evident that despite working together on the tasks, these students lacked a shared perspective on the task, which according to Antón and DiCamilla (1999, p. 240) may preclude what they call a "construction of a social space." This construction of a social space together with the establishment of intersubjectivity is according to sociocultural theory crucial for successful support to occur, or to put it another way, a lack of intersubjectivity is likely to hinder mutual support during interactive work.

One possible explanation for the relative lack of support can be related to the age-related characteristics which may have influenced students' social-emotional engagement with each other. The age range of 9 to 14 is defined by some educational psychologists as early adolescence (between the ages of 9 and 14), which is a time of critical transitions (e.g., from elementary school to middle school) and tremendous developmental changes in social, biological, and cognitive domains (Eccles, 1999). In other words, children in this study were still in the process of learning how to express their emotions, interpret others' views and emotions, show empathy for other people's emotions, share space with others, and offer support. Some may have already been capable of doing so, some less, some may have been reluctant, and some may have even resisted it. Likewise, the reason for the lack of support within two pairs (2, 6) may have been influenced by low acceptance and lower level of popularity of two students (Wiebke and Nora) by others, as revealed by interviews with the teacher. In fact, research suggests that while well-liked children tend to be kind, cooperative, friendly, and helpful, rejected children tend to show heightened levels of disruptive behavior (Asher & McDonald, 2009; Oberle et al., 2010). Moreover, whether students have social cognition skills (i.e., differentiation of perspectives and perspective taking) and are perceived as helpful, cooperative, empathic, and sympathetic by peers may depend on their popularity in the peer group for 5th-grade students (Oberle et. al., 2010). It seems that their own perceptions of themselves as not being popular or fully accepted by others may have contributed to the relative lack of social behavior in their interactions.

Nevertheless, a surprising finding is that despite the lack of support and low level of intersubjectivity, these two pairs frequently engaged in LREs and resolved over 70% of them correctly. This seems to be attributed to the relatively high level of interest in English among the participants in this study, as indicated by their teacher. It is, however, plausible to say that a higher degree of social–emotional support could have led to a better mutual understanding of these learners. This, in turn, would have helped create a social space in which arising linguistic problems could have been addressed and resolved even more successfully.

The second research question examined to what extent peer support accounts for learning opportunities. In line with Damon and Phelps (1989), it had been expected that when peers interact as equals, they are more likely to

mutually direct their interaction, share each other's views, challenge each other, or/and engage in collective scaffolding (Donato, 1994). We have seen that this was the case to a certain extent as five pairs frequently engaged in LREs and tended to resolve them correctly. On the other hand, over 25% were either unresolved or resolved incorrectly. In addition, the absolute majority of LREs was elementary and involved only limited discussions about language. Moreover, the analysis revealed that even though support was provided, learners did not necessarily use the targeted language in the form in which support was provided. What is more, their use was not by definition target-like in later stages. It seems that in addition to peer support, students' target-like use was linked to other sources such as the teacher's input and support, support from other students, and input from the video, worksheets, or dictionary. This suggests that although very important, peer support is only one of the potential language sources in a language classroom. The findings also point to the limitations of peer support which is qualitatively different from the developmentally appropriate teacher's mediation (Lantolf et al., 2015). Despite this, peers seemed to have been able to closely work together, help each other, and pool their resources and ideas, thus adjusting the ZPD to the needs and abilities of their partners. Although their support did not always culminate in resolving LREs, it allowed them to experiment with new ideas, examine their assumptions, and take risks (Damon & Phelps, 1989). It afforded them more autonomy and confidence to work without complete reliance on the teacher's support.

7 | PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings have important implications for language pedagogy. We have seen that although students were able to support one another, the extent (and quality) of support differed widely among pairs, and because in addition to proficiency differences, factors such as social relationships or peer acceptance come into play, teachers must be very attentive to these factors. Furthermore, because YL may not see the learning benefits of supporting one another and may be reluctant to request, receive, and give help from or to their classmates, teachers should consider training their students in the use of support strategies. For example, because requests for clarification and explanations were rather rare and because requesting an explanation, explaining, and applying an explanation are crucial features of high-quality verbal helping behavior (Webb & Mastergoerge, 2003), teachers can explicitly teach their students how to articulate and explain the salient features of the linguistic problem at hand. They may as well model peer support strategies to students (Adams & Oliver, 2011) or show students a video that displays these strategies. Likewise, teachers can engage students in discussions about the benefits of peer support for learning before assigning them to work in pairs or groups. Nevertheless, teaching such strategies must be engrained in the capacities or principles that students need to develop to allow such strategies to happen. Alexander (2018) provides an example of such principles: *(1) Listen; (2) Think about what you hear; (3) Give others time to think; (4) Respect alternative viewpoints.* Arguably, such principles should be created and decided together with the students. Arriving at principles together with students instead of imposing principles on them gives the students a sense of self-determination and self-empowerment which in turn may encourage students to follow such principles wholeheartedly. Needless to say, teachers themselves should follow these principles and implement strategies of support in their teaching (Davin & Donato, 2013). Finally, students' supportive attitude can be greatly enhanced if teachers continually provide opportunities for students to reflect on their collaborative work and elicit thoughts or feelings during pair/group work. At the same time, it is important to provide feedback to students in this regard.

8 | CONCLUSION

Taking cognitive, linguistic, and social–emotional aspects of peer support into consideration, the current study explored interactions of six pairs composed of students of average language proficiency. Although all pairs were able to support each other to complete tasks that were beyond each individual level, the degree and the quality of their

support differed widely among pairs. Of particular importance was the relatively low degree of social–emotional support provided. This is important because social–emotional support is crucial for mutual understanding and the creation of a social space for sharing aspects of the given situation and addressing linguistic problems that may arise. The current study suggests that although peer support plays an important role in FL learning among YL, it has limitations that may negatively influence learning opportunities for some learners. Implementing an experimental design, future studies could investigate to what extent and how different types of peer support promote language learning of YL. Future research could also investigate to what extent and how teachers' modeling of support strategies transforms into peer interactions among YL. Given the important role of social discourse in learning (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2016; Martin-Beltrán et al., 2017), future studies could explore the connections between social discourse among YL and language learning. For example, more research on the role of disagreements in language learning among YL is needed (see Chen, 2020). While the current study described peer support in naturally occurring peer interactions and its ecological validity of the classroom-based approach is thus high, the generalizability and interpretation of the results to other contexts is limited.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Due to data protection standards, free access is impossible. All transcripts and results of the student work have been pseudonymized and stored in a password-protected folder and can be shared upon request.

ORCID

Tomas Kos https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7499-4755

PEER REVIEW

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APPENDIX

Transcription conventions

italics translation of utterance in German;

() comments about a support strategy which cannot be deduced from the context, the tone of voice, mood, gesture, facial expression, eye gaze, body, posture;

? rising intonation at end of a sentence;

!—increased volume and excitement;

falling intonation;

… pause less than 3 s.