

A APPLICATION OF PEER ASSISTED LEARNING IN ANATOMY**Dr. Ashwini Khot*¹, Dr. Savitri²**

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Article Received on 26 April 2026,
Article Revised on 16 May 2026,
Article Published on 01 June 2026,

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20441285>

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How to cite this Article: Dr. Ashwini Khot*¹, Dr. Savitri². (2026). A Application of Peer Assisted Learning In Anatomy. World Journal of Pharmaceutical Research, 15(11), 738-473.

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ABSTRACT

Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) is an innovative and student-centered educational approach widely used in medical education, particularly in anatomy teaching. Anatomy is a fundamental subject that requires detailed understanding of the human body, spatial relationships, and clinical correlations. Traditional teaching methods alone may not adequately address the challenges faced by students in mastering extensive anatomical content. PAL involves students teaching, guiding, and supporting fellow students through structured learning activities such as peer tutoring, near-peer teaching, group discussions, and collaborative practical sessions. In anatomy education, PAL promotes active participation, improves communication skills, enhances knowledge retention, and encourages teamwork. It creates a supportive learning environment in which students feel more comfortable asking questions and clarifying difficult concepts. Applications of

PAL in anatomy include cadaveric dissection guidance, histology discussions, osteology demonstrations, neuroanatomy tutorials, and peer-led revision sessions. Research studies have demonstrated that PAL improves academic performance, confidence, leadership abilities, and student satisfaction while also reducing stress and anxiety associated with anatomy learning. Despite challenges such as variability in teaching quality and the risk of incorrect information, proper faculty supervision and tutor training can ensure successful implementation. With the advancement of modern educational technologies and competency-

based medical education, peer-assisted learning continues to play an increasingly important role in anatomy teaching. This article discusses the concept, applications, benefits, and future prospects of peer-assisted learning in anatomy education.

KEYWORDS: Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL), Peer Teaching, Near-Peer Learning, Collaborative Learning, Anatomy Teaching, Cadaveric Dissection, Active Learning, Small Group Learning, Peer Tutoring,, Educational Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Anatomy is one of the most important and fundamental subjects in medical and health sciences education. It provides essential knowledge about the structure of the human body and forms the basis for clinical practice. However, anatomy is often considered difficult by students because of its vast syllabus, complex terminology, and detailed structural relationships. Traditional teaching methods such as lectures and cadaveric dissections may not always ensure active participation and effective understanding among students.

Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) has emerged as an effective student-centered teaching method in anatomy education. In PAL, students learn by teaching and supporting one another through activities such as peer tutoring, group discussions, and near-peer teaching. This approach promotes active learning, improves communication skills, enhances knowledge retention, and creates a comfortable learning environment. PAL is increasingly being integrated into anatomy teaching to improve both academic performance and collaborative learning among medical students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted among first-year medical students in the Department of Anatomy. Students were divided into small peer groups, and trained peer tutors conducted anatomy teaching sessions using cadavers, anatomical models, histology slides, bones, and charts. Activities included peer teaching, group discussions, dissection demonstrations, and quizzes under faculty supervision. Student performance was assessed using pre- and post-tests, practical examinations, and feedback questionnaires.

Teaching Methods Used in PAL for Anatomy

1. Small Group Discussions

Students discuss anatomical topics in small groups under peer guidance.

Advantages

- Encourages interaction
- Promotes critical thinking

2. Peer-Led Tutorials

Students prepare and teach selected topics.

Example: A student presenting thoracic cavity anatomy.

3. Demonstration Sessions

Peer tutors demonstrate

- Cadaveric structures
- Models
- Histology slides

4. Quiz-Based Learning

Peer-conducted quizzes increase motivation and reinforce learning.

5. Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Students solve clinically oriented anatomical problems collaboratively.

Example: Analyzing nerve injuries using anatomical knowledge.

6. Team-Based Learning (TBL)

Students work in teams guided by peers for anatomy tasks.

7. Digital Peer Learning

Online PAL has become common using:

- Video demonstrations
- Online discussion forums
- Virtual anatomy platforms
- Social media study groups

Application of PAL in Anatomy

In anatomy education, PAL can be applied in several practical and impactful ways:

1. Small Group Discussions

Students are divided into small groups where peer tutors guide discussions on topics such as gross anatomy, neuroanatomy, and histology. This encourages open communication and

helps clarify difficult concepts.

2. Cadaver-Based Learning Support

During dissection sessions, peer tutors assist learners in identifying structures, understanding spatial orientation, and correlating theoretical knowledge with practical observations.

3. Diagrammatic and Visual Learning

Anatomy heavily relies on visual understanding. Peer learners often use drawings, models, and 3D resources to teach complex structures in a simplified manner.

4. Revision and Exam Preparation Sessions

PAL is especially useful during revision periods. Peer-led sessions help reinforce key concepts, discuss frequently asked questions, and improve recall through active engagement.

5. Bridging Communication Gaps

Students may sometimes hesitate to ask questions in large classrooms. PAL creates a comfortable environment where learners can freely clarify doubts without fear of judgment.

Role of Faculty in PAL

Although PAL is student-centered, faculty supervision remains essential.

Faculty Responsibilities

- Training peer tutors
- Monitoring teaching quality
- Providing feedback
- Ensuring accuracy of content
- Organizing PAL sessions

Components of Tutor Training

- Communication skills
- Teaching strategies
- Anatomy content revision
- Ethical considerations
- Time management

Assessment in PAL

Assessment methods include:

a. Formative Assessment

1. Oral questioning
2. Practical demonstrations

b. Summative Assessment

1. Practical examinations and Written tests
2. Objective Structured Practical Examination (OSPE)

c. **Self-Assessment:** Students reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses.

Benefits of Peer-Assisted Learning in Anatomy

1. Improved Academic Performance
2. Enhanced Communication Skills
3. Increased Confidence
4. Reduction of Student Anxiety
5. Development of Professional Skills
6. Efficient Utilization of Resources

Future Prospects of Peer-Assisted Learning in Anatomy Education

1. Integration with Technology-Enhanced Learning
2. Blended Learning Models
3. Expansion into Interdisciplinary Learning
4. Development of Trained Peer Tutors
5. Use of Artificial Intelligence and Adaptive Learning.

RESULTS

The implementation of Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) in anatomy showed positive outcomes among medical students. Most students demonstrated improved understanding of anatomical concepts, better practical performance, and increased participation during anatomy sessions. Post-test scores were higher compared to pre-test scores, indicating enhanced academic performance after PAL activities. Students reported increased confidence, improved communication skills, and greater comfort in discussing difficult topics with peers. Feedback analysis revealed high student satisfaction with PAL as an effective and interactive learning method in anatomy education.

DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrates that Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) is an effective teaching strategy in anatomy education. The improvement in post-test scores suggests that PAL enhances understanding and retention of complex anatomical concepts. This may be due to active participation, repeated discussion, and explanation of topics in a peer-friendly environment, which reduces learning anxiety and improves engagement.

Students also reported better communication skills, increased confidence, and greater interest in anatomy learning. Near-peer explanations often make difficult concepts easier to understand due to cognitive and social congruence between learners. Additionally, PAL encourages teamwork and collaborative learning, which are essential skills in medical practice.

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