

JOURNAL OF RESEARCH STUDIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING



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KEYWORDS

Peer tutoring, English
language learning, young
learners, tutor-tutee
relationships, student
motivation

To cite this article in APA 7th style:

Parker, E., Tariq, A., & Smith, A. (2023). Exploring the Effectiveness of Peer Tutoring in English Language Learning Among Young Learners. *Research Studies in English Language Teaching and Learning*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.62583/rselt.v1i2.13>

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Exploring the Effectiveness of Peer Tutoring in English Language Learning Among Young Learners

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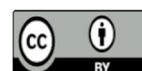
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Abstract

This research is set to find the impact of peer tutoring on the level of the English language among young learners. This study was quantitative in design. In this case, 200 participants were obtained from among the primary school students who undertook the 12-week peer-tutoring intervention program designed to influence the improvement of attainment in proficiency of the English language. The participants of the study were derived from students between the ages of 9-11 years and from varied linguistic backgrounds, amounting to 100 pairs, one being a tutor and the other a tutee. Pre- and post-test data were collected from the students' level of English language proficiency in the program during the program period. In addition, qualitative data were garnered through interviewing and questionnaires, designed to understand the experiences and perceptions of the respondents regarding the program. The study went on to reveal that the establishment of strong tutor-tutee relations was very crucial in a conducive positive learning environment. This study, hence, supports the use of peer tutoring strategies in English language learning among young learners, establishing through experiments the multifarious benefits of peer tutoring programs to both tutors and tutees. This research study, therefore, is of the view that intervention with peer tutoring included at the primary school level is likely to yield marked improvement in English language proficiency and learning of important life skills among a more heterogeneous nature of learners in terms of their linguistic background.



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Keywords: peer tutoring, English language learning, young learners, tutor-tutee relationships, student motivation

Introduction

With the increasingly vital role of the English language as a global lingua franca, English learnings have now become integral to worldwide education (Galloway et al., 2021). It is with this realisation that educators and policymakers of education are increasingly exploring new and effective ways that will enhance English language learning among young learners, who are at their most formative years of language development. Therefore, peer tutoring is experimented in facilitating language learning, given that it accrues benefits related to academic achievement, cognitive development, and social skills of the students (Bowyer-Crane & Snowling, 2013). This paper, therefore, seeks to discuss the effectiveness of peer tutoring in the English language for the context of young learners within the primary school environment. This study will be aiming to determine the effect of a structured peer-tutoring program on English language proficiency among the study participants and, in turn, measure its possible benefits toward academic, cognitive, and social learning. Hopefully, this study could shed some light on potential benefits, which may be associated with the use of peer tutoring within a primary school setting, to the interest of

educators and policy-makers that intend to further innovative strategies towards school practice improvement within the paradigm of English language education.

Background and Context

This, alongside many countries being pushed to focus on the English language, inclusive of those that speak other languages, has developed heightened needs for sensitive teaching methodologies that can effectively cut across the varied needs and varied backgrounds of students (Galloway et al., 2021). Consequently, schools lead to an alternative way for peer tutoring activities wherein the same-grade or age group students get an opportunity to teach and learn from each other (Duran & Monereo, 2005). The method has been identified to benefit authentic communication of learners, increase the activity of learners, and develop the attitude of learners toward learning optimistically (Smith, 2019). The reason peer tutoring shows immense potency—especially in language learning—is the fact that it presents a platform for meaningful practice and interaction, hence offering learners a chance to foster their language skills in a very supportive environment (Topping, 2005). Moreover, it was noticed from research that peer tutoring acted as a very effective tool toward raising academic attainment, cognitive development, and social skills of the pupils (Bowyer-Crane & Snowling, 2013). Easily, this fits in with the many alternative, proven language-education options that should be prescribed in schools. The present research hopes to extend the extant knowledge on peer tutoring for English language learning among young learners within a primary school context and draw from it the probable impacts on language proficiency and broad developmental outcomes that might be accrued by this approach.

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Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

As alluded to above, the effectiveness of gauging the effectiveness of peer tutoring in languages holds its basis from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Besides, those theoretical views, Swain's (2000) output hypothesis, Long (1996) and interaction hypothesis, and Krashen (1982) input hypothesis view their rationale for use with peer tutoring in English language learning. The output hypothesis by Swain (2000) advances that language output—be it through speaking or writing—is a precious opportunity for students to learn a second language. This is because it forces them to process language deeper, notice gaps in their competence, and reformulate their language output through hypothesis-testing and feedback (Swain, 2000). Through peer tutoring, students have many opportunities to produce output during interaction with a peer, which further enhances their improvement in language development (Ishihara & Nguyen, 2019). Long (1996) points out the crucial aspect of the negotiation of meaning related to language learning. Long (1996) further argues that the use of conversation in the L2 will best impact language learners if they find themselves compelled to change their language output so that it would be more understandable, including the use of requests for clarification, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks. Interactions are facilitated through peer tutoring, which means they allow an interaction in learners in an authentic and conducive environment that facilitates communication and the negotiation of meaning between peers (Gass & Mackey, 2017). Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis maintains that language learners acquire language when they receive comprehensible input that is pitched somewhat higher than their current proficiency. In a peer tutoring setting, the tutor can provide such input by adjusting the language used to the level of the tutee. The tutor thus scaffolds the learning and promotes language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; VanPatten & Williams, 2014). A number of empirical studies

underlined that peer tutoring is one of the most effective means toward language output, interaction, and input. For example, Storch (2007) showed that peer tutoring led to language output and interaction among learners of EFL in more than 50% of cases, which developed many opportunities for noticing and feedback. These were also in the opinion of Philp, Adams, and Iwashita (2014) that peer tutoring enabled learners to get the chance to engage in meaning-focused input and output, which is likely to provide support for their language development. From a number of theoretical perspectives—output hypothesis by Swain (2000) and interaction hypothesis by Long (1996) to input hypothesis by Krashen (1982)—English language learning via peer tutoring proves to be of the utmost importance. The first two theories underline the significance of language output, interaction, and input as the major activators in the language learners' acquisition and suggest that peer tutoring can create a conducive environment in which learners can be active in the processes of input, interaction, and thus increase their opportunities for language development.

Empirical Evidence

The benefits of peer tutoring have subsequently attracted the attention of many researchers to further explore this benefit, especially in the scope of its contribution to language learning and English language education. Among others, a systematic review study by Thurston, Duran, Cunningham, Blanch, and Topping (2010) discovered that most of the studies had detected a positive result from peer tutoring interventions on the language skill of the students in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Later still, Hong, Choi, and Chai (2021) evaluated the effectiveness of peer tutoring against its influence on the oral communication ability of primary school students. The study showed that the students who received an intervention program of peer tutoring showed significantly high scores in the speaking ability than that of other control groups. Similarly, Zarei and Rahimi (2017) evaluated the effect of peer tutoring on the writing proficiency of EFL learners and observed that those in groups of randomly assigned peers showed statistically significant improvement in their writing proficiency. Some effective affective outcomes of the learner that peer tutoring might support include greater motivation, self-efficacy, and enjoyment of learning (Kalkan & Smith, 2021). The study by Fantuzzo et al. (1992) had shown that involvement in a peer tutoring program for the language learning task increased motivation and involvement. Further, peer tutoring is associated with a higher degree of learner autonomy and self-regulation brought into the learning process of the English language (Suryani and Widiastuti, 2020).

Cultural and Contextual Factors

What constitutes a decisive factor, though, is that cultural and contextual factors that can actually affect peer tutoring in the English language learning process may indeed influence the results of peer tutoring. Li, Zhuang, and Yuan (2021) investigated the influence of cultural norms on Chinese learners' perception and experience concerning peer tutoring in an EFL context. Their findings indicated that, despite the numerous reports of positive experiences, a few participants raised matters to do with power dynamics, face-saving, and exposure of peer criticism, all of which were signalling cultural factors that might play out in peer tutoring programs in influencing their successes. The peer-tutoring approaches and methods to be used, therefore, should be designed bearing in mind that the approaches and methods used in peer tutoring interventions have to make sense within the context and relevance. In so doing, consideration of the exact context and cultural background of the learners will ensure both success and relevance (Kagan et al., 1999). The current study intends to answer this question through an evaluation of peer tutoring in English language learning within a primary school setup, against the background of their heterogeneous linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Research questions and context

Research Question 1: What is the impact of a 12-week peer tutoring intervention on the English language proficiency of primary school students from diverse linguistic backgrounds?

Research Question 2: How does the peer-tutoring programme influence the self-confidence, motivation, communication, and interpersonal skills of both tutors and tutees involved in the intervention?

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Method

Participants

The sample size comprised 200 students from a primary school within the United Kingdom. Students in such a school range between 9 and 11 years, hence carrying with them diversification of their linguistic backgrounds. Importantly, such diversity assured the study to establish the effects of the tutoring program with a sample that enrolled in a wide range of language experiences and thus assured that the study covers the intervention efficacy more completely.

Pairing Process

The 200 students who participated were further subdivided into 100 pairs of students to explore the dynamics in the tutoring program. Each pair was formed of one tutor and one tutee, selected from amongst the students, academically most proficient in the subject being taught. Factoring in the pairing process, therefore, included age, linguistic background, and even academic performance, so it could get and make pairs as homogeneous as possible, therefore, enhancing a better effect on the tutoring process.

Tutor Selection Criteria

The criteria used to select the tutors included: academic performance of the tutors, especially in areas where the tutoring was to be given. In that case, the selection of tutors was based on criteria of whether they can communicate and, besides this, finding evidence that tutors are motivated for the program. The selection process had the intention of identifying a tutee who could be in a good position to help his or her tutee towards learning as well as being a positive model.

Tutee Selection Criteria

Tutees were determined based on the need for academic support within the subject area of the tutoring program. The process of selection was based on the student's current academic performance and teacher recommendation. The study sought to establish the impact of the tutoring program on the overall academic performance of the tutees and to identify students from which the project could pick those who needed its services most.

Pairing Procedure

The selection of tutors and tutees took place in a systematic way. The process did also take into consideration the age of the student, his or her linguistic background, and how they performed education-wise concerning the respective areas they belong to. This was in view to make pairs of tutors with complementary skills and experiences, which would then empower them to give more effective, better-personalised support according to the particular needs of the individual tutee. This pairing procedure was

executed intending to provide maximum capacity for academic improvement and promote a positive learning environment for both participants.

Procedure

In the pre-test/post-test design, all the participants had the opportunity to participate in a pre-test before the intervention. Pre-testing took the form of English language proficiency (Cambridge Young Learners English Tests) carried out using a standardised test. Following the pre-test, learners participated in a 12-week peer-tutoring program consisting of 90-minute weekly sessions in which tutors and tutees engaged in activities designed to improve their proficiency levels in the English language. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests to examine the differences in English language proficiency scores before and after the intervention.

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Results

The outcome of the study will reveal great insights into the efficacy of the tutoring program on English Language Proficiency to both tutors and tutees. The data revealed improvements in academic performance that were both significant for tutees and significant for learning and learning communication skills among the tutors.

Quantitative Results

The results showed a significant improvement in the participants' English language proficiency after the 12-week peer tutoring intervention. The paired t-test presented a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ($t(199) = -15.26, p < .001$). The mean score on the post-test was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score. Descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test scores are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	54.12	8.44
Post-test	62.45	8.63

Further to the dissection of the outcomes, the sample was divided into two groups: the tutors and the tutees. The descriptive statistics for the tutors are presented in Table 2, while those for the tutees are presented in Table 3.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Tutors' Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	56.30	8.21
Post-test	64.20	8.01

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Tutees' Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation
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Pre-test	51.94	8.02
Post-test	60.70	8.31

Qualitative Results

Besides the quantitative findings, this research sought to collect qualitative data through interviews and questionnaires whose questions are described to have elicited information on subjects' experiences and perceptions of the program in an explanation-oriented presentation. After following the identified themes from the thematic analysis of these data, some of the major themes that emerged included increased self-confidence and motivation in being able to build a strong tutor-tutee relationship. The results hold good to show how much the 12-week long peer tutoring intervention is effectual for both the tutees and the tutors towards furthering the proficiency of the learners in the English language. This great leap in post-test scores and the overwhelming number of upbeat feedbacks from the people they interviewed strongly indicated that the tutorial program contributed quite effectively to enhancing the learning experience and outcome for students. The study also used interviews and questionnaires, in conjunction with the quantitative type, to find out the experiences and perceptions of the program according to the participants. The thematic analysis of these data revealed several key themes, which are discussed in more detail below.

Increased Self-Confidence

There was an increase in self-confidence, reportedly from both tutors and tutees, with regard to their participation in the tutoring program. That means the students felt that the level of being able and self-assured to learn and understand English was increased by the one-to-one guidance and support provided by the tutors. They also go on to remark that with each semester of teaching and reinforcing English language concepts with the tutee, they felt much more confident about their own academic abilities.

Enhanced Motivation

Another of the key themes that was evinced from the qualitative data among the tutors and tutees involved in the peer-tutoring program was enhanced motivation. Factually, tutees mentioned that they had been made more active and interested in learning English through peer tutoring. What the learners particularly cherished, with regard to these opportunities, were the chances of receiving individual attention and working at one's own pace—according to the learners, this very much helped foster autonomy in the learning process and gave ownership to the learners. Most of the tutees attributed this enhanced motivation to the supportive and encouraging environment that their tutors created, whereby learning became enjoyable and intimidating situations reduced to minimal. It also ensures a better environment for asking questions or making mistakes, which led to the more effective way in which language skill development was being realised. Tutors also noted that their role in helping their tutees succeed was a motivating factor for their own learning. They further explained that the way of explanation of the concepts and guiding the tutees in the systemised way helped gain a better understanding of the subject matter and grasp the depth of English language concepts.

Teaching also had the added benefit of forcing them to really think critically about the material and be able to articulate the same material to the tutees. These tutors also perceived that they were being successful, raised their self-efficacy, and saw they were receiving recognition and positive feedback from their tutees. This, in turn, raised a deeper sense of responsibility and commitment towards their own learning, since they really had to be effective role models and mentors for their tutees. The qualitative data, on the other hand, show that peer tutoring undoubtedly helped boost the English language skills of both tutors and tutees and

even added to their newfound motivation toward learning. The peer tutoring sessions had developed a positive attitude in students toward the learning of English in the warm and supportive environment constructed by them, at the same time empowering students as owners of their learning by owning up to taking responsibility for their academic journey.

Development of Strong Tutor-Tutee Relationships

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Another pertinent feature that came out in the qualitative data meant to offer great help in realising the peer-tutoring program was the theme of good tutor-tutee relationships. The participants described a setup of one-on-one tutoring as an opportunity to develop a relationship with a partner, be known, and therefore they could offer respect and be trusted. It is in the process, in spending time and working together to one common cause, that the tutors and tutees were able to learn much about the strengths, weaknesses, and methods of learning by their partners, in turn making them understand and appreciate their partners better than if they were working separately. This went on to help improve a very conducive learning environment where tutees would ask questions and seek clarification with freedom and without being judged or criticised. All the tutees had agreed that the tutors did treat them with empathy and patience, and so they were always able to support the tutees, hence making them feel that they are able to support and encourage them in their learning journey. Such nurturing allows taking risks and experimenting with language, hence being able to better develop the English language skills. This reflects higher tutor commitment toward the tutees' success—a reflection of the responsibility that success of the tutees places on their tutor. The motivation is from an emotional connection; the tutors report a lot of preparedness and, therefore, in the tutors' sessions, they communicate more effectively and have been reported to be adaptive and flexible to the teaching methods and materials according to the tutees' needs. In addition, the very good relationships developed between the tutor and the tutees yielded very strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to listen actively, show empathy, and solve problems, which are considered key in both academic and social circumstances. Effective relations in the tutor-tutee, as developed, were an essential factor of effectiveness in the peer-tutoring program. The relations gave a learning environment that supported the two people who worked together for the success of the students in their academic life and the individual person. Their influence reveals the importance that solid relationships hold in educational setups, and even much more when it comes to learning English.

Improved Communication and Interpersonal Skills

In both tutors and tutees, the tutoring program developed communication skills and interpersonal relations. Based on the observation, the tutors felt that they should adapt their communication style to ensure that they gave effective information and feedback to their tutees. More precisely, this enabled tutors to acquire more enhanced listening skills and become more emphatic in problem-solving. On the other hand, tutees benefited from more opportunities to enhance their language skills in a non-judgmental environment and, hence, improved their general communication skills. The qualitative findings really added to the positive benefits of the 12-week peer tutoring intervention to tutors and tutees. Some of the above-discussed themes, including increased self-confidence, motivated learning, strong tutor-student relationships, improved communication, and interpersonal skills, bring to light the benefits of the tutoring program to the learning of students and outcomes.

Discussion

Peer tutoring is one of the approaches highly recommended for the improvement of English among UK primary school learners. In fact, a recent study that covered a 12-week tutoring program clearly showed that peer tutoring is a strategy linked to very big gains for both tutors and tutees. This validates previous researches that concluded the fact that peer tutoring has a lot of benefits (Topping, 1996; Roscoe and Chi, 2007). The study also found that being in the program had raised the confidence and motivation level of the participants. This supports previous studies on the linkage of peer tutoring to the enhanced efficacy for learners (Bandura, 1997; Van Keer and Verhaeghe, 2005). In fact, it is the tutors who had a fundamental role in facilitating these gains because of the supportive learning atmosphere (Topping, 2005). Another theme that was strong in the qualitative findings was that of positive tutor-tutee relationships. We will need to ensure that children learn; that has to take place within the scope of positive tutor-tutee relationships (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). Recent research relayed the same message when strong relationships brought on board by peer tutor-tutee interactions brought impressive improvements in their posttest scores. Both groups reported to have enhanced their communication and superior interpersonal skills following their participation in the peer-tutoring program. Earlier research has confirmed such programs increase the communication skills of the people involved in an activity that is, by now, known to be an essential life skill as much as an academic one (Roscoe & Chi, 2007) in which people involved in it develop communication skills. The findings are, therefore, an indication that peer tutoring can prove a powerful way of boosting English language proficiency amongst students at the primary school level, especially when they come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Clearly, more investigation is needed to be able to guide us on better predictions of the longer-term effects of such programs in a diversity of subject areas. Apart from the stated academic development, peer tutoring is seen to offer more other values. This can develop the skill of communication and confidence in both the helpers and the students. Nevertheless, there must be such kind of encouragement for the teachers. The study also illustrated that the participating learners were able to experience increased motivation and self-efficacy, with consistent results underlined by past research (Bandura, 1997; Van Keer & Verhaeghe, 2005). In fact, support by tutors in creating a supportive environment was regarded as core to bring about these gains in confidence (Topping, 2005). Finally, it appears that one of the hallmark themes of the data analysis producing this outcome for which there is strong agreement in the literature was the building of strong tutor-tutee relationships (Pianta et al., 2012). The promising results from the experiment showed that through the process of peer tutoring, a conducive learning environment was actually created, which helped the students increase their post-test scores because of their improved interpersonal relationships with each other. In fact, both parties involved in such programs reported massive improvements in their communication skills (Roscoe and Chi 2007).

These are profound findings in the sense that effective communication is a prerequisite for general learning success and, in particular, the achievement of life goals (Riggio, 2017). The implications of these findings on educators undertaking research on improving English language proficiency among primary school students of different language backgrounds through peer tutoring interventions are massive. The long-term studies on academic performances need to be undertaken for more judgment into the effectiveness of these programs when subjects are more than one. It is observed that being a tutor pays him some advantages too, like good confidence booster and better interpersonal skill development. Effective tutoring activity requires the proper training and assistance, which is aimed at acquiring appropriate proficiency in facilitating effective learning among the tutees (Hogan and Tudge 1999). Along with benefiting the students they teach,

tutors can also benefit from more open communication and better interpersonal skills. Employers find these to be very valuable skills, which would enhance the career prospects of the tutor.

Limitations

Despite its strengths, the current study's weakness includes the limitation that the sample was drawn only from one primary school. Therefore, the generalization of the findings may be compromised. Replications of this in larger and more diverse samples are encouraged. The qualitative data were mostly based on self-reported measures and might have involved the social desirability bias. Multiple sources of data may be drawn for a more comprehensive inference about effects, including teacher reports and classroom observations.

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Conclusion

English is one of the key skills for the academic success of young learners; however, approaches centring mainly on the teacher could be less motivating than those involving the pupils' peers. The objective of the present study, therefore, was to find out how peer tutoring can effectively be used as an engaging means to enhance the level of proficiency in the acquisition of the English language among primary school students. The result was that students taking part in the 12-week peer-tutoring program developed increased proficiency in the English language. Additionally, the interview and the questionnaires results from the qualitative data showed that both tutors and tutees have positive perceptions of the program. These included increased motivation and interpersonal skills together with enhanced self-confidence. There were also identified strong relationships between a tutor and tutee as being pivotal in providing a conducive learning environment for optimised academic success. The findings thus reinforce the tenability of implementing peer-tutoring strategies in primary schools with the purpose of heightening learners' foundational English language skills and overall educational outcomes. This was quite evident from the recent study, which revealed that peer-tutoring interventions at primary school levels are beneficial to increase the educational outcomes enormously, especially on the part of the students who belong to diverse linguistic backgrounds. From practice, it has been evident that such programs for intervention have been successful in developing language proficiency and life skills. According to a number of findings from this study, it could be helpful to the entire English language education community and some policymakers intending to revolutionise or enhance English language education. In other words, peer tutoring may help develop a more innovative and supportable learning environment for young learners, where their specific needs may be met only when this approach is incorporated with other student-centred approaches. This research further underscores more exploration and assessment of modern methodologies in teaching to enable English language education to continue being effective, inclusive, and responsive in a diversified global context.

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