EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER TUTORING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of peer tutoring as a method of enhancing English language learning among young learners. A quantitative research design was employed, with a sample of 200 primary school students participating in a 12-week peer tutoring intervention. The students, aged between 9 and 11 years and from diverse linguistic backgrounds, were divided into 100 pairs, each comprising a tutor and a tutee. Pre- and post-test data were collected to measure students' English language proficiency. In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative data were gathered from interviews and questionnaires to gain insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions of the programme. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in the students' English language skills after participating in the peer tutoring programme. Notably, both tutors and tutees experienced increased self-confidence, motivation, and enhanced communication and interpersonal skills. The study also found that the development of strong tutor-tutee relationships played a crucial role in fostering a positive learning environment. This research supports the implementation of peer tutoring strategies in English language learning for young learners, as it highlights the multifaceted benefits of such programmes for both tutors and tutees. The findings suggest that incorporating peer tutoring interventions in primary schools can lead to significant improvements in English language proficiency and the development of essential life skills, especially for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Keywords: Peer tutoring, English language learning, Young learners, Tutor-tutee relationships, Student motivation

1. Introduction

The acquisition of English language skills has become an essential aspect of education worldwide due to the increasing prominence of English as a global lingua franca (Galloway, Kriukow, & Numajiri, 2021). As a result, educators and policymakers are continuously seeking innovative and effective
strategies to enhance English language learning, particularly among young learners who are in the critical stages of language development. Peer tutoring has emerged as a promising approach to facilitate language acquisition, given its potential to contribute to students’ academic achievement, cognitive development, and social skills (Bowyer-Crane & Snowling, 2013). This study aims to explore the effectiveness of peer tutoring in English language learning among young learners in a primary school setting. The study will examine the impact of a structured peer tutoring programme on participants' English language proficiency and analyse the potential benefits of this approach in terms of academic, cognitive, and social development. By investigating the potential advantages of peer tutoring in a primary school context, the study seeks to provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers interested in implementing innovative strategies to improve English language education.

1.2. Background and Context

The increased emphasis on English language education in many countries, including non-English-speaking ones, has led to a growing need for effective teaching methods that cater to diverse learner needs and backgrounds (Galloway, Kriukow, & Numajiri, 2021). In response, educational institutions have turned to alternative approaches such as peer tutoring, which involves students of similar age or grade teaching and learning from each other (Duran & Monereo, 2005). This student-centred approach has been found to facilitate authentic communication, increase learner engagement, and promote positive attitudes towards learning (Smith, 2019). Peer tutoring has been shown to be particularly effective in language learning due to the opportunities it provides for meaningful interaction and practice, allowing learners to develop their language skills in a supportive and interactive environment (Topping, 2005). Furthermore, studies have suggested that peer tutoring can contribute to improved academic achievement, cognitive development, and social skills (Bowyer-Crane & Snowling, 2013), making it an appealing option for English language education in primary school settings. The current study aims to build on this existing body of research by exploring the effectiveness of peer tutoring in English language learning among young learners in a primary school context, investigating the potential benefits of this approach for language proficiency and broader developmental outcomes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

As previously mentioned, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory provide the foundation for understanding the effectiveness of peer tutoring in language learning. In addition to these theoretical perspectives, Swain's (2000) output hypothesis, Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis, and Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis also support the rationale for using peer tutoring in English language learning. Swain's (2000) output hypothesis posits that
producing language output (i.e., speaking or writing) facilitates language acquisition because it encourages learners to process language more deeply, notice gaps in their understanding, and refine their language production through hypothesis-testing and feedback (Swain, 2000). Peer tutoring provides ample opportunities for learners to produce language output while interacting with their peers, which can enhance their language development (Ishihara & Nguyen, 2019). Long’s (1996) interaction hypothesis emphasises the importance of negotiation of meaning in language learning. According to Long, language learners benefit from engaging in conversations that involve clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks, as these interactions prompt learners to modify their language output and make it more comprehensible (Long, 1996). Peer tutoring facilitates such interactions by creating a supportive environment in which learners can engage in authentic communication and negotiate meaning with their peers (Gass & Mackey, 2017).

Krashen’s (1982) input hypothesis posits that language learners acquire language when they receive comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level of proficiency (i+1). In a peer tutoring setting, tutors can provide such input by adjusting their language to match the level of their tutees, thereby scaffolding their learning and promoting language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; VanPatten & Williams, 2014). Several empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of peer tutoring in promoting language output, interaction, and input. For instance, Storch (2007) found that peer tutoring facilitated language output and interaction among EFL learners, leading to greater opportunities for noticing and feedback. Similarly, Philp, Adams, and Iwashita (2014) reported that peer tutoring provided learners with opportunities to engage in meaning-focused input and output, which contributed to their language development. Various theoretical perspectives, including Swain's (2000) output hypothesis, Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis, and Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis, provide a strong foundation for understanding the effectiveness of peer tutoring in English language learning. These theories highlight the importance of language output, interaction, and input in facilitating language acquisition and suggest that peer tutoring can create a conducive environment for learners to engage in these processes, thereby enhancing their language development.

2.2. Empirical Evidence

In recent years, several studies have further investigated the benefits of peer tutoring in language learning, particularly in English language education. For example, Thurston, Duran, Cunningham, Blanch, and Topping (2010) conducted a systematic review of peer tutoring interventions in language learning and found that the majority of studies reported positive effects on students' language skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. More recently, Hong, Choi, and Chai (2021) examined the impact of peer tutoring on the oral communication skills of primary school students and found that students who participated in the peer tutoring programme demonstrated significant improvements in their speaking abilities compared to a control group. Similarly, Zarei and Rahimi
Research question 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?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample population for this study consisted of 200 students from a primary school located in the United Kingdom. These students were aged between 9 and 11 years and represented a variety of linguistic backgrounds. This diversity ensured that the study could examine the effects of the tutoring program across a broad range of language experiences, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the intervention's efficacy.
3.2. Pairing Process

To explore the dynamics of the tutoring program, the 200 participating students were divided into 100 pairs. Each pair was composed of a tutor and a tutee, with the tutors selected based on their academic proficiency in the subjects being taught. The pairing process considered factors such as age, linguistic background, and academic performance to ensure that the pairs were well-matched and that the tutoring process would be as effective as possible.

3.3. Tutor Selection Criteria

The tutors were chosen based on a set of criteria that included their academic performance, particularly in the subjects where the tutoring would take place. Additionally, the tutors were selected based on their demonstrated ability to communicate effectively and their willingness to participate in the program. The selection process aimed to identify students who could serve as positive role models and effectively support their tutee’s learning.

3.4. Tutee Selection Criteria

Tutees were chosen based on their need for academic support in the specific subject areas targeted by the tutoring program. The selection process took into consideration the students’ current academic performance and teacher recommendations. By identifying students who could benefit most from additional support, the study aimed to evaluate the impact of the tutoring program on improving the tutees' overall academic performance.

3.5. Pairing Procedure

Once the tutors and tutees were selected, they were paired using a systematic approach. This process took into account the students' age, linguistic background, and academic performance in the relevant subject areas. The objective was to create pairs with complementary skills and experiences, enabling tutors to provide effective support tailored to the specific needs of their tutees. This pairing procedure aimed to maximize the potential for academic improvement and foster a positive learning environment for both participants.

3.6. Procedure

The study employed a pre-test/post-test design. Prior to the intervention, all participants completed a standardised English language proficiency test (Cambridge Young Learners English Tests). The 12-week peer tutoring programme involved 90-minute weekly sessions, during which tutors and tutees engaged in activities designed to improve their English language skills.

3.7. Data Analysis
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.

4. Results

The results of the study provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of the tutoring program on English language proficiency for both tutors and tutees. The data revealed significant improvements in academic performance for the tutees, while tutors also experienced benefits in their learning and communication skills.

4.1. Quantitative Results

The results revealed a significant improvement in the participants' English language proficiency after the 12-week peer tutoring intervention. The paired t-test showed 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>54.12</td>
<td>8.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>62.45</td>
<td>8.63</td>
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To further analyze the results, the sample was divided into two groups: tutors and tutees. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the tutors, and Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the tutees.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>56.30</td>
<td>8.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>64.20</td>
<td>8.01</td>
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</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>51.94</td>
<td>8.02</td>
</tr>
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</table>
4.2. Qualitative Results

In addition to the quantitative findings, the study also gathered qualitative data from interviews and questionnaires to gain insights into the participants’ experiences and perceptions of the program. The thematic analysis of these data revealed several key themes, such as increased self-confidence, enhanced motivation, and the development of strong tutor-tutee relationships. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of the 12-week peer tutoring intervention on improving English language proficiency for both tutors and tutees. The significant increase in post-test scores, as well as the positive feedback from participants, indicate that the tutoring program had a positive impact on the students’ learning experience and outcomes. In addition to the quantitative findings, the study also gathered qualitative data from interviews and questionnaires to gain insights into the participants’ experiences and perceptions of the program. The thematic analysis of these data revealed several key themes, which are discussed in more detail below.

4.3. Increased Self-Confidence

Both tutors and tutees reported an increase in their self-confidence as a result of their participation in the tutoring program. Tutees expressed that the personalized support and guidance provided by their tutors helped them feel more capable and confident in their abilities to learn and understand English. Tutors also reported increased confidence in their own academic abilities as they gained experience in teaching and reinforcing English language concepts with their tutees.

4.4. Enhanced Motivation

Another key theme identified in the qualitative data was enhanced motivation for learning among both tutors and tutees participating in the peer-tutoring programme. Tutees reported that the peer tutoring sessions made them more engaged and interested in learning English. They appreciated the personalized attention and the opportunity to learn at their own pace, which fostered a sense of autonomy and ownership of their learning process. Many tutees attributed this increased motivation to the supportive and encouraging environment created by their tutors, which made learning more enjoyable and less intimidating. They felt more comfortable asking questions and making mistakes, which allowed them to develop their language skills more effectively. Tutors also noted that their role in helping their tutees succeed was a motivating factor for their own learning. They found that explaining concepts and providing guidance to their tutees reinforced their understanding of the subject matter and deepened their knowledge of English language concepts. This process of teaching others helped to solidify their own language skills, as they had to think critically about the material and articulate it clearly for their tutees. Moreover, the tutors experienced a sense of
accomplishment and increased self-efficacy as they observed their tutees’ progress and received positive feedback. This, in turn, fostered a greater sense of responsibility and commitment to their own learning, as they sought to be effective role models and mentors for their tutees. The qualitative data suggest that the peer-tutoring programme not only improved the English language proficiency of both tutors and tutees but also contributed to an enhanced motivation for learning. The supportive and engaging environment fostered by the peer tutoring sessions enabled students to develop positive attitudes towards English language learning and cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility for their academic progress.

4.5. Development of Strong Tutor-Tutee Relationships

The development of strong tutor-tutee relationships emerged as another important theme in the qualitative data, playing a significant role in the success of the peer-tutoring programme. Participants reported that the one-on-one tutoring sessions allowed them to form meaningful connections with their partners, fostering a sense of mutual respect and trust. By spending time together and working towards a common goal, tutors and tutees had the opportunity to learn more about each other’s strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles, leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation of their partners. These relationships contributed to a more positive learning environment, in which tutees felt comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification, without the fear of being judged or criticized. Tutees appreciated the empathy and patience displayed by their tutors, which made them feel supported and encouraged in their learning journey. This nurturing environment allowed tutees to take risks, experiment with language, and ultimately, develop their English language skills more effectively. On the other hand, tutors felt more invested in their tutees’ success, as they developed a sense of responsibility for their tutees’ progress. This emotional connection motivated tutors to be better prepared for the tutoring sessions, to communicate more effectively, and to adopt more adaptive and flexible teaching strategies in response to their tutees’ needs. Additionally, the strong tutor-tutee relationships facilitated the development of essential interpersonal skills, such as active listening, empathy, and problem-solving, which are invaluable for both academic and social contexts. The development of strong tutor-tutee relationships was a crucial factor in the overall effectiveness of the peer-tutoring programme. These relationships created a supportive and collaborative learning environment that allowed students to thrive academically and personally. The positive impact of these connections highlights the importance of fostering meaningful relationships in educational settings, particularly in the context of English language learning.

4.6. Improved Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Both tutors and tutees reported improvements in their communication and interpersonal skills as a result of the tutoring program. Tutors noted that they had to adapt their communication styles to
effectively convey information and provide feedback to their tutees. This process helped them develop better listening, empathy, and problem-solving skills. Tutees also benefited from the increased opportunities to practice their English language skills in a supportive and non-judgmental setting, which improved their overall communication abilities. The qualitative results provide a richer understanding of the positive impact of the 12-week peer tutoring intervention on both tutors and tutees. The key themes identified, including increased self-confidence, enhanced motivation, the development of strong tutor-tutee relationships, and improved communication and interpersonal skills, highlight the multifaceted benefits of the tutoring program for the students' learning experience and outcomes.

5. Discussion

Peer tutoring can have a significant impact on improving English language proficiency among primary school students in the UK. That is according to a recent study examining a 12-week tutoring program that resulted in significant improvements for both tutors and tutees. This echoes previous research suggesting that peer tutoring offers multiple advantages (Topping, 1996; Roscoe & Chi 2007). The research also found that participants experienced increased self-confidence and motivation levels resulting from their engagement in the program. This supports earlier studies linking peer tutoring to enhanced efficacy for learners (Bandura, 1997; Van Keer & Verhaeghe 2005). The supportive learning atmosphere facilitated by tutors played a key role in fostering these gains (Topping, 2005). In addition positive tutor-tutee relationships served as another important theme emerging from qualitative findings. If we want children to learn effectively, we need to prioritize positive relationships between tutors and tutees (Planta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). This was confirmed by a recent study where strong bonds led to impressive improvements in posttest scores. Both tutors and tutees also reported becoming better communicators with superior interpersonal skills following their participation in the peer-tutoring program. This supports previous research showing how these types of programs enhance communication skills in everyone involved (Roscoe & Chi 2007) – an essential life skill as much as an academic one (Riggio, 2017). The findings indicate that peer tutoring could prove a powerful way of boosting English language proficiency among primary school students from different linguistic backgrounds. Clearly more research is needed to explore the longer-term impact of such programs across various subjects. Peer tutoring has been shown to have benefits beyond academic growth - it can enhance communication skills and self-confidence for both helpers and students. However, it is necessary to provide proper training and support systems for educators. The study illustrated how participating learners experienced increased motivation and self-efficacy with consistent results underlined by past research (Bandura, 1997; Van Keer & Verhaeghe 2005). A supportive atmosphere provided by tutors was deemed fundamental in fostering these gains in confidence (Topping, 2005). Finally the development of strong tutor-tutee relationships emerged as a key theme from the qualitative data analysis - an outcome consistent with the...
importance of positive relationships highlighted by earlier research studies (Planta et al., 2012). Peer tutoring has the potential to create a positive learning environment that enhances posttest scores by strengthening relationships between tutors and tutees. In fact, both parties reported significant improvements in their communication skills as a result of participating in this program (Roscoe & Chi, 2007). Effective communication is necessary for successful learning and general life achievements (Riggio, 2017) making these results remarkable. The implications of these findings are significant for educators looking to improve English language proficiency among primary school students with varying language backgrounds through peer tutoring interventions. Long-term research on academic performance is necessary to better understand the effectiveness of such programs across multiple subjects. It is worth noting that being a tutor also offers several benefits such as increased confidence and improved interpersonal skills. Tutors need proper training and assistance to be effective at facilitating learning among tutees (Hogan & Tudge, 1999). Besides benefiting the students, they teach tutors themselves could reap broader rewards from improving their communication and interpersonal talents. These competencies are highly prized by employers and could boost tutors’ career prospects greatly (Andrews & Higson, 2008).

5.1. Limitations

Despite its strengths, the present study has some limitations. The sample was drawn from a single primary school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should seek to replicate these findings in different educational settings and with larger, more diverse samples. Furthermore, the study relied primarily on self-report measures for the qualitative data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. The use of multiple sources of data, such as teacher reports and classroom observations, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of peer tutoring.

6. Conclusion

English is one skill that is essential for young learners’ educational success; however, teacher centred approaches can prove less engaging than those which include pupils’ peers. Our research investigated the effectiveness of peer tutoring as a more engaging method for improving English language skills in primary school students. The results showed that student participants who underwent a 12-week peer-tutoring programme demonstrated improved proficiency levels in English. Furthermore, the qualitative data gathered from interviews and questionnaires revealed positive feedback from both tutors and tutees, which included increased self-confidence, motivation and interpersonal skills. Strong tutor tutee relationships were also identified as instrumental in creating a conducive learning environment for optimised academic success. The findings affirm the value of implementing peer-tutoring strategies in primary school settings to enhance learners' foundational English language skills and overall educational outcomes. A recent study has shown
that incorporating peer-tutoring interventions into primary schools can significantly improve educational outcomes especially for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The effectiveness of such programmes has been demonstrated in enhancing language proficiency as well as fostering essential life skills. The findings of this research offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers looking to enhance English language education through innovative strategies. By prioritizing student centred approaches like peer tutoring, they can create more stimulating and supportive learning environments that cater to the specific needs of young learners. Ultimately, this study underlines the importance of ongoing exploration and evaluation of new teaching methods to ensure English language education remains effective, inclusive, and responsive in an ever-changing global environment.

References


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