

Enhancing Peer tutoring in ESL classes

PHAM TRAN MOC MIENG

Fundamentals Division, The University of Danang – Vietnam-Korea University of Information and Communication Technology, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: In the beginning, the article provides a definition of peer tutoring and describes its essential characteristics in designing the learner-oriented approach. The article continues by considering the factors influencing the effectiveness of peer tutoring for learners and teachers. In addition, it identifies the key benefits of peer tutoring, which are the improved academic results, enhanced communicative skills, more advanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills, greater self-confidence and collaboration, learner autonomy, and reduced teacher's load. Nevertheless, some disadvantages of peer tutoring, such as inconsistent quality of peer instruction, great dependency on the level of competence and engagement of learners, time management issues, inequality of learners' participation, and difficulty in assessing the results of learning, are identified. Consequently, several peer pairing and grouping models that can be used in ESL classes are offered, such as same-ability pairing, cross-ability pairing, reciprocal pairing, rotating pairing, fixed pairing, group peer tutoring and class-wide peer tutoring. Apart from that, the article considers many peer tutoring activities that may help improve learners' language skills. These activities should promote interaction between learners, provide learners with the opportunity to practice the language, and enhance learners' linguistic skills and soft skills. Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of assessment methods. Therefore, various types of assessment, including teacher assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment, should be considered.

Keywords: peer tutoring, definition, factors, influence, benefits, disadvantages, peer pairing and grouping models, activities, assessment methods, ESL classes

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I. INTRODUCTION

Based on my own teaching experience, it can be stated that Communicative Language Teaching is practiced in many ESL classes. This method is aimed at fostering the involvement of students in the process of interaction with the instructions provided by the teacher. Therefore, many classroom activities take place in a relaxed way using pairs and groups. On the other hand, the teacher is the dominant person in the process of transferring knowledge in many ESL classes, leaving less chances for independent development of knowledge on the part of the students. In some cases, teaching and learning take place in groups and pairs. Nevertheless, in those cases, the group and pair formation takes place spontaneously, depending on the preferences, gender or seats of the students. In this case, there will be great differences in language skills, responsibility and motivation among members of groups. In such a way, the level of involvement and participation among them will also be different. Some students will perform most of the work, while others will remain passive or depend on their partners. Moreover, this spontaneous group formation will not be enough for collaborative learning that requires long cooperation among group members, such as presentations, projects, video production, case study and digital products. Such collaborative learning presupposes coordination of activities, division of roles, supervision and support throughout the whole process. Frequent changes in pairing and grouping may lead to failure in the maintenance of cohesion, mutual responsibility and collaboration. The author suggests that the problem of inefficient learning can be solved through using the instructional strategy that allows being actively involved in knowledge acquisition, helps explain others what they know and develop different skills. Likely, such teaching will have a motivating effect, increase the efficiency of the learning process and lead to greater accomplishment of learners. The approach which will help solve the issue is peer tutoring and its advantages are outlined below. Peer tutoring may be considered as an effective pedagogical approach since it contributes to the development of numerous key skills required in the modern ESL learning setting.

II. RELATED STUDIES

Recent literature has presented a variety of articles that deal with the issue of peer tutoring. According to Bowman-Perrott et al. (2016), there was a systematic review of the impact of peer tutoring on the academic achievement, social skills, and language production of the English language learners. Nurhidayah Mohd Sharif et al. (2012) explored the impact of peer tutoring on the tertiary ESL learners and provided recommendations

regarding a series of classroom activities that might be used in conducting peer tutoring. Elena A. Makarova (2018) suggested a peer tutoring model for teaching speaking skills and further instructional procedures and activities to assist in providing speaking instruction. Kate Tzu-Ching Chen and Alison Yi-Chen Tsai (2015) examined the effects of peer tutoring on elementary EFL students considering three aspects, such as academic achievement, learning motivation, and learning attitudes. Phung Dao and Kim McDonough (2018) conducted research concerning the influence of learners' English proficiency on peer interaction from the perspective of learners' engagement from cognitive, social, and affective perspectives. Besides, Minh Hue Nguyen (2013) analyzed how Vietnamese EFL students scaffolded each other in completing a collaborative oral presentation. The article was mostly devoted to the forms of peer scaffolding, perceptions of peer support as well as the role of peer scaffolding in developing speaking skills and collaborative competence. Recently, Cuong Huy Pham and Nguyen Thien Duyen Ngo (2025) conducted research about the experience of university students functioning as peer tutors in the Vietnamese higher education setting. Besides evaluating learning outcomes, this study focused on the importance of learners' agency and emotions in the process of peer tutoring. Overall, all the above-mentioned articles provide much valuable information regarding the process of peer tutoring and its development in the educational environment, especially in ESL classes. Nevertheless, according to the author, the literature review lacks sufficient studies providing a comprehensive description of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of peer tutoring. It is also important to develop a list of activities that would facilitate the successful development of each skill of the English language. Besides, it is crucial to assess the effectiveness of peer tutoring and the learners' performance with proper methods.

III. DEFINITION AND FACTORS INFLUENCING PEER TUTORING

1. Definition

Peer Tutoring is a method where learners of comparable competence interact and help each other in achieving mutual objectives. By sharing information, exchanging experiences, working on problems together, and giving each other feedback, learners become proficient not only in acquiring knowledge about the subject but also in developing communication skills and critical thinking skills. As Topping (2005) says, "Peer learning can be described as the process of learning through mutual teaching and learning among peers or matched companions." Similarly, Boud, Cohen, and Sampson (2001) suppose, "Peer learning is a learning strategy where learners learn together with and from each other without the presence of a teacher." Moreover, Falchikov (2001) defines that "Peer learning is a process in which students learn by teaching, supporting, and assessing each other."

2. Factors influencing Peer tutoring

2.1 Learners' roles

According to Boud et al. (2001), in peer learning, learners play a very proactive role. They exchange information, ideas, give feedback to each other, support one another and work together to achieve certain learning outcomes. Throughout this process, learners acquire autonomy, critical thinking, communication skills and responsibility. Topping (2005) explains that learners play the roles of a learner and a tutor simultaneously. The explanation of some concepts, asking questions, giving feedback and helping peers not only helps them to support others in their learning process but also increases their knowledge and expertise. Similarly, Falchikov (2001) highlights that learners are partners in the process who are involved in tutoring, assessment, feedback and helping each other. Participation in such activities helps learners to become self-regulated, collaborative and confident. Topping & Ehly (1998) stress that learners are the main participants in the process. Being tutors and learners at the same time enables them to not only improve their academic achievements but also to develop such skills as communication and collaboration. Even though Vygotsky (1978) did not directly conduct research on the topic of peer learning, he claims that cognitive development can occur because of social interactions. Learners have an opportunity to perform better in the Zone of Proximal Development with the help of more capable people, like teachers and peers.

2.2 Teachers' roles

First, the teacher should prepare a proper learning environment and learning goals, select content and activities that will be used during peer tutoring. According to Boud et al. (2001), it is crucial to use proper strategies of pairing and grouping, to assign roles and to plan proper activities. These are the main aspects that influence the effectiveness of peer learning. The teacher creates the conditions for interaction and support in the Zone of Proximal Development based on Vygotsky (1978). In other words, the teacher does not answer but gives chances to students for acquiring new information through questioning, prompts and collaboration. Before beginning the process of peer learning, the teacher should teach learners how to collaborate. Explanation of the concept, questioning, feedback, listening, cooperation and conflict resolution are the required skills before beginning the process. According to Topping (2005), the preparation for the collaboration makes the process

more effective. Throughout the process of peer learning, the teacher observes the process and identifies possible problems, motivates all learners to participate and corrects any imbalance between activities and collaboration. The intervention of the teacher should be minimized and provided only when it is required. Furthermore, the teacher should evaluate both learners' achievements and the quality of the peer learning process. These can be done by observation, providing feedback, using rubrics, self-assessment and peer assessment. Feedback from the teacher is very important for proper learning strategies, according to Falchikov (2001). Moreover, it is important for teachers to ensure that there is an environment created in which the learners feel free to express themselves, accept failures as part of the learning experience, and assist one another. The positive enabling environment boosts the confidence of learners in taking part in classroom activities, thus enabling teachers and learners to play their respective roles effectively during peer tutoring.

IV. BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES OF PEER TUTORING

1. Benefits

Explaining concepts, answering questions, and giving feedback help the learners to deepen their understanding of the material and develop a better comprehension of it. Simultaneously, being assisted brings learners benefits from the explanations which may be clearer than those in traditional teacher-led instruction. According to Topping (2005), peer learning results in higher academic performance in various subjects and at all levels of education. Activities associated with peer learning such as discussion, collaboration, and giving feedback facilitate the development of various communication skills, presentation skills, questioning skills, active listening skills, and expressive skills. Activities in the context of an ESL class will give the learners meaningful opportunities to apply English in real-life communicative situations thus developing language proficiency and communicative competence. To explain something to their peers or to give some feedback, learners must analyze information, evaluate different alternatives and choose the best way to present the ideas. As a result, learners will improve their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Besides, a positive learning environment fosters confidence when expressing one's opinion, makes learners less anxious about possible mistakes, and increases learning motivation and engagement. Bowman-Perrott et al. (2016) found that learners who participated in peer tutoring were more positively oriented towards learning than learners involved in traditional instruction. In addition to developing communication and presentation skills, peer tutoring helps learners to develop such collaborative skills as team working, task distribution, time management, conflict resolution, and responsibility. All these skills are crucial not only for academic success but also for professional practice. Also, through creating learning materials, explaining concepts, and helping their peers, learners develop their autonomy. Additionally, in large classes where English is taught as a second language, peer tutoring has been advantageous to the teachers, as it has created more chances for the teachers to interact individually with learners who need extra attention.

2. Disadvantages

Learners who have insufficient knowledge concerning the subject will give confusing answers, which will lead to misconceptions among other learners. Teachers need to ensure that learners understand what they should do before involving them in peer tutoring exercises. The success of peer tutoring depends on the competence, level of responsibility, good communication skills of learners and their readiness to work together. If any learner does not like working with other people, the whole process turns out to be useless. Often, there are situations of unbalanced distribution of tasks within cooperative learning groups since some students take a considerable part in their job while others rely only on their friends. Besides, in this case, it becomes difficult for teachers to assess learners separately. Moreover, due to the absence of permanent supervision by teachers, learners may communicate in their native language and will be distracted from studying during classes. Therefore, it is important for teachers to form appropriate pairs or groups, to organize relevant learning activities, to set criteria for evaluation and to control their performance. Indeed, there were several possible weaknesses that Topping (1998) revealed in peer learning including the lack of experience of learners in tutoring, the unwillingness of some students to participate in such activities because of the difference in proficiency and ability to learn, inconsistency of peer learning with regard to some curricula or types of learners, and opposition of parents owing to their insufficient knowledge about the effectiveness of this method. Generally, peer tutoring requires more preparation from teachers than traditional methods. One of the main disadvantages of this method relates to the way of assessment of learners' performance. That's why it is important to apply different ways of assessment such as teacher assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment.

V. APPLYING PEER TUTORING TO ESL CLASSES

1. Pairing and Grouping

1.1 Same - ability pairing

Same ability pairing implies grouping of individuals who have same abilities in a pair, so they can help and teach each other in explaining something without being permanent tutors or tutees. Consequently, both are treated equally and can communicate freely. Thus, this type of paired learning is convenient for discussions and oral activities.

1.2 Cross - ability pairing

It involves pairing of two learners where one of them is more competent and serves as peer tutor and another one is tutee. In this case, the latter learns from his peer tutor and gains certain skills. The only disadvantage of this type is the fact that less competent learner relies completely on his peer tutor and begins to learn from him. Nevertheless, interaction between the learners is positive due to exchange of ideas and feedback.

1.3 Reciprocal pairing

In this type of paired learning, the roles of peer tutor and tutee are switched among two learners according to the teacher's plan. As a result, both develop new skills of tutoring and explaining and become more independent.

1.4 Fixed pairing

These learners are assigned either the role of tutor or tutee at the beginning of the learning process and retain it throughout the process. The advantages of fixed pairing include facilitation of interaction between peers and control of learners' progress. Besides, there are some disadvantages of this type of peer tutoring. First, it puts them under too much pressure as one of them must be tutor throughout the whole process. Second, the learners who are usually tutees have fewer chances to show their competence and creativity.

1.5 Rotating Pairing

Rotating pairing is concerned with the rotation of the roles of the tutors and tutees from one lesson, period or week to another. Rotating pairing keeps the learners' attention and helps to reduce boredom. Furthermore, it helps to minimize the stress levels due to the change in the roles. One more advantage of using this type of grouping is that the teachers can assign the learners tasks based on their capabilities.

1.6 Group Peer Tutoring

The number of learners constituting a particular group varies depending on the nature of the task. There is no limit regarding the number of learners constituting the group. However, there is the provision for having more than two roles apart from the tutor's and tutee's roles. Some of the other roles include those of the presenter, secretary, editor, recorder and coordinator.

1.7 Class-Wide Peer Tutoring

Peer Tutoring in Class-Wide Peer Tutoring involves the engagement of all the learners in the peer tutoring activities at once. The roles of the learners are specified and then perform an activity collectively. There will be a class leader of the whole class who will coordinate and allocate various roles to the learners and evaluate their performances. This type of peer tutoring is appropriate where many learners are needed for handling big projects. However, the class leader should have good skills in communication and leadership to properly coordinate the learners' activities.

2. Activities for each language skills

2.1 Pronunciation

- Listen to identify the vowels, consonants, word stress, sentence stress and intonation.
- Listen to identify the sound pairs (minimal pairs).
- Listen and do gap-fill exercises.
- Listen and do pronunciation exercises.
- Listen and do dictation.
- Free conversations with native speakers.
- Discussions with native speakers and audio/video recordings after the analysis of pronunciation characteristics.

2.2 Grammar

- Create slides for presentation with grammar and tasks based on the syllabus of the course.
- Participation in grammar competitions or tests.
- Study of grammar in different kinds of games such as crosswords, songs, idioms, proverbs and others.
- Watching films and/or listening to songs to identify dialogues and grammatical structures in accordance with the syllabus of the course.

2.3 Listening Comprehension

- Identification of distractors/traps prior to listening.
- Analysis of keywords, context and culture prior to listening.
- Description of pictures prior to listening.
- Prediction of answers prior to listening.
- Taking notes while listening to the main information.
- Listening to the recordings related to the topics discussed in classes.
- Listening to songs, movies or discussion of native speakers.

2.4 Speaking

- Watching movies and songs to receive information about pronunciations, intonations and means of communication.
- Presentation of certain topics in English.
- Interviewing of one's partner/classmate from another group on certain topics.
- Performing role-play in English.
- Making debates, discussions and giving public speeches on certain topics.
- Communicating with native speakers in tourists' locations, cafes and other public places.
- Recording and analysis of pronunciation and communication skills.

2.5 Reading Comprehension

- Analysis of the topics of certain text passages.
- Prediction of the main idea of the passage based on its title.
- Scanning of texts and identifying of the main ideas of it.
- Finding the pieces of evidence in texts to support the answer.
- Matching the paragraphs to the proper topics/headings.
- Discussion of the problems with certain text passages.

2.6 Writing

- Information about emails, letters, essays, reports and articles.
- Analysis of writing prompts and idea formation.
- Creation of an outline before writing.
- Paragraphs correlated with the stages of writing process.
- Cooperative writing where all the participants complete different stages of the writing process.
- Writing on topics chosen or given by the teacher.
- Peer assessment of writing of others.

3. Assessment methods

3.1 Teacher assessment

Teacher assessment happens at different points in the learning process to measure the performance of the learners and thus be able to change whatever needs changing in the teaching activities. Teachers observe the groups or pairs of learners when doing activities and assess them based on their participation, communication, cooperation, explanation of concepts, helping peers, asking questions, and conflict resolution. The teacher then provides the learners with feedback either while they are doing the activities or soon after to help them change their learning strategies and improve collaboration. Moreover, there is summative assessment at the end of the topic or unit to determine whether the learners have achieved the learning outcomes. Summative assessment includes tests, exams, presentations, projects, and individual or group learning products. It is advised for the teachers in ESL classes design communicative activities that would help in assessing the learners' ability to use language effectively and not only their knowledge of grammatical rules. An assessment rubric may include completion of the task, correctness of the knowledge, language usage, communication and collaboration skills, peer support, and individual performance. Teachers may also assess the products created by the learners during peer learning activities which include essays, presentations, projects, videos, posters, reports, and classroom tasks.

3.2 Peer Assessment

One distinctive characteristic of peer learning is peer assessment, which differs from other types of learning. Students evaluate each other depending on some criteria concerning cooperation, responsibility, the quality of feedback, explanation, participation, and the ability to be helpful to the group. Peer assessment helps students develop skills of critical thinking, evaluation, and responsibility for oneself and for the whole team. Peer assessment gives students a chance to realize their abilities compared with other students and discover their strengths and weaknesses. It helps students to develop observation, analysis, constructive criticism and its acceptance. Information about peer assessment becomes an additional source for teachers to see how involved students are and help those that do not take active part in teamwork.

3.3 Self-Assessment

Self-assessment involves evaluation of the learners' experience throughout the process. Various instruments such as checklists, journals, and questionnaires may be used for this purpose. Some of the issues that might be covered by self-assessment include the following: the level of understanding of the learners, difficulties experienced by the learners, the amount of work done by the learners, help given by the learners to other students, and the objectives that are going to be achieved in the future learning process. Reflection enables the learners to assess their performance objectively, to identify those things that must be kept, and to learn about the areas in which they should improve. Consequently, self-assessment helps the learners to become independent, responsible for their own learning experience, and able to regulate themselves. Regular reflection on the processes associated with learning contributes to the development of an effective learning strategy, learning methods, and problem-solving skills among the learners. Self-assessment in the context of peer learning allows the learners to comprehend their roles in the groups and contribution to collaboration. Information gained from self-assessment will enable the teachers to observe the learners' development process, give advice, change the approach to teaching, and assist the learners where necessary. Nevertheless, to conduct self-assessment efficiently, the teachers should explain the criteria of self-assessment to the learners, encourage them to be objective and honest, and specify the primary aim of self-assessment, namely, development of the learners.

VI. CONCLUSION

Peer tutoring is used to provide the possibility for students to actively take part in the learning process by helping each other to advance academically. Peer tutoring gives an opportunity for students to gain such skills as critical thinking, linguistic abilities, personal presentation, cooperation, and argumentation. Moreover, peer tutoring supports the teacher to detect the weak sides of students and to develop their strong sides. Within the guidance of the teacher, conducting such activities as working in pairs and groups, making presentations, discussions, and problem solving, students actively search for information, acquire it, and use it. Therefore, it makes them more motivated to study and improves their academic results and attitude towards English learning as well. Apart from improving academic achievements, the regular use of peer tutoring also contributes to the development of friendly relationships among students as well as between teachers and students.

Furthermore, peer tutoring plays a significant role in the formation of a wide range of competencies required nowadays, which includes self-regulation, independent learning, communication, teamwork, problem solving, and critical thinking. While being a peer tutor or helping their peers, students must revise and organize their own knowledge, choose correct explanations, and provide proper feedback. Thus, while trying to help other students to understand the information, peer tutors improve and enrich their own knowledge. Moreover, the frequent discussions, active listening, and exchange of different opinions help to develop teamwork skills, respect to people's diversity, and responsibility to the team.

The teacher has a changeover role from merely being a source of information to being an enabler, organiser and facilitator of the learning by the learners through peer tutoring. The teacher will not be spending the whole-time teaching dispensing information, but he/she will get a chance to observe the degree of involvement of the learners in the learning process, monitor the progress of the learners, identify any issues and offer guidance where necessary. Peer tutoring thus helps in elevating the standard of teaching and creating a learner centered learning environment whereby the learners will be enabled to learn and grow holistically. Long term impacts of peer tutoring include improvement of the education in English language not only in terms of the quality but also the development of the transferable skills which are very important in future learning and working life of the learners. These skills include the skills such as autonomy, communication, cooperation, problem solving and adaptability which will enable the learners to meet the demands of the changing world.

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