

# **Peer-to-Peer Tutoring and its Challenge**

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## **Abstract:**

Peer tutoring is becoming a trend in most of the higher learning institutions. Peer tutoring is a learning method of instruction that involves students teaching other students. Students work in pairs to help one another learn a material or practice an academic task. Peer tutoring works best when students of different ability levels work together [1]. The purpose of this study is to discover the challenges faced by peer tutors during their peer tutoring sessions. A group of Cambridge A Levels and IB students are involved in peer-to-peer tutoring program initiated by Taylors' College Sri Hartamas. The observations and interviews revealed that the tutors faced difficulties and challenges during these sessions. Based on the feedbacks, generally the tutors experienced issues in areas of communications, time management, tutees' commitment and tutors' ability to explain well.

## **1. Introduction**

Peer teaching appoints students as teachers and is widely used in K-12 education, universities, and increasingly in medical schools. "Peer teachers can give lectures on assigned topics, lead problem-based learning session, and provide on one support to classmates in the form of tutoring [2]. The basic idea of peer-to-peer tutoring is student tutors coaching their peers and helping each other to learn through communication and sharing of knowledge among themselves. It can be in a group of 2 to 3 tutees or on a one-to-one tutoring session. Various studies have been carried out to investigate the benefits of peer-to-peer tutoring. The benefits of peer tutoring for students include higher academic achievement, improved relationships with peers, improved personal and social development as well as increased motivation. In turn, the teacher benefits from this model of instruction by increasing the opportunity for individualise instruction, increased facilitation of inclusion/mainstreaming, and opportunities to reduce inappropriate behaviours [3]. Most of the schools and colleges in Malaysia practice teacher-cantered learning whereby teachers deliver knowledge in the classroom and there is minimal interaction among learners. Many studies have shown that students lacked interpersonal, interaction and questioning skills during early tutoring sessions [4]. This could pose a threat to the effectiveness of peer-to-peer tutoring. Therefore, a study on the challenges faced by peer tutors is important.

## **2. Literature Review**

In peer-to-peer tutoring, students become the teacher and they guide the students who need assistance in their studies. Explaining and teaching a concept to another not only helps to extend one's own learning but also gives students the opportunity to understand better the material being studied. Moreover, peer-to-peer tutoring can help to improve their presentation and teaching skills: "Although it is time-consuming, a successful

session can be a satisfying one. I think my presentation skills and teaching skills have improved.” And for another peer tutor, “It creates an informal environment and can initiate a good discussion. On a personal level, I think I have gained a lot from being a peer-assisted learning tutor.”[5]

Peer tutors can gain confidence, improved communication skills and are able to facilitate and promote the involvement of fellow peers in activities which in turn enables them to support each other’s learning and make the learning experience more fun and meaningful [6].

According to Hill, Luizzi, and Giles [5], one of the challenges faced by the peer tutor is lack of knowledge. According to a peer tutor who was teaching other medical students, “My initial trepidation was not having sufficient knowledge, and being asked questions that were beyond me. The most challenging aspect has been on deciding what to include, and identifying the key knowledge and skills relevant for that stage”.

A study conducted by Chai and Lin [7], the peer tutors experienced a number of difficulties during peer-tutoring sessions, namely communication, time management, group management, interest sustenance and lack of knowledge. These problems left behind a negative impression on the teaching and learning process in the course of the peer-tutoring sessions.

### **3. Methodology**

A group of Cambridge A-Levels (CAL) and International Baccalaureate (IB) students participated in peer-to-peer tutoring program initiated by the teachers in both programmes. The subject teachers from each programme have identified peer tutors based on their learning progression and willingness to become tutors in the respective subjects. The teachers pair the peer tutors and tutees up based on the strength and needs of the tutors and tutees. They were encouraged to attend a briefing on some simple guidelines before they began their tutoring sessions. It was recommended to have a maximum 1hour 30 minutes discussion per session. Both tutor and tutee will find common time slots and agree on topic discussions before each tutoring sessions. Then, interviews with the peer tutors and observations were carried out to identify the challenges faced by the peer tutors during their discussion sessions.

### **4. Findings**

There were numerous challenges faced by the peer tutors during their discussion sessions. Most of them experienced common difficulties such as tutees’ commitment, communication, time management, and lack of knowledge/ability to explain. These problems have affected the effectiveness of peer-to-peer tutoring program.

#### *4.1 Commitment*

Tutor A had problems with a tutee who was not committed- she did not actively participate and was unprepared for the discussion session. As a result the tutors did

the asking instead of the tutees and the tutors contributed more inputs during their discussion session. It was observed that some of the tutees were reluctant to ask questions due to low confidence and inadequate understanding of concepts. Tutor B who is in IB programme admitted that she was busy with school work and projects and therefore devoted very little time to prepare for the discussion sessions. Finally, Tutor E found that his IB tutee undisciplined and was always late for discussion sessions.

#### 4.2 *Communication*

Tutor C and D had a tutee with different proficiency in English. According to Schmidt and Moust [8], an effective tutor is able to manage students well and communicate in a language which can be understood. During their first few discussions, they realised that they need to explain the concepts to their tutee in their mother tongue in order to make sure their tutee could grasp the concepts they have tried to explain. Next, Tutor E found it difficult to communicate because his tutee was disruptive, opinionated and confrontational due to the tutee's different way of thinking. Tutor F claimed that she had an issue explaining different concepts to her tutee due to different levels of understanding. She overcame this problem by splitting the information and by explaining with examples. Tutor G admitted that complicated subject matter impeded communication during her discussion sessions.

#### 4.3 *Time Management*

Tutor E had three tutees in his group. Due to different areas of weaknesses, he had to handle his tutees differently. He discovered that he had limited time to pay individual attention during their discussion sessions. Tutor B also faced time management problem due to different schedule with her tutee. Tutor C had two tutees with different learning progression. She mentioned that it was hard for her to provide equal time for both her tutees. Similarly, Tutor G couldn't find a common time slot due to different subject combinations with her tutee. Lastly, Tutor H and I found it challenging to find a suitable time as their tutees are from different classes and took up different subject combinations. This resulted in inconsistent discussion schedule.

#### 4.4 *Insufficient knowledge*

Tutor J and H endeavoured to assess the learning progression of their tutees by marking their answers. However, they admitted that due to lack of marking skills, they failed to assess their tutees effectively. The tutor should be prepared to answer the questions by the tutees. Tutor A and E admitted that they were unable to answer some of the questions from their tutees. However, they clarified their answers with their respective subject teachers and got back to their tutees. They were glad that their tutees weren't disappointed with their performances. Additionally, Tutor G commented that she had limited materials to further her discussions with her tutee during their sessions.

## 5. Conclusion

The challenges faced by the peer tutors in this study were in the areas of tutees' commitment, communication, time management and insufficient knowledge. These challenges resulted in some tutors losing their enthusiasm in teaching and their willingness to continue in playing their roles as a peer tutor. Schwartz [9] in his study has mentioned it is important for a tutor to be well prepared to play their roles. Trainings in the form of workshops on language enhancement, lesson planning and confidence boosters are important for the tutors [10]. Closely follow up by the Peer-to-Peer Team or subject teachers are also crucial.

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