

To Investigate the Effectiveness of Peer Helping Strategy Amongst Grade 10 Learners in English

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out the effectiveness of peer helping strategy in English among Grade 10 students. It is to determine the effectiveness of peer helping strategy in tests and to find out whether peer helping strategy helps to enhance communication and social skills. A total of 46 participants were identified from two sections of grade 10 based on their performances in the Mid Term examination, 23 participants were identified as high performers and 23 as low performers. The data was gathered using survey questionnaire and by conducting pretest and posttest. The findings revealed significant improvement with the calculated t-score at 4.1 which is more than the critical t-score of 1.7. Furthermore, the test scores show improvement with pretest mean of 13.61 against posttest mean of 16. The responses from the questionnaire showed positive impact on enhancement of social skills. There is significant statistical evidence to show that the intervention has positive impact in improving the students learning outcome.

Keywords: Peer Helping Strategy; English; Peer Learning

Introduction

Peer learning is a powerful tool to enable learners to share skills and knowledge with each other. Peer learning isn't a new strategy, it's a strategy that existed ever since learning took place in some kind of setting. The classroom as a learning setting creates an enabling environment for the learners to learn from each other. With the learners frequently placed in pairs and groups for the various learning activities, peer tutoring is bound to happen amongst the learners with the role of tutor and tutee being reversed as the learners learning is not the same. However, for actual peer helping to take place, it is necessary to create situations whereby such help can be rendered among the learners. English is the medium of instruction in Bhutan all schools across Bhutan however there is a wide gap in the mastery of English amongst the learners which cannot simply be narrowed no matter how good the curriculum or teacher. Peer helping strategy is an effective

strategy to be tried and tested to enable learners to help each other in English.

According to Boud [1] learners have conversations about what they are learning inside and outside classrooms whether teachers are aware of it or not but learning becomes more effective for learners if formalized peer learning take place. There are learners at different learning paces and some facing learning difficulties across all classrooms.

Peer learning is a collaborative learning strategy that involves learners to work in pairs or in small groups enabling them to discuss concepts and find solutions to issues/problems. It creates an ambience thereby learners learn from each other and actively participate thus taking responsibility for their own learning. The learners get opportunity to explore, collect, analyze, evaluate, integrate and apply relevant information for completing learning

tasks or solving problems. This approach enables learners to develop interpersonal communication, team work, project management, research, and study skills [2].

Since most teachers opt for student-centered learning, the learners are bound to help each other both inside and outside the classrooms. Peer assisted learning take place amongst the learners both within and beyond the classroom. Austin [3] posits that collaborative learning puts students in charge of their own learning with the focus shifted from the teacher to student. It is useful in a class full of struggling learners. There are various forms of peer assistance taking place across various subjects as the learners spend time together.

This study is designed to find presence of the culture of peer helping in academics and to determine its effectiveness in acquiring knowledge and enhancing social skills. The study was carried out in two sections of grade 10 by identifying the high performers (23) and low performers (23) based on their scores in English in the Mid Term examination. The peer helping strategy was carried out as an intervention for a period of about two months. During the intervention, lessons and activities were designed to facilitate interaction amongst the high performers and low performers. The seating arrangement was made to ensure that a high performer and a low performer were made to sit and interact as much as they could in the English classes.

Samtse higher secondary school being a day school limits the interaction among the learners particularly when it comes to seeking and rendering help in academics. Thus, the low performers do not get much opportunity to interact with the high performers. Like any school, there is a considerable number of low performers in every subject. Thus, this study is to see the possibilities of reducing the learning gap between the high and the low achievers by creating a platform to interact and help each other.

Aim and Objectives

- To assess the existing culture of peer tutoring.
- To measure the impact of peer helping strategy in written test.
- To identify the other positive benefits of peer helping strategy.

Research questions

- Is there any significant difference in the mean score of the learners by using of peer helping strategy?

- Does peer helping strategy enhances social and communication skills?

Literature Review

For the purposes of this study, peer helping refers to an instructional method that uses pairings of high-performing students to tutor lower-performing students in a classroom setting under the supervision of a teacher. The terms “tutoring” and “helping” will be used synonymously, as the role of tutor/helper also includes maintaining a supportive and encouraging relationship with the tutee/helpee [4].

Mayfield and Vollmer [5] defines peer tutoring as a type of intervention in which one student supports or instructs another student in academics. Learners continually learn from each other both inside and outside the classroom. However, peer tutoring is a lopsided relationship in which the tutor and tutee do not have equal academic ability but they share a common goal [6]. Peer tutoring encourages meaningful interactions with exchange of ideas, knowledge and expertise amongst peers.

Nguyen [4] states that in peer tutoring the tutoring takes place between a high-performing student and a lower-performing student in a class setting or even outside under the supervision of a teacher with the tutor supporting and encouraging the tutee. Jeff King [7] considers peer tutoring is one of the useful learning techniques that is instrumental for learning to take place in the classroom. One of the useful techniques that fosters collaboration with fellow learners which leads to increase in motivation and help students take responsibilities for their own and their peers’ learning

Boud, Cohen and Sampson [8] posit that peer learning leads to development of skills related to collaboration and teamwork, improved learning, encourage students to articulate their understanding and being able to engage in reflection. K. M. Dos Reis [9] states that peer mentoring helps both the mentor and mentee develop “soft skills” such as teamwork, motivation, decision making and positivity. Mustafa [10] in his study on peer learning among graduates in Saudi universities concluded peer learning help students become active and positive thus providing students with expertise that will assist them in future positions.

In a study conducted by Robinson, Schofield and Steers-Wentzell [11] concluded that peer tutoring increased academic

achievement and motivation in both the tutor and tutee. Formalised peer tutoring brings about more benefits than simply leaving it to chance which in a way benefit but at times create more confusion. Reciprocal peer learning can happen easily in a given setting such as within the classroom. Learning how to learn and peer learning occurs on one on one basis. Peer learning can prompt a sense of responsibility for one’s own learning and develop confidence, build self-esteem, develop collaborative skills by engaging in learning and helping each other.

Peer learning can prompt a sense of responsibility for one’s own and others’ learning and development of increased confidence and self-esteem through engaging in a community of learning and learners. Giles, Zacharopoulou and Condell [12] opined that there are academic, professional and personal benefits of peer helping which enables both helper and helpee to build interpersonal relationships, improve communication skills and thereby developing self-confidence. Much learning takes place from sharing others’ experiences, existing knowledge and skills. Students learn to acknowledge the backgrounds and contributions of the people they are working with. Peer learning necessarily involves students working together to develop collaborative skills. Working together gives them practice in planning and teamwork and makes them part of a learning community in which they have a stake. Keenan [13] study indicated that students who learn together develop a sense of belonging leading to greater confidence and active participation in the community.

According to Kimbrough, *et al.* (2017), peers influence learning in the classroom and allowing peer to peer teaching for 10 minutes increases learning as much as by 42%. On the contrary, Kassab, *et al.* [14] states that peer learning may not be that helpful as some students feel anxious and overwhelmed when they are asked to teach their peers as they lack previous teaching experience and due to insufficient time to master the content.

Another study conducted by Chan and Leijten [15] indicated that peer learning environment is not meant for every student. For peer learning to take place, there is a requirement of the application of basic communicative, conflict-management and attitudinal skills. Thus, there is a need to make peer learning relevant and important for the learners.

Methodology/research design

The methodology used was quantitative to review the impact of peer helping strategy learners two sections of grade 10 learners were involved in this study who were then divided into two groups: high performing group and low performing group. Pretest and posttest were conducted to collect the data. A questionnaire was also designed based on 5 point Likert scale with a few open ended questions. The learners were made to fill up the questionnaire after the end of intervention period. The sampling and statistical design was done using paired t-test.

Participants

A total of 46 learners from two sections of grade 10 were involved in this study out of which 23 as low performers and 23 were high performers. They were identified and grouped based on their scores in English in the Mid term examination which was held prior to this study. The high performers did not take part in the pretest and posttests and nor did they fill up the questionnaires. Throughout the study, the seating arrangement in the class for English class was arranged in such a way that a high performer and a low performer shared the same desk. They were made to work together on any activity or task assigned on the topics taught. It was left up to the learners that the role of helper and helpee can be reversed as well depending on whosoever understood the topic/ lesson and is in a position to explain to the other.

Data analysis of pretest and posttest

In order to assess the effects of peer helping strategy in English, a comparison of test scores was done of the low performers in both pretest and posttest.

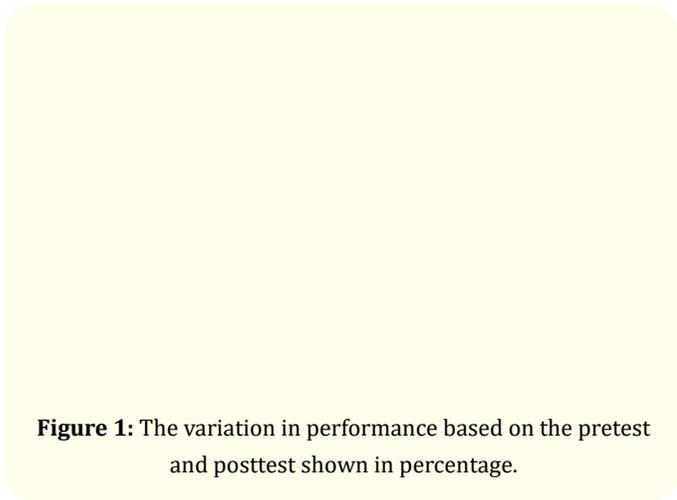
No. of participants	Pretest (Mean)	SD	Post test (Mean)	SD
23	13.61	3.27	16	2.76

Table 1: Difference in mean and standard deviation of pretest and post test scores in English.

Table 1 shows the pretest and post test scores of the low performers. The first column displays the number of students who took part in the tests. The same set of students took part both in pretest and posttests. The test paper was set out of 30 marks. The same set of questions were used for both pretest as well as posttest.

Column 2 and 3 show the mean scores of the pretest and posttest. There is a significant increase in the mean mark in the posttest.

participants (8.7%) dropped in the posttest compared to pretest. The improvement in the scores of the low achievers can be attributed to the help rendered by the peers to a certain extent, the revision of the topics just before the test by the subject teacher must have enabled the learners to perform better in the post test.



When the individual scores from the pretest and posttests were compared, it was found that 19 (82.6%) out of 23 participants showed some significant improvement in the posttest. The scores of 2 participants (8.7%) remained the same while the scores of 2

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	13.6087	23	3.27163	.68218
	Posttest	16.0000	23	2.76340	.57621

Table 2: Paired Sample Statistics.

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pretest and Posttest	23	.598	.003

Table 3: Correlation of pretest and post test score.

Paired Samples Test									
Mean		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-2.39130	2.74258	.57187	-3.57728	-1.20532	-4.182	22	.000

Table 4: Table showing calculated t-score.

Since the calculated t-score is 4.1 which is more than the critical t-score of 1.7 with one tailed test and having the degree of freedom of 22(n-1), where n= 23. There is significant statistical evidence to show that the intervention has positive impact in improving the students learning outcome.

Questionnaire

The data collected from the questionnaire contain three parts. The first part contain 4 items which shed some light on the existence of peer tutoring among the students. The second part consist of 6 items to find out whether peer tutoring equip them with skills to comprehend and write. The third part contain 8 items to check

whether the intervention helps in improving communication and social skills. The questionnaires were filled up by the low performers who sat for both pretest and posttest.

Result and Discussion

The result of the data analysis indicate that the respondents agree on the total items of the questionnaire with a mean of 4.2 and standard deviation of 0.59. As for the percentage of responses, majority of the respondents agree (41.3%) and strongly agree (31.3%) to the total items of the questionnaires while those who disagree or strongly disagree were 5.2% and 2% respectively. However, 20.2% were found to be neutral.

No. of items		Frequencies					M	SD
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree		
18	Frequency	10	25	97	198	149	4	0.58
	%	2	5.2	20.2	41.3	31.3		

Table 5: Frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation of the responses on the whole.

Sl. No.	Indicator	Frequency of respondents						
		SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	SD.
1.	I used to seek help from my peers in different subjects in the past.	9	10	2	2	0	4.1	0.92
2.	I asked and got help from my peer helper in English.	14	7	2	0	0	4.5	0.67
3.	My peer readily helped me in academics whenever I asked for help.	12	7	4	0	0	4.3	0.78
4.	I could learn English with the help of my peer helper.	13	8	1	0	1	4.4	0.94
							4.5	0.67

Table 6: The frequency and mean scores on investigating the status quo of the culture of peer helping.

Table 6 shows the prevalence of peer helping as a culture. The result indicates that most respondents agree on the items with overall mean of 4.5 and standard deviation of 0.67. The responses

from the majority indicate that there is a strong presence of peer helping culture existing amongst the learners.

Sl. No.	Indicator	Frequency of respondents						
		SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	SD.
1.	I can understand phrases and texts from different texts.	0	15	8	0	0	3.7	0.49
2.	I can understand and remember the concepts from literature.	0	13	9	0	1	3.5	0.59
3.	I am able to identify important ideas in a text.	0	17	6	0	0	3.7	0.45
4.	I can effectively brain storm ideas before writing.	3	7	11	2	0	3.5	0.85
5.	I can organize my ideas better and write in a paragraph.	2	7	10	4	0	3.5	0.59
6.	I can write an accurate summary of information that I have read in English.	2	11	9	0	1	3.3	0.88
							3.7	0.45

Table 7: The frequency and mean scores on improvement in comprehension and writing through peer learning

Table 7 shows how effective was the intervention particularly in acquiring comprehension and writing skills. Most respondents agreed on the indicators with overall mean of 3.7 and standard deviation of 0.45. Out of the 6 items, 4 indicators (Sl. 1,2,3 and 6)

were in the range of “agree” There were a lot of neutral responses in this section which indicates that the low performers were doubtful and uncertain about how much they have learned with this peer helping strategy.

Sl. No.	Indicator	Frequency of respondents						
		SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	SD
1.	I feel free to approach my peer helper whenever I need help.	13	9	1	0	0	4.5	0.59
2.	I prefer to learn this way in the near future.	13	7	2	1	0	4.4	0.84

3.	My relationship with my peer helper improved	13	10	0	0	0	4.6	0.51
4.	I feel free to communicate whenever necessary.	8	13	2	0	0	4.3	0.62
5.	I feel more motivated to learn.	11	11	1	0	0	4.4	0.59
6.	Learning became more enjoyable for me.	13	8	2	0	0	4.5	0.67
7.	Over all, my social skills improved both inside and outside the classroom.	3	13	6	1	0	3.8	0.74
8.	I didn't learn much from my peer helper.	0	2	1	11	9	1.8	0.89
9.	I got the right peer helper who helped me with works related to English.	10	9	3	1	0	4.2	0.85
10.	My peer helper willingly helped me each time I approached her.	10	7	6	0	0	4.2	0.83
							4.3	0.62

Table 8: The frequency and mean scores on enhancement of communication and social skills through peer helping strategy.

Figure shows the whether the social skills has been enhanced with the help of this strategy. The results indicate that respondents mostly agree strongly with most items with an overall mean of 4.1 and standard deviation of 0.62. The item with the lowest mean was "I didn't learn much from my peer helper", with a mean of 1.8 and standard deviation of 0.89.

Some open ended questions were asked and when asked to write about their peer helping experience, one respondent mentioned that her peer helper taught her by finding time and rectified her errors. Another wrote that "My peer helper explained in the local dialect which helped me understand the concept/topic." Another mentioned that he learnt the word meanings from the helper. One respondent wrote that her peer encouraged her to read books. Another mentioned that his/her peer helper explained further with word meanings. One of the respondents mentioned that peer helping would work in subjects like Dzongkha, Maths, EVS and Science subjects while another respondent expressed that his/her peer helper extended help all the time in class work and homework in helping her understand a text however he/she wouldn't recommend peer helping strategy for all the subjects.

The result of this part of study indicates that peer helping strategy is a useful strategy however as the survey indicates the impact is seen more in the enhancement of social and communication skills as compared to the impact actual learning as indicated by the mean and standard deviation of part 2 and 3. There is a need to create a more effective intervention with the inclusion of various strategies and activities for a greater impact on the low performers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As reported by Nuthall [16], peer learning activities should be guided and structured by the teacher which otherwise may lead to unintended learning outcomes if simply left up to the learners. This study focused to investigate the impact of peer helping strategy on 23 learners from Grade X. It was also designed to ascertain the existence of peer helping in academics and whether such help leads to enhancement of social and communication skills.

This study provided some insight into the impact of peer helping strategy which is prevalent. The students were very cooperate and enthusiastic throughout the study. The increase in the mean marks in the posttest indicates that peer helping definitely has a positive impact in learning. It was observed that most high performing learners extended help to the low performers. Some low performers felt at ease learning a concept or seeking help from their peer helper. While at same time, some peer helpers didn't contribute much.

Most students have desires to interact with other learners if given a chance which resulted in the willingness to participate in this study. When peer helping strategy was initiated in the class, the teacher has to monitor and ensure that the learners do not deviate from the main task when given the opportunity to discuss and take part in an activity. This frequent sharing and rendering of help wouldn't have happened to this extent and for this longer duration in a typical classroom setting. Overall, most of the low performing students made the most of the opportunity afforded

to them in the classroom to take charge of their learning and they clearly benefited from this process.

A future study may include a study anecdotal record of the learners to find out in which field the impact was greater. The other group that was left out in this study was the group of high performers. There is a need to find out whether the high performers were benefitted from this study. It is perhaps equally important to find out whether this study further enhanced the performance of the high performers or perhaps marred their performance. The study involved only the low performers based on their Mid term examination marks in English. No feedback was collected from the high performers hence that left a gap in the study.

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