

Peer-Tutoring: An Approach to Enhance Students' Motivation to Learn English

Tutor Rakan Sebaya: Suatu Kaedah untuk Meningkatkan Motivasi Pelajar dalam Mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris

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Abstract: English language has always been a challenging subject for some students in Malaysia. Despite the fact that these students have learned English for almost ten years in school, they are still facing problems to learn it mostly due to language anxiety. This study was conducted to identify the effectiveness of peer-tutoring approach as one way to lower the students' anxiety level as well as to boost their motivation in learning English language. This study was conducted in a public university in Malaysia in which seventeen pre-diploma students were selected to join a 'Mentor-mentee' programme as the mentees while five diploma (semester three) students were chosen to be the mentors. The mentors were asked to coach the pre-diploma students in learning English language by using four interesting and interactive English games namely 'Truth or Dare', 'Roll the Dice', 'Spot the Error' and 'Once upon a Time'. The researchers used a google form questionnaire to get responses from the participants regarding their feelings about the programme. The results show that the peer-tutoring programme has appeared to create a more relaxed and friendly environment for the students to learn English, thus boost their motivation in learning English.

Keywords: *ESL, peer-tutoring, motivation, language anxiety*

Abstrak: Para pelajar di Malaysia seringkali mengalami kesukaran dalam mempelajari matapelajaran bahasa Inggeris. Walaupun para pelajar ini telah mempelajari bahasa Inggeris selama hampir sepuluh tahun di sekolah, mereka masih lagi menghadapi masalah untuk mempelajarinya dan ini seringkali disebabkan oleh perasaan resah yang mereka alami. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti keberkesanan kaedah tutor rakan sebaya untuk mengurangkan keresahan para pelajar ketika sesi pembelajaran dan seterusnya meningkatkan motivasi mereka untuk mempelajari bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini dijalankan di sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi awam di Malaysia yang melibatkan tujuh belas orang pelajar pra-diploma sebagai mentee dan lima orang pelajar diploma (semester tiga) sebagai mentor. Program tersebut dinamakan sebagai 'mentor-mentee' yang mana para mentor ditugaskan untuk membimbing para mentee dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggeris. Antara aktiviti-aktiviti yang dijalankan adalah permainan bahasa yang dinamakan 'Truth or Dare', 'Roll the Dice', 'Spot the Error' dan 'Once upon a Time'. Penyelidik menggunakan kaedah soal selidik menerusi 'google form' untuk mendapatkan maklumbalas dari para peserta dan hasil kajian mendapati kaedah tutor rakan sebaya atau 'peer-tutoring' boleh membantu para pelajar mempelajari bahasa Inggeris dalam suasana yang lebih tenang dan santai dan seterusnya membuatkan mereka berasa lebih bersemangat untuk belajar.

Kata kunci: *ESL, tutor rakan sebaya, motivasi, kebimbangan bahasa*

Introduction

Students in Malaysia learn English as a second language since in primary school until tertiary level. However, these students, especially from rural areas whose mother tongue is the Malay language usually have difficulties in learning English since they have less exposure to the language. Many of them have problems to express themselves in English as they do not usually use the language in their daily communications and also due to language anxiety. Some of the students learned English in school by using Malay translation in which the English teacher usually translated each and every word into Malay to make sure that they could understand the contents of the lesson. The teachers believe that reverting to the students' mother tongue could help to ease the comprehension process (Nurulhayati & Airil Haimi, 2011). Due to this, most of the students hardly master the language and some will feel demotivated to improve their proficiency in English language.

Therefore, there should be a platform for these low-proficiency students to practise and use the language without feeling anxious, enables them to be more relaxed as well as to enhance their motivation to learn English language. A programme called 'Mentor-mentee' was conducted to expose the students with a less-threatening atmosphere where the students can freely share their feelings and opinions with their peers while learning English. In this programme, more proficient students were selected to be the mentors and to facilitate their mentees (low proficiency students). This kind of programme is believed to motivate the students to use the language more frequently as it provides more friendly and meaningful environments (Nurhidayah et al., 2012).

There are two research objectives for this study which are:

1. To identify if a peer tutoring programme can help students to feel less anxious in learning English.
2. To identify if a peer-tutoring programme can motivate students to learn English.

Based on the research objectives, we hypothesise that students can learn better with their peers when they feel more relaxed and as a result, they tend to participate more actively. Thus, we have selected seventeen participants to participate in this study. All of them were pre-diploma students who enrolled for pre-commerce course in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). We have also come out with two research questions that focus on the students' feelings as well as their participation during the learning session. The research questions are:

1. Can a peer-tutoring programme reduce the anxiety level of the students' when learning English?

2. Can a peer-tutoring programme boost students' motivation in learning English?

Literature Review

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Foreign language anxiety is commonly related to English language learners who feel stressful in the language classroom as they are usually shy or afraid of making mistakes when communicating in the target language. People with language anxiety are scared of being ridiculed or being laughed at as well as being assessed negatively when they are not saying the right word (Vijandren, 2017). This suggests that language anxiety could hinder students from participating actively in the foreign language classroom since they do not want to be judged by others.

According to Yalcin and Incacey (2014), most language learners consider speaking as the most frightening skill while Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu and Ergin (2016) stated that anxiety is one of the affective variables that highly affects language learning and speaking skill is the most frequently selected skill to be studied by most researchers related to foreign language anxiety.

Although English language teachers are usually aware of this behaviour among their students, it is still difficult for them to distinguish whether the students' reluctance to speak is due to anxiety or lack of motivation (Yalcin & Incacey, 2014). In this paper, it is essential to discover whether peer tutoring technique can help the students to feel less anxious during the learning process, thus enhance their motivation to be more participative in the English language classroom.

Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring involves students who are taught by their peers from the same age or class and it is a good strategy to be used in assisting teachers in the classroom (Eskay, Onu, Obiyo & Obidio, 2012). According to Ullah, Tabassum and Kaleem (2018), peer tutoring occurs when skilled and proficient ones assist those who are less expert interactively, meaningfully and organized. Meanwhile, Kuru Gonen (2016) described peer tutoring as a collaborative technique in which persons of the same level could actually observe and contribute to each other.

The concept of peer tutoring could be related to the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as it emphasises the students' progress through the help of more proficient learners or peers. According to Vygotsky (1978) as cited in McLeod (2019), the zone of proximal development (ZPD) refers to the difference between how students could improve their problem-solving skills independently and how they could do that with the observation or collaboration with more expert peers.

Apart from that, McLeod (2019) suggested three important elements to be focused by teachers in the teaching and learning process which are the presence of someone who has a better knowledge compared to the other learners, communication between the learner and a competent tutor as well as scaffolding.

Benefits of Peer Tutoring in Teaching and Learning

Through peer tutoring technique, students will have a huge opportunity to better understand the material in an academic task when they manage to explain any concepts to one another. As mentioned by Futterman (2016), youngsters' perspectives about education could be improved when they are together with their peers. Clarkson and Luca (2002) stated that the role of mentors is rather to guide than to teach and the objective of peer tutoring is to solve practical and realistic problems in an authentic human setting. Yurt and Aktas (2016) stated that the main reasons for educators to practice peer tutoring in their classroom are because it provides great impact on students' attitudes and the appreciation received by the peer tutor from the students. Moreover, peer tutoring could resolve the time constraint on individual expression as it could be applied in groups.

Ullah et al. (2018) added that creativity and problem-solving skills of both tutors and tutees could effectively be developed through peer tutoring. Rafiza and Yee (2010) mentioned that students could learn more with the assistance from experts through sharing process and discussion. In a research done by Bulut (2019), the results showed that students could increase their creative thinking much better through peer-coaching. Moreover, Ruegg, Sudo, Takeuchi and Sado (2017) has found that a student tutee had managed to identify her error as well as to explain the reason for it which is believed to allow the student to feel satisfy, motivated and more confident in her work.

According to Nurhidayah et al. (2012), tutees felt comfortable to talk with their tutors in the target language due to the close age gap and it has made them become friends. In the programme named Friends of English (FoE), it is identified that the more friendly learning environment has appeared to encourage the tutees to optimally used the language.

Methodology

Research Design

The study is a quantitative study which involved the analysis of the data from a questionnaire distributed to seventeen respondents. The data was analysed using SPSS version 23.

3.2 Respondents

The respondents for this study were seventeen (4 males and 13 females) pre-diploma students who enrolled for pre-commerce course in Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang (UiTMPP). The pre-diploma (MDAB) programme or currently known as Pra Pendidikan Tinggi (PPT) is a programme initiated by UiTM to help all students who do not have the opportunities to continue their studies in other public institutions due to poor results in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination. The main objective of PPT is to offer courses to the SPM leavers who receive low grade and do not have enough qualifications to enter other public universities (Pra Pendidikan Tinggi, n.d.). The respondents were all first semester students and they scored D and below for their English language in SPM. Therefore, they were asked to join a 'Mentor-Mentee' programme conducted by the English Language Club of UiTMPP.

Procedure

The 'Mentor-Mentee' Programme

This two-day peer tutoring programme was conducted by the English Language Club of UiTMPP with the main objective is to help the university students to improve their English language skills. Apart from that, it also aimed to motivate the low-proficiency students in learning English by inserting more interactive elements as well as to make them be more confident to use the language. In this programme, the more experienced and proficient students (the mentors) facilitated and guided the low-proficiency students (the mentees). All of the activities were planned and conducted by the mentors, supervised by an English lecturer.

The mentors were part 3 (semester 3) diploma students who were pursuing their diploma in Pharmacy. They are among the students who scored 'A' for their English paper in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination and they volunteered themselves to join the programme as the mentors.

The Activities

The mentors started the programme with a quite informal ice-breaking session that took about 30 minutes on the first day. Next, the mentees were put into four groups with one mentor facilitating the mentees in each group. There were four types of games conducted by the mentors during the two-day programme with two games on each day. The elaborations of the games are explained in the table below.

Types of games	Explanation
(DAY 1 - Game 1)	1. The mentor played a song while the mentees passed a box (containing papers that were

<p>Truth or Dare - Group activity</p>	<p>written with different kinds of instructions) to their group members.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> When the music stopped, the person who was holding the box had to pick one paper from it. Then, the mentee had to read the instruction written on the paper and he/she was required to do as what instructed. e.g.: ‘Sing your favourite English song’ / ‘Tell us one thing you expect no one expect you would do’ / ‘Share with us the interesting fact about your best friend’ <p>4. The activity was conducted for about 30 minutes.</p> <p>Benefits: This activity could encourage the mentees to speak in English and boost their confidence level.</p>		<p>for the correct answers but only 1 mark if the mentee could not explain the reason.</p> <p>Benefit: In this game, the mentees could learn the common mistakes of sentences in English specifically in subject-verb agreement.</p>
<p>(DAY 1 - Game 2) Roll the Dice - Group activity</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The mentors provided the mentees with two sets of crosswords puzzle. Each puzzle contained 6 questions on Subject-Verb Agreement. Next, each mentee was asked to roll a dice in order to know which question to answer. The mentor awarded 1 mark for each correct answer. Later, the mentors discussed and explained on the answers. <p>Benefit: Students were able to revise on the grammar lesson that they have learnt in a more fun way.</p>	<p>(DAY 2 - Game 4) Once upon a Time - Involving all the mentors and mentees together</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> For this game, all the mentees were asked to sit in a big circle. They had to create an interesting story by combining words. The first student began the story by using a word and the next person stated the second word that is suitable to be combined. The game continued with the same process until they managed to create a story. Each student was given 5 – 7 seconds only to come out with a word) and the person could be disqualified if he/she took a very long time to think. The mentor awarded one mark for each suitable word provided. <p>Benefits: This game could help the students to build their self-confidence and think fast besides enhancing their creativity to create an interesting story by using English language.</p>
<p>(DAY 2 - Game 3) Spot the Error - Group activity</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Each mentee was asked to choose a folded paper containing a sentence. Next, the mentee had to identify whether the sentence is right or wrong according to the subject-verb agreement rule. If the sentence is wrong, the mentee needed to explain the reason. The mentor awarded 2 marks 		

Questionnaire

After the students have completed the two-day programme, they were then asked to answer a questionnaire that was constructed using the Google form. There were ten (10) questions altogether which focus more on the students’ feelings about learning English with mentors. A pilot test has been done to check the reliability value of the questionnaire.

Findings and Discussions

Cronbach’s Alpha Score

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Statistics Value

Item Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.923	10

The coefficient alpha for 10 items in the study is 0.923 and this shows that all the items have consistency with high relativity. Item reliability statistics with 0.7

and above is accepted in most Social Science studies (Nunnaly, 1978).

Table 2: Questionnaire Items Data

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I like to learn English with the mentors (saya suka belajar bahasa Inggeris dengan rakan mentor).	17	3	5	4.53	.624
2. I feel more relaxed when learning English with the mentors (saya berasa lebih santai belajar bahasa Inggeris dengan mentor)	17	3	5	4.53	.624
3. I feel less stressful when learning English with the mentors (saya berasa kurang tertekan ketika belajar bahasa Inggeris dengan mentor)	17	3	5	4.35	.606
4. I feel more comfortable to use English language in the classroom with the mentors (saya berasa lebih selesa untuk menggunakan bahasa Inggeris di dalam kelas bersama mentor).	17	3	5	4.00	.612
5. I do not feel afraid of making mistakes when speaking in English with the mentors (saya tidak berasa takut jika melakukan kesalahan tatabahasa apabila bertutur dalam bahasa Inggeris dengan mentor).	17	3	5	4.12	.697
6. I do not feel shy to speak in English with the mentors (saya tidak berasa malu untuk menggunakan bahasa Inggeris dengan mentor).	17	3	5	3.94	.556
7. I am able to use English more confidently during the learning session with the mentors (saya berasa lebih yakin untuk menggunakan bahasa Inggeris ketika sesi pembelajaran dengan mentor).	17	3	5	4.00	.500
8. I feel more motivated to learn English after joining this program (Saya berasa lebih bermotivasi untuk belajar Bahasa Inggeris selepas menyertai program ini).	17	3	5	4.65	.606
9. I enjoy the activities conducted by the mentors (Aktiviti- aktiviti yang dijalankan oleh mentor adalah sangat menarik)	17	3	5	4.35	.606

10. The activities conducted by the mentors help me to actively participate in the classroom (Aktiviti-aktiviti yang dijalankan oleh mentor membantu saya untuk melibatkan diri dengan lebih aktif di dalam kelas).	17	3	5	4.59	.618
Valid N (listwise)	17				

Based on the responses given by the participants, it shows that the highest mean score is 4.65 for item no.8 'I feel more motivated to learn English after joining this programme'. This indicates that the programme managed to boost the students' motivation which answers the second research question (Can a peer-tutoring boosts students' motivation in learning English?). Meanwhile, the lowest mean is 3.94 for item no. 6 'I do not feel shy to speak in English with the mentors'. Some of the mentees were still feeling shy to speak with the mentors and this could probably due to the fact that they did not really know the mentors as all the mentors were considered as seniors (semester 3 students) compared to the mentees (new semester one students).

Apart from that, we also included more specific statements about the students' feelings when learning English with the mentors which are 'I feel more relaxed when learning English with the mentors' (item no. 2) and 'I feel less stressful when learning English with the mentors' (item no.3). As shown in the table above, the mean for item no. 2 is 4.53 and the mean for item no. 3 is 4.35. Based on the results, it is proven that the 'Mentor-mentee' programme has helped the low-proficiency students to feel less stressful in the English language learning process which also answers the research question one - a peer-tutoring programme can reduce the anxiety level of the students when learning English.

Furthermore, in order to identify the students' feelings on the use of English language in the classroom, we included more related statements which are item no. 4 'I feel more comfortable to use English in the classroom with the mentors', item no.5 'I do not feel afraid of making mistakes when learning English with the mentors', item no. 6 'I do not feel shy to speak in English with the mentors and item no. 7 'I am able to use English more confidently during the learning session with the mentors. The mean scores for all of the items are 4.00, 4.12, 3.94 and 4.00 respectively. With these results, it could be summarised that most of the respondents did experience more positive feelings to use English language during the learning session as they were feeling more comfortable, more confident and not afraid of making mistakes.

Conclusion

Based on the results that we have obtained, it is proven that peer-tutoring programmes such as the 'mentor-mentee' programme, have managed to enhance the students' motivation to learn English language besides using it more comfortably and confidently during the learning session. A high number of the students indicated that they felt more motivated to learn English after joining the programme. Most of the students also confessed that they felt more relaxed and less stressful to learn English with the mentors, besides they also felt more comfortable and not afraid of making mistakes when communicating with the mentors in English. Lastly, most of the participants also admitted that they felt more confident to use English during the learning session with their mentors.

A peer-tutoring programme is a good platform for students to practise the language skills (especially speaking) more effectively with their counterparts. Besides language skills, both mentors and mentees could actually benefit each other through interactions. According to Nurhidayah et al. (2012), the less threatening environment, the techniques use and the tutor factors (close age gap) have encouraged the students to be more participative and they not only gain benefits in the language learning but also in social and communication skills. As students' progress and preparing themselves for their future needs, it is vital that they have a speaking platform to enable them to practise the right approaches and techniques more comfortably. This will allow them to freely express their thoughts and opinions (Yurt & Aktas, 2016). In conclusion, peer tutoring will help students to discover their own capabilities as well as to lower their affective filter, hence able to promote enthusiasm to effectively communicate in English.

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