Let's Learn Together: Peer Tutoring as a Pedagogical Tool in Higher Education.

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Abstract

This paper highlights the concept of peer tutoring as a pedagogical tool. It suggests the ways through which students can learn together in a better way through peer tutoring. The rationale of introducing peer tutoring in Pakistani context is also discussed. This paper describes peer tutoring as an effective pedagogical tool to engage students in learning. The ways different forms of peer tutoring can effectively be used in order to maximize learning of students and bringing about productive changes and improvements in students are also discussed in this paper. Here significance of peer tutoring in relation to the retention and success of the students at higher education level is also highlighted. This paper also suggests the possibilities and extent to which peer tutoring can be made a valuable part of teaching- learning process at higher education level. It also sheds light on advantages and hazards associated with peer tutoring.

Keywords: Peer Tutoring; Uni-directional; Bi-directional; Reciprocal tutoring; Class-wide peer
            tutoring

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Problem

The concept of tutoring is as old as human existence. Even in the stone- age people were used to tutor each other in one way or the other. Parents, siblings and peers tutored the young-ones in hunting, making fire, arranging food, and instructing them to make their survival possible.   Peer tutoring refers to an instructional method that uses pairings of high-performing student to lower-performing students in a class-wide setting or in a common venue outside of school under the supervision of a teacher (Nguyen, 2013). Damon and Phelps (1989) define peer tutoring as an approach in which generally one child who is expert in material instructs another child who is a novice. Peer tutoring can be same-age and can be cross-age tutoring. The basic theme is that the students teach other whether they belong to the same level/grade or they are from different levels or grades.

The present study was conducted to explore that what is peer tutoring, what different forms of peer tutoring are and how peer tutoring can be used as a pedagogical tool for learning at higher education level.

The rationale behind peer tutoring is that students can learn better from each other and in an effective way than the teacher. They can have more time for learning and can learn at their own pace. Peer tutoring, peer education, peer learning, partner learning, collaborative learning, child-teach-child, peer-assisted learning strategies, reciprocal peer tutoring are almost the synonymous concepts. There are variations in different forms of peer tutoring but the underlying theory is the same. Some forms are flexible and some are specifically structured. It can be formal and informal. In case of formal it is

highly systematic and peer-mediated teaching strategies.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The present study was conducted to:

1. Explore the concept of peer tutoring.
2. Investigate different forms of peer tutoring that can be used at higher education level
3. Find out advantages of peer tutoring in higher education.
4. Fore see hazards associated with peer tutoring

1.3 Literature Review

In the past two decades, educators have increasingly introduced alternative teaching strategies or methods in order to advance students learning and improving the traditional education system in advanced countries (Miller , 2000, Colvin, 2007) . Peer tutoring is among those strategies which are in vogue since then. Peer tutoring programs are developed and made the part of teaching-learning process for the reason to improve the outcomes for various stakeholders like administrators, teachers and learners (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Per tutoring is a strategy in which the students teach the students. Normally or in most of the caes those students become tutors who are academically strong and are good in interpersonal skills. The purpose of this strategy is to help the students learn from their peer those concepts which somehow they cannot learn from their teachers due to any reason, whether related to teacher or the learner himself/herself. This strategy provides the learners the great opportunity t to learn at his/ her own pace and join the system in the effective way.

At present there are a lot of research based evidences available which proves the worth of peer tutoring across academic subjects, and worthwhile in improvement in academic achievement for a diverse population of learners within a wider range of subject areas'. (Fuchs, et al, 2000)

In our context where there are a lot of financial constraints not only for the government, institutions and the students as well. There is the great need to employ such techniques or the ways through which maximum output could be achieved. The government has a lot of financial burdens and becomes very difficult to introduce alternative system of education for those students who could not get benefit from the traditional or existing system of education. Along with that the institutions are incapable to arrange remedial classes for those students who could not be benefited in given timeframe. The students who join universities or other institutions of higher education come to university or join higher education with a lot of aspirations, hopes and future related goals. As they enter into the system of universities they find it very much different from the previous system of education and the resultant stress hampers their path to smooth attainment of goals. In some cases when medium of instruction gets changed, and expectations of four to five teachers are reached to them they become overwhelmed and the result is lack of motivation and apathy, and under estimation of their own capabilities. The strong hierarchical system or the gap between the teacher and the learner do not allow the learners to solve their queries. They hesitate to ask the

questions, or giving answers to teachers in the class. A time comes when they are so far behind from the rest of the class that they refuse to compete at all. Some of them leave their education incomplete or if they do remain in the system they do not fulfill the expectations of the system. This is a serious situation that calls for such solutions which are feasible and convenient for all the concerned. Peer tutoring can prove to be a possible solution to the above mentioned problematic situations.

It has a wide scope and many areas of teaching-learning can be covered through this. It also provides a vast array of benefits to many other stakeholders including administrators and teachers also. This strategy helps the administration to use effectively the available resources especially the human resources in the form of teachers. Teachers can efficiently and effectively fulfill their teaching responsibility and get maximum output through this.

Another justification for introducing the peer tutoring is the increased unemployment. The students who pass out with fewer grades find it very difficult to get job of their choice. This also justifies the need of introducing peer tutoring.

Another justification for introducing per tutoring is that student's financial hardships do not allow them to join tuition academies to supplement their learning. In such cases peer tutoring can help them to overcome either academic difficulties.

There are many universities in advanced countries where formal peer tutoring is available. Students who are academically good and have strong communication skills can register themselves as tutors and help those who are somehow facing difficulties in subjects/ areas. One requirement is that peer tutors should be enrolled in any program in that university. There are also options for the tutees top select the tutors according to their choice in terms of class, gender or ethnicity. These are sufficient justification for the introduction of peer tutoring in universities or at higher education level.

2. Methodology

Review of related Literature was used as a methodology to achieve the desired objectives. Books and research studies were consulted to reach to conclusion.

2.1 Concept of Peer Tutoring

Goodland and Hirst (1989) define peer tutoring as a system of instruction in which students provide help to each other to learn and learn themselves by teaching. Peer means a person of the nearly equal status or of the same status as the person who is going to be tutored. One person is more skilled or well versed in that concept of learning or skill that the other is not able to do by himself/herself independently. The peer is a person who is not a professional teacher.

In such cases or the situations where adequate financial support is not available, the peer tutoring can prove to be highly beneficial. In Pakistani set up where classrooms are filled by many students it becomes very difficult to ensure that every student has learned well is not possible. And if some teachers do assess that sufficient level of learning is not taking place he/she could not take fruitful steps all the time in

order to improve learning of the pupils due to time constraints. In such situation peer tutoring can be very much useful.

This method also proves to be beneficial and supporting as this is an active learning method where the students are not passive but highly active both the tutor and tutees are engaged in activities to maximize learning and adopting certain strategies which could ensure the optimum learning. They become responsible for their classmates learning or the tutee's learning and also of their own learning. This can make the students more responsible and sharing the learning with each other. This is also a very rewarding approach for the learners. They feel accomplished when they teach to other students. And the other party also becomes satisfied as required amount of assistance which a teacher cannot provide s available to them by their peer tutors.

As this is a method in which students are actively engaged it proves to be very much rewarding. The students accept the responsibility of sharing the learning. They do hold responsibility for the learning of their peers as well. This method proves to be worthwhile in the situations where students cannot learn from the teachers. At times it does happen that the students cannot understand a concept taught by the teacher. As the teachers level is higher from that of learners. Sometimes they feel hesitant to ask from the teacher and some time they feel that asking again and again to teacher creates embarrassments for them. So in such types of situations it becomes very much convenient for the learners to learn from those who are

within them or who are having the equal status. Peer-mediated instruction, or peer tutoring, is generally accepted as a strongly research-based, and increasingly popular, teaching technique that has positive impact on both tutor and tutee.

This method facilitates the learning by building and refining ones knowledge by asking questions and answers and by engaging in discussion. This is the primary objective of the peer tutoring.

2.2 Different Forms of Peer tutoring

Peer tutoring can be introduced in higher education institutions in Pakistan. The structure of peer tutoring can take many forms; generally the teacher provides the new content of a lesson and then structures the class so that students can drill the information in small groups. It can be informal as well has formal. In an informal way students are engaged in peer tutoring in almost all the subjects. The fact is that they learn more when they do ask questions from each other. Some times during the class they seem asking questions from each other and sometimes after the class. Whatever concept they do not understand they ask from the class mates. This strategy is mostly seen in universities or colleges when the exams near at the time of examination. Students are seen sitting in the corridors, grounds, lobbies, class-rooms engaged in peer tutoring.

1. One-to-one Tutoring
In many cases peer tutoring is on one-to-one basis. Where one student is learner and the other is tutor.

- **Uni-Directional**

Peer tutoring can be uni-directional in which peer tutor remains all the time tutor and learner remains the learner. This happens when the learner is a person who knows little or has more problems in learning. And the tutor is better than him. This happens in the case where one student is more skilled or conversant with the concept than the other so he/she accepts the responsibility of the other learners, and helps him /her to learn which he/she does not know. This technique has proved to be an effective way for students to teach as well as practice their learning while solidifying their understanding, through this they gain more and more.   One-on-one discussion and attention improves their learning. Through this they get an opportunity to master the content and have positive social interaction

- **Bi-Directional/ Reciprocal Tutoring**

It can be bi-directional or reciprocal. In which at one time one student becomes tutor and then at the other time he becomes the tutee. It happens when both exchange their roles as tutor and tutee.

2. Class-wide Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring can occur in **class-wide** setup as well. In class-wide peer tutoring teacher teaches a concept, and after that he/she makes the small groups in the class. In each group there is one tutor and the others are tutees. The tutor teaches the same concept to his classmates which was taught by the teacher. This method is very much rewarding and interesting. As the same concept that is taught by the teacher when is taught by the classmates it gets revised. Sometime in the easier words or in the terminologies that are shared by the students only. It is observed that sometimes the students tries to help their class mates learn the concept with such examples, incidents or happenings that are known r to only them and not to teachers. They do share their personal experiences with each other I order to help them learn what they do not know.   Reddy conducted a study which was discussed by him in an article class-wide peer tutoring has been proved to be effective for a variety of age group buy a study conducted by Reddy in the article "Peer Tutoring for Health and Safety,".

3.   Cross-Age peer tutoring

Peer tutoring can be cross-age as well. In the cross-age peer tutoring the senior student teaches the junior students. When a student of second semester teaches the students of first semester, this is called cross-age peer tutoring. This form also has benefit to the tutor and tutee. As this is the method where the students learn from the senior student become rewarding. Because here students are learning from not their classmates but the senior ones. So they do not feel hesitant to ask question learn from him/. Peer tutoring is taken as an alternative teaching strategy in the higher education in almost all the advanced countries.

1. It can be introduced as a Part of regular classroom teaching arranged by the teacher. Teacher can give the lecture and after that he/she can divide the students in two either pairs or in groups with one tutor in each group.

2. Another way is to make these groups or pairs for the whole semester, where tutor and tutees mutually decide to share and accept responsibility.

3. The third way is to introduce peer tutoring as a service organized by the university.in which the willing students can register themselves with university as peer tutors. And then they can be allocated to the students who need help in certain areas. The peer students can also register themselves or apply to get help from peer tutor in the certain subject area. The choice of gender and class can be decided by the peer tutee. If this type of peer tutoring is organized by the institutions certain, guidelines ,responsibilities of peer tutor as well as peer tutees , can be decided and made available to concerned. If such type of system is properly organized and structured then students' assessment system can also be decided.

2.3 Advantages of peer tutoring in higher education

The possible advantages of peer tutoring in Pakistani Scenario can be many. Some of them which are proved by research studies are:

1. Cognitive and social gains
Peer tutoring in most of its forms and components can prove to be facilitating cognitive as well as social gains for both high- performing peer tutors and low-performing peer tutees also (Grenwood, 1995; Kunsch et al, 2007).As the real learning comes through teaching this also helps peer tutor to refine his concepts and improve his/her communication skills.

2. Differentiated learning
Differentiated learning stresses to provide students with variety of opportunities to acquire learning (Scruggs, 2012)). It becomes very much difficult to put it into effect in the traditional system of education. Peer tutoring may be one way for teachers to provide differentiated learning.

3. Higher order thinking

Peer tutoring can help in ensuring higher order thinking in higher education institutions (King et al, 1997). It can be done through engaging students in question and answering, dialogue, discussing different concepts in an unthreatened environment.

4. Individualized teaching-learning

As there are individual differences among students there is the great need to accommodate the varied levels of students. The peer tutors can decides the amount of assistance to be given to the peer learner. They may gradually adjust this amount according to the performance of the learner. This makes it an individualized and tailored according to requirements of learner.

5. Academic outcomes: performance in different academic settings

If this method is applied in Pakistani context this can ensure improvement in academic outcomes. The students learning can be enhanced.

6. Reading skills improvement

Different studies suggest that this can be effectively used to help students improve reading skills.

7. Increase in motivation level

Through peer tutoring motivational level of both peer and tutors increases. The tutee can feel that he/she can get more assistance regarding subject-matter and discuss and ask questions in a safe mode. Sense of responsibility increases motivation level of peer tutors as well.

8. Interpersonal skills improvement

Interpersonal skills of both tutor and learner increase when they do have interaction with each other.

9. Study habits improvement

The peer tutors who are somehow better than peer learners, they can help peer learners to improve their study habits.

10. Study Skills improvement

The peer tutors can help the learners to adopt such study skills which have proved to be beneficial for the tutors.

11. Self- Concept improvement

Students' self-concept gets improved. Both learner and the tutor feel elevated. The learners feels accomplished as he/she now have better control on their own learning and tutor self-concept improves as he feels good that he has helped others to learn.

12. Sense of control and responsibility

Both tutors' and learners' sense of control and responsibility increases through this method (Mitchem, 2001).

13. Meta-cognitive gains.

Students may not only know what they do not know but also learn how to know (Backer, et al, 2011).

14. Increase in Attendance, and Retention

Obviously when learning increases and learners get relevant support his attendance and retention can be increased.

2.4 Hazards Associated with Peer Tutoring

Along with possible advantages peer tutoring may entail certain hazards. One of them can be superiority complex of the peer. As in most of the cases the peer tutor is the classmate so there are the chances that he/she considers himself superior to the other learners.

The other hazard associated with this can be peer students' negative self-concept. When the learners are taught by their mates they feel it as a matter of disgrace and their positive self- concept may deteriorate.

The third possible hazard can be that teachers may not teach as devotedly as they normally do when they have idea that their teaching can be supplemented by peer tutoring.

The fourth hazard can be students or parents' resentment, as they may argue that students are sent to universities to learn from the specialists not by the peers.

The fifth possible hazard can be time wastage on trial and error or experimentation. As peer tutor are not the experts they try to use variety of techniques to assist their tutees. Some prove to be effective and some become totally ineffective. In this way a lot of time may be wasted.

3. Conclusion

In spite of having possible hazards associated with peer tutoring, its advantages are much more than those hazards. It can be concluded that peer tutoring can be introduced as an effective pedagogical tool in regular classrooms. It can be introduced as a formal service organized by the universities in order to assist the low-performing students to enhance their learning. It will supplement the regular teaching and prove to be an alternative strategy to aid the students in spite of having financial constraints. The students can improve their learning with the help of their peers who have learnt in the same setup and become also a source of motivation for other students. It can improve the learning of both tutor and tutee. Peer tutoring must not replace the role of teacher but facilitate the teacher and learner. It can improve attendance and retention of students in higher education as well as ensure many other gains.

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