

Peer Tutoring as a Collaborative Strategy to Strengthen EFL Secondary Students' Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of peer tutoring as a collaborative instructional approach to improve reading comprehension among EFL secondary school students. A pre-experimental design was employed over six sessions, consisting of four treatment meetings. The participants were thirty-six eleventh-grade students from a secondary school in Lubuklinggau who were enrolled in a reading comprehension course. Data were obtained through a reading comprehension test administered twice, namely as a pre-test prior to the intervention and a post-test following the treatments. The findings demonstrated an increase in the students' mean score from 65.00 in the pre-test to 75.00 in the post-test. Moreover, the paired-samples t-test revealed a calculated t-value of 8.196, which exceeded the critical t-table value of 1.684. These results confirmed the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a). Thereby indicating that Peer Tutoring exerted a significant and positive effect on the reading comprehension achievement of EFL secondary students.

Keywords: *peer tutoring, collaborative strategy, reading comprehension*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini meneliti tentang efektivitas bimbingan sebaya sebagai pendekatan instruksional kolaboratif untuk meningkatkan pemahaman pembaca siswa sekolah menengah EFL. Metode penelitian menggunakan pra-eksperimental sebanyak enam sesi, yang terdiri dari empat pertemuan perlakuan. Peserta berjumlah tiga puluh enam siswa kelas sebelas sekolah menengah di Lubuklinggau yang terdaftar dalam pelatihan pemahaman membaca. Data diperoleh melalui tes pemahaman membaca yang diberikan dua kali, yaitu sebagai tes awal sebelum intervensi dan tes akhir setelah perlakuan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa peningkatan rata-rata siswa dari 65.00 pada tes awal menjadi 75.00 pada tes akhir. Selain itu, uji-t sampel berpasangan mengungkapkan nilai-t hitung sebesar 8.196 yang melebihi nilai t-tabel kritis sebesar 1.684. Hasil ini mengkonfirmasi penerimaan hipotesis alternatif (H_a). Dengan demikian menunjukkan bahwa bimbingan sebaya memberikan efek yang signifikan dan positif terhadap pencapaian pemahaman membaca siswa sekolah menengah EFL.

Katakunci: *bimbingan sebaya, strategi kolaboratif, pemahaman bacaan*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is foundational to academic success, particularly in contexts where English functions as a foreign language (EFL). For Indonesian secondary students, reading is not only a key component of English exams but also a critical gateway to disciplinary knowledge across the curriculum, enabling access to scientific texts, global information, and higher-order literacy practices. Recent international assessments underscore persistent

challenges. The OECD's PISA 2022 (reported in 2023) shows that many adolescents in lower and middle income countries, Indonesia included struggle with inference, evaluation, and integration skills in reading, especially when texts demand critical interpretation across multiple sources (OECD, 2023). These outcomes mirror broader concerns about "*learning poverty*," namely the share of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10; while this indicator focuses on primary schooling; the World Bank's 2023 update highlights downstream consequences for secondary learners who must read to learn increasingly complex material (World Bank, 2023).

Within Indonesian schools, several structural factors amplify the challenge: mixed-ability classrooms, limited exposure to authentic English texts, time pressured syllabi, and assessment regimes that privilege discrete skills over deep comprehension. In many cases, reading instruction remains teacher-fronted and text-driven, with insufficient scaffolding for strategic processes such as predicting, monitoring comprehension, summarizing, and evaluating sources. In addition, students' motivation and confidence to engage with longer, more complex texts can be fragile when they encounter vocabulary density, unfamiliar text structures, and limited opportunities to discuss meaning collaboratively. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2023 emphasizes that equitable, high-quality learning requires deliberate classroom strategies that both differentiate support and activate student participation, particularly for literacy (UNESCO, 2023). Taken together, these concerns point to the need for instruction that is social, scaffold, and responsive helping students employ strategies while building the language, confidence, and persistence needed for complex reading. Although reading has been learned by students since they start to learn the English language but it still becomes the most difficult skill to be acquired than speaking, writing, and listening. It is a possibility caused by the students have a limitation of knowledge about reading roles, different learning styles, lazy to read, and low motivation for effective reading because of a too-long passage and different types of text. Therefore, students must be serious to acquire this skill (Supriadi, et.al, 2019).

Students supporting other students in structured ways offer a compelling response to these needs. It is an evidence-informed approach that increases active engagement time, provides immediate feedback, and personalizes support within ordinary classroom constraints. In peer tutoring, roles (tutor/tutee) can be reciprocal or fixed; activities are tightly focused on specific strategies (e.g., clarifying vocabulary from context, questioning the text, summarizing paragraphs, mapping text structure), and interactions are guided by simple protocols and materials. Recent syntheses continue to identify peer tutoring as a high-impact, cost-effective approach when implemented with structure and training. Hattie (2023) highlights peer-assisted learning among approaches with positive average effects on achievement, particularly when tasks are clear, feedback is immediate, and accountability is built in. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit, updated 2023, similarly reports consistently positive effects of peer tutoring for literacy, noting the importance of structured pairings, short but regular sessions, explicit reading goals, and ongoing monitoring (EEF, 2023).

Importantly for EFL settings, peer tutoring can create low-anxiety spaces where students practice strategy use and language output with a supportive peer before whole-class sharing thereby building both reading comprehension and confidence.

For Indonesia's EFL secondary context, peer tutoring is especially promising because it expands time-on-task for comprehension strategies without adding instructional hours; differentiates support within mixed-ability classes by pairing or rotating roles; builds metacognition as tutors explain processes (e.g., "How did you infer this?"); supports language development (vocabulary, discourse markers, academic talk) while students process text meaning; and fosters agency and collaboration, aligning with current emphases on student-centered learning.

While peer tutoring has a long tradition, the novelty in your project is threefold to focus on higher-order comprehension in EFL reading: The study emphasizes strategy rich tasks (question generation, summarizing, text structure mapping, evaluating evidence), not only word- or sentence-level work, collaborative design tailored to Indonesian secondary classrooms: the model specifies pairing/rotation protocols, short cycles (10-15 minutes), tutor scripts/checklists, and formative routines that fit typical periods and class sizes. Dual outcomes comprehension and learner disposition: The research examines not only comprehension gains but also students' confidence/engagement in tackling unfamiliar texts an often under-measured but crucial factor for sustained literacy growth. These emphases respond directly to system-level priorities highlighted in OECD (2023) and UNESCO (2023) namely strengthening comprehension, equity, and student agency through structured, scalable pedagogy.

The study aims to strengthen EFL secondary students' reading comprehension through a structured peer tutoring model, while also enhancing students' confidence and engagement with English texts. Specifically, it seeks to: determine the effect of peer tutoring on students' reading comprehension (literal, inferential, and evaluative levels); examine changes in student confidence and engagement during reading tasks; document implementation fidelity and practicality (feasibility, teacher workload, student acceptance) in regular Indonesian secondary classrooms. Furthermore, practical/ instructional benefits to provide ready-to-use protocols (pairing rules, tutor scripts, task cards, rubrics) those teachers can adopt with minimal cost. To offers a scalable routine (short, frequent cycles) compatible with large classes and varied proficiency levels. To enhances formative assessment through peer explanation checklists and quick progress trackers. By situating peer tutoring as a collaborative literacy routine that is tightly linked to strategic reading and affective support, this study addresses urgent needs in Indonesian secondary EFL classrooms: improving comprehension, building confidence, and making equitable progress possible in mixed-ability settings. The expected result is a replicable model that elevates reading outcomes while cultivating the habits of mind persistence, metacognition, and collaborative problem-solving essential for lifelong learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design to examine the effectiveness of the intervention on students' reading comprehension. In this design, a single intact group is measured before and after the treatment without a comparison group. Although internal validity threats cannot be ruled out entirely, the design is appropriate for early-stage classroom-based research and for establishing preliminary effectiveness in authentic educational settings (Field, 2021; Salkind & Frey, 2022). The design allows estimation of within-subjects change and effect magnitude using matched (dependent) samples procedures.

The participants were 36 EFL secondary students (Grade 11) enrolled in a regular reading comprehension course. Cluster random sampling was employed to select one intact class from the target population. In cluster sampling, naturally occurring groups (e.g., intact classes) are randomly selected, which is often more feasible in school-based research where individual randomization is impractical or disruptive to instruction (Field, 2021; Salkind & Frey, 2022). Inclusion criteria were: (a) enrollment in Grade 11 EFL reading, (b) consistent attendance, and (c) consent to participate. This approach preserves ecological validity while ensuring that the selected cluster is randomly chosen from comparable classes.

Reading comprehension was measured using a multiple-choice (MC) objective test aligned with the course's curricular targets (literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension). To read means to comprehend or take in the meaning (something written or printed), reading is a form of written language (Herlina, 2021). TMC formats are widely used in language assessment

for their objectivity, reliability, and scoring efficiency, provided items are well-constructed, piloted, and reviewed for content validity and appropriate difficulty (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). The test blueprint specified the number of items per skill domain, cognitive level, and text type. Items were reviewed by two EFL experts to ensure content validity, clarity of stems and options, avoidance of test-wiseness cues, and balanced distractor plausibility. A small pilot was used to check item functioning (item difficulty and discrimination) before the main administration. Procedures in analyzing the data were:

1. Pretest: Students completed the MC reading test under standard conditions to establish baseline scores.
2. Intervention: The instructional treatment was delivered over several sessions using the designed procedures (e.g., strategy-focused activities, guided practice, and formative checks).
3. Posttest: The same blueprint (parallel form) was used to reassess reading comprehension after the intervention period, under equivalent administration conditions to minimize instrumentation effects.
4. Fidelity and Documentation: Brief checklists recorded lesson coverage, time-on-task, and adherence to the instructional sequence to support interpretability.

In addition, data analysis followed four steps and was conducted with standard parametric procedures where assumptions were met (Field, 2021; Privitera, 2022; Salkind & Frey, 2022):

1. Individual Score

Each student's raw score (number of correct answers) on the pretest and posttest was computed. Test-level scoring keys ensured objectivity. Item-level analyses (difficulty and discrimination) from the pilot informed minor revisions to enhance measurement quality (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

2. Conversion of Individual Score

Raw scores were converted to percentage scores for descriptive reporting and to facilitate interpretation across administrations ($\text{Percentage} = (\text{Correct}/\text{Total Items}) \times 100$). Where needed, scores were also transformed into z-scores for standardized comparisons (Field, 2021).

3. Normality Testing

The distribution of gain scores (posttest – pretest) and/or paired difference scores was examined for normality using Shapiro–Wilk with $\alpha = .05$, supplemented by visual checks (histograms, Q–Q plots). Shapiro–Wilk offers robust performance for small-to-moderate samples and is recommended in behavioral and educational research to verify parametric assumptions (Field, 2021; Salkind & Frey, 2022).

4. Matched t-test

Assuming normality was not violated, a paired-samples (matched) t-test compared pretest and posttest means to test the null hypothesis of no change. Alongside the p-value, effect size (Cohen's d for dependent samples) and 95% confidence intervals were reported to convey the magnitude and precision of the observed change—practices increasingly emphasized in contemporary research reporting (Lakens, 2022; Privitera, 2022). Where normality was materially violated, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was pre-specified as a nonparametric alternative. Descriptive statistics (M, SD, min–max) for both administrations and gain scores were also provided.

To support instrument validity, items were constructed from a content blueprint and reviewed by experts; alignment to curricular objectives was documented. Reliability was estimated using internal consistency (KR-20/Cronbach's alpha) for dichotomous items; acceptable thresholds ($\geq .70$) were targeted for classroom research (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). Procedural fidelity and equivalent testing conditions aimed to reduce threats to internal validity

commonly discussed in pre-experimental designs (Field, 2021; Salkind & Frey, 2022). Assumption checks, effect-size reporting, and transparent documentation of sampling and procedures further strengthen the study's interpretability (Lakens, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The pre-test was administered prior to the treatments following a try-out session. It consisted of 25 multiple-choice items, with the material focused on recount texts and a time allocation of 40 minutes. A total of 36 students participated in the pre-test. The results were tabulated based on the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC). The analysis revealed that 29 students were categorized as "Failed," while 7 students met the "Passed" criterion. The highest score achieved was 80, obtained by four students, whereas the lowest score was 40, recorded by two students. The overall average score of the students on the pre-test was 65.00.

Then, the post-test was administered after the treatments had been completed. The treatments were conducted in four sessions following the pre-test, during which the researchers taught the students recount texts using the peer tutoring strategy. The items on the post-test were similar in form to those on the pre-test. The students completed the post-test to the best of their ability, based on the knowledge they had gained throughout the treatments. According to the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC), 11 students were categorized as "Failed," while 25 students met the "Passed" criterion. The highest score achieved was 96, obtained by two students, while the lowest score was 48, recorded by a single student. The average score of the students on the post-test was 75.00.

The progress of the students' achievement on reading comprehension could be shown by comparing the students' score in pre-test and post-test. The researchers presented in detailed scores on the table below.

Table 1. The Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test

No	Categories	The Recapitulation of Pre-Test and Post-test Score					
		Average Score	Total Score	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Passed Criteria	Failed Criteria
1	Pre-Test	65.00	2160	80	40	7	29
2	Post-Test	75.00	2700	96	48	25	11

Based on the comparison between the students' pre-test and post-test scores, it was evident that their performance improved after the treatments. This indicates that the treatments provided were significantly effective in enhancing the students' reading achievement. Moreover, the pre-test data showed that χ^2_{obtained} was 4.63 with degree of freedom (df) = 5 (6-1). Since level was 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$) and the χ^2_{table} was 11.1. It meant that the data was normal because $\chi^2_{\text{obtained}} < \chi^2_{\text{table}}$. In addition, the post test data that χ^2_{obtained} was 10.71 with degree of freedom (df) = 5 (6-1). Since level was 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$) and the χ^2_{table} was 11.1. It meant that the data was normal because $\chi^2_{\text{obtained}} < \chi^2_{\text{table}}$.

The calculated t-obtained value was 8.196, while the critical value of t-table at df = 36 – 1 = 35 with a 5% significance level was 1.684. Since the t-obtained exceeded the t-table value (8.196 > 1.684), the result met the criteria for hypothesis testing, indicating that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_o) was rejected. In other words, teaching reading comprehension through the peer tutoring strategy proved to be significantly effective in facilitating and improving EFL secondary students' reading comprehension.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the application of Peer Tutoring as a collaborative strategy was significantly effective in enhancing EFL secondary students' reading comprehension. The results showed a substantial increase in students' post-test scores compared to their pre-test performance, as confirmed by the statistical analysis using a paired t-test. This indicates that Peer Tutoring facilitated not only comprehension of the text but also provided students with opportunities to engage actively in collaborative learning. One of the main reasons Peer Tutoring proved effective lies in its interactive and student-centered nature. In peer tutoring, students are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but are actively engaged in both giving and receiving feedback, clarifying doubts, and negotiating meaning with their peers. This process creates a supportive environment in which learners can explore reading strategies collectively. As AlZoubi (2022) notes, peer-mediated learning promotes deeper cognitive engagement and strengthens students' comprehension through collaborative scaffolding.

Another important aspect is that Peer Tutoring fosters a sense of responsibility and autonomy among students. Acting as both tutor and learner, students develop greater accountability for their own learning process. This dual role enhances metacognitive awareness, as they need to reflect on how to explain concepts to peers while also applying strategies to understand texts themselves. According to Teng and Zhang (2021), peer collaboration enhances students' metacognitive regulation and critical thinking, which are essential in improving reading comprehension. Furthermore, Peer Tutoring aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning is optimized through social interaction with more capable peers. By working collaboratively, students bridge their individual gaps in understanding and gradually internalize effective reading strategies. Recent studies have also confirmed that peer-assisted learning significantly contributes to language development in EFL contexts (Pham, 2023). This explains why, in the present study, students who initially scored below the minimum mastery criteria were able to show substantial improvement after participating in peer tutoring sessions.

The findings of this research also corroborate earlier studies that emphasize the positive impact of peer collaboration on EFL reading achievement. For example, Chen and Tsai (2022) found that peer tutoring not only improved comprehension outcomes but also enhanced learners' confidence and motivation in reading activities. This is particularly relevant in the Indonesian EFL context, where students often face anxiety and lack of confidence in language learning. Peer Tutoring provides a less intimidating environment than teacher-centered instruction, encouraging more active participation and reducing learning apprehension. Additionally, the collaborative dynamics fostered by Peer Tutoring contributed to building a sense of community in the classroom. This is consistent with the findings of Li and Li (2022), who highlighted that peer tutoring fosters positive interdependence and social skills, which in turn support language learning. In this way, the strategy not only strengthened reading comprehension but also enhanced students' interpersonal communication skills, which are equally vital in EFL learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the significant improvement in students' reading comprehension scores after the application of Peer Tutoring indicates that this collaborative strategy is highly effective for EFL secondary students. It provides cognitive, social, and affective benefits that traditional teacher-centered approaches may not fully achieve. These findings suggest that Peer Tutoring should be integrated more systematically into English language instruction at the secondary school level in Indonesia, as it not only strengthens reading comprehension but also equips students with collaborative and critical learning skills. Based on the findings presented in the

previous chapter, it can be concluded that the use of the strategy was significantly effective in facilitating and improving EFL secondary students' reading comprehension. This was demonstrated by the difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test. The average score increased from 65.00 in the pre-test to 75.00 in the post-test. Students showed clear progress, as only 7 students met the minimum mastery criteria in the pre-test, while 25 students achieved the criteria in the post-test. The improvement was further supported by the results of the paired t-test analysis, which showed that the t-obtained value of 7.58 exceeded the t-table value of 1.684 at the critical level. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted, and the null hypothesis (Ho) was rejected.

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