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Implementation of Peer-Assisted Learning to improve selected SHS students' output submission rate in English subjects

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A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to determine how Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) helps students improve their assignment submission rates in an English class. PAL is an adaptive learning technique that pairs students with low academic performance (mentees) with high-performing students. The researcher selected 10 students from the class to serve as mentees. The study employed a qualitative design using purposive sampling to select participants. Prior to the implementation of PAL, the mentees' average assignment submission rate was only 10%. Following implementation, the submission rate rose to an average of 61.43% during the period between the third and twelfth weeks. In focus group discussions, students evaluated the project as a positive and beneficial strategy for both mentors and mentees, as reflected in their experiences throughout the activity. Teachers should master peer-support learning strategies to minimize student passivity in the classroom while fostering a spirit of collaboration and accountability among students.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The submission of assignments (output) became almost synonymous with a "struggle" during the pandemic and the shift to online learning. It serves as a crucial indicator of student performance; without it, teachers face difficulties in assessment [1]. An online survey conducted by the SEQuRE (Safe, Equitable, Quality, and Relevant Education) movement revealed that 1,278 public school teachers reported approximately one in two students falling behind in attendance or the submission of learning modules and other requirements [2].

This issue necessitates greater flexibility and tolerance from teachers regarding the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, the Department of Education (DepEd) has prepared measures to address these challenges and improve distance learning amidst the pandemic. In response to the current situation, teachers are experimenting with various strategies to boost assignment submission rates. Thus, the pandemic offers an opportunity for teachers to re-evaluate teaching strategies that are relevant and effective for distance learning. One such strategy is Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL). PAL is an approach that fosters active learning by encouraging students to ask peer mentors questions about topics they find difficult to grasp [3], [4], [5].

This method has yielded significant results deemed beneficial for student performance in the classroom. Its advantages include creating a safe and collaborative learning environment [6], fostering students' "personal growth" [7], and reducing stress while increasing student satisfaction with the subject matter [8]. Building on the outstanding results of previous studies, the researchers decided to conduct an action research project to determine how PAL could help improve student assignment submission rates in English classes. In the long term, this study aims to provide concrete solutions that can be recommended to teachers and school administrators for implementation across the school environment.

1.2. Literature Review

Peer-Assisted Learning often referred to as peer tutoring is a valuable method for assisting students who are experiencing academic difficulties. However, in higher education [9], [10] and in concept-based subjects such as Science [11], [12], Mathematics [13], and English [10], this strategy is commonly used and researched [14], [15]. PAL programs can be established to help students practice collaborative learning, particularly in English academic writing [14].

PAL is also used to assist students in improving their reading comprehension [15]. PAL improved the performance of target respondents in a study involving working students studying Chemistry [16]. Beyond boosting academic performance, PAL helps students reduce anxiety when studying Chemistry [17]. PAL bridges the gap between students' enthusiasm for science and the difficulties they encounter in the subject [10].

The use of the PAL method has a significant impact on students' statistical success in mathematics [11]. In addition to improving performance, the method helps students build friendships and other important relationships during their studies [9]. A study titled "Peer Tutorial: Championing the Students-at-Risk" concludes that this approach represents a commitment to equitable and inclusive learning through collaboration it allows mentees to learn and understand course material while enabling mentors to share their academic success with their peers [10].

1.3. Research Objectives

This action research aims to determine how Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) can help improve student assignment submission (output) in English classes. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: how did the rate of assignment submission by mentees change following the implementation of PAL?, what are the students' perceptions regarding PAL's role in improving assignment submission among selected high school students in English?, what were the experiences of mentors and mentees during the implementation of PAL to improve assignment submission in English?, and what suggestions do participants have regarding the development of PAL for the upcoming academic year?.

2. Research Method

2.1. Participants and/or Other Sources of Data

The participants in this study were Mataas na Paaralang Neptali A. Gonzales Grade 11 and 12 students during the school year 2021-2022. The mentors and mentees were identified through purposive sampling. A total of 10 pairs of mentors and mentees were selected to be part of the implementation. The mentors chose their mentees from a roster given by the teacher-researcher. The students' and their parents' permission were requested. The performance of mentees throughout this exercise was tracked using the teacher's class records.

2.2. Data Gathering Procedures

The English teachers who were also researchers chose 10 mentees (5 for Grade 11 and 5 for Grade 12) from their respective English classes who were going to be part of the peer-assisted program. These mentees were assigned to the volunteer mentors who were carefully evaluated to see if they had a high percentage of output submission rate. After the pairings are made, a chat group was made by the teacher-researchers to keep track of the communication between the mentor and the mentee. The submission dates of students' output were taken into consideration and then categorized based on the week the submission date falls.

Weeks 1 and 2 of quarter 1, second semester (February 14-25, 2022) were the sources of the data which transpired as to the mentee's submission rate before the implementation of the PAL. Meanwhile, Weeks 3 to 8 (February 28-March 8, 2022) of the same quarter and semester were the time allotted for the mentors to guide their mentees hence was the basis of how the output submission rate was calculated after the implementation of PAL.

The data gathered from the records of the Creative Writing and 21st Century Literature teachers were presented, analyzed, and interpreted through percentage. While the focus group discussion responses were thematically analyzed by identifying the themes and exploring issues arising from the study. Every Friday, the mentors sent a report as to how their mentee performed in the week, especially in their English class. At the end of quarter 3, a focus group discussion was held to discuss their perception, experience, and suggestions for the implementation of peer-assisted learning. With this discussion, the researchers had an answer to the second, third and fourth research questions.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Output Submission Rate before and after implementation of PAL

The data on output submission rates before and after the implementation of PAL, presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 presented the output submission rate of students before and following the application of PAL in the first quarter of the second semester. There was a significant shift in the submission rate from Weeks 1-2 and Weeks 3-8 based on the average submission rate of students in their respective English classes. This revealed that during the execution of PAL, students submitted more outputs than when they were not using peer-assisted learning.

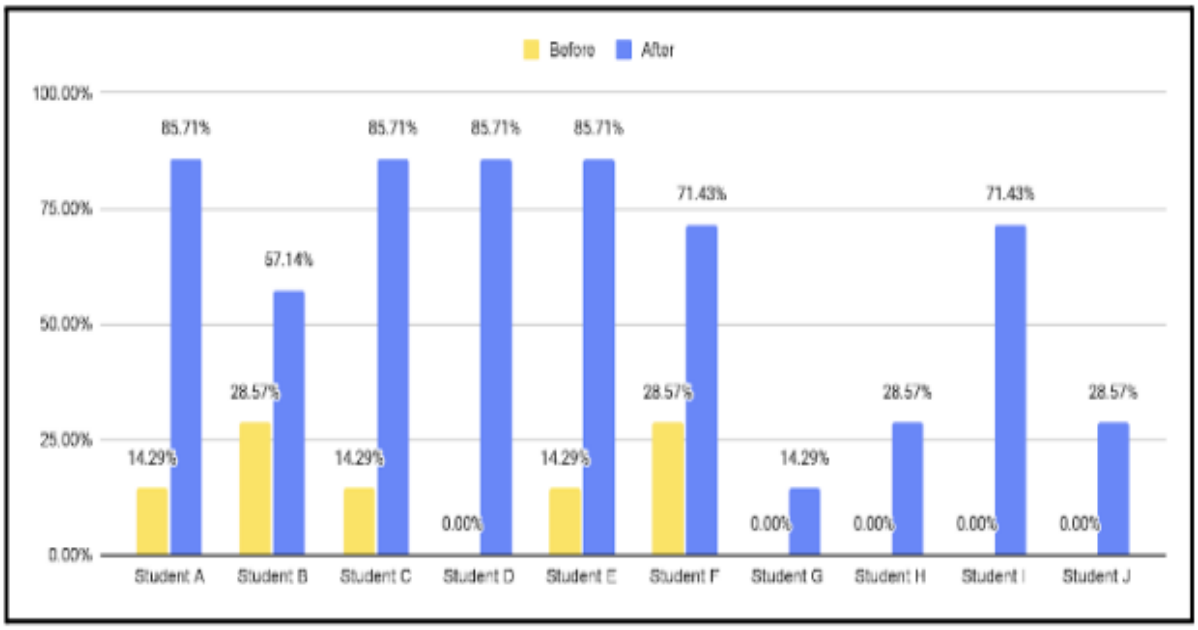


Fig. 1. Output Submission Rate before and after implementation of PAL

3.2. Perceptions of the Students in the Implementation of PAL

All of the participants agreed that peer mentoring has a positive effect on both mentor and mentee. One participant described how peer mentoring helped her as a mentor. "It helps Ma'am because for example for mentees. They do the tasks whenever they are being helped by their mentee, whenever they have someone to ask how to do a particular activity or they have someone to explain the task for them." (Mentor of Student A)

This answer was supported by the mentor of Student B who further explained that having someone to ask concerns and questions to is important, especially in online classes which is the current situation of the students. Interestingly, the mentor of Student F raised the concept of responsibility for helping their classmates. "It is the mentor's responsibility to help their mentees. The goal is collaboration. It is not an added task for me because I am willing to help them. After all, I once experienced having no one to help me when I need one." (Mentor of Student F)

Student I who was a mentee stated the importance of collaboration and agreed that PAL can help him in submitting outputs. He mentioned: "To improve output submission and student collaboration. Yes, PAL can help me by submitting outputs because with the help of my partner we will be able to monitor our modules and make it work and pass on time." Student J acknowledges that PAL enhances student motivation to learn, reduces the sense of isolation, and improves student performance in online courses which was agreed by the rest of the mentees.

3.3. Experiences of the Students in the Application of PAL

The participants, both mentors, and mentees, were asked about their best experiences and challenges while mentoring or being mentored by a peer. All mentors shared that their best experience was when their mentees accomplish their tasks on time. Student A's mentor and Student D's mentor mentioned that their success was when she explained the difficult lesson to her mentee and the mentee can understand the lesson in return. However, Student D's mentor explained her challenge while mentoring her mentee, which is time. "Time is our challenge. My mentee doesn't go online all the time. That's why I can't talk to her every day but I still answer her questions whenever she asks me." (Mentor of Student D)

This challenge was agreed upon by the Mentor of Student A which resulted in little communication time since it is mostly done online. On the other hand, the mentor of Student G mentioned that one of her best experiences was when her mentee accomplished the checklist, she provided for her. She further explained: "I am thankful that she accomplished everything that I put on her to-do list. My challenge is when she is not active most of the time that's why we can't talk more often. Even though that is the problem, she still sends me updates every time the internet connection is good and she apologizes every time she fails to update me." The mentor of Student F explained her experience by sharing one of the highlights of their PAL experience. "We have a confusing subject that I focus on so that when I have to explain it to her, I can easily do it. Whenever she doesn't understand that subject, she can also ask me and I also give her instructions and steps on how to do our tasks. I did not have challenges

helping her because my mentee is cooperative." (Mentor of Student F)

Student A, Student B, and Student E, who were all mentees, shared their experiences by being grateful to their mentors. They mentioned that having a mentor is a great help every time they could not understand a discussion. Student B emphasized that having a mentor made learning interactive and at the same time motivating since he had someone to help him accomplish tasks. Student J's experience during the PAL implementation made him more confident in his submissions knowing that someone helped him in doing it. Student I shared his challenge as a mentee and how his mentor helped him in improving his submissions.

He explained that: "My habit is to put aside the modules to be made first so sometimes I'm too late to pass. I have experienced my partner updating me on my modules. I am asked where I am struggling or am I done with my modules. The challenge for me is that I need to do it immediately because someone is monitoring me." Mentors were asked for ways of helping their mentees. Mentors of Student G and Student F shared a specific technique which was further explained in their answers. "I save all modules immediately the moment our teachers give them. I store them in one Google Drive and share them with my mentee. I use this strategy to help her locate all learning materials immediately. "(Mentor of Student G) "After the synchronous sessions, I created a Powerpoint Presentation which I gave to her for her to easily understand the previous lesson." (Mentor of Student F)

While the rest of the mentors did not share a definite strategy, instead, they practiced consistency in updating their mentees, asking them which part of the lesson they were having difficulty with and giving examples to their mentees. The majority of mentees believed that mentors are helpful to them, especially in this type of setting when everything is done online. Student A, in particular, stated that constant updates assisted him in ensuring that he submitted assignments on time. Student B went on to say that his mentor's daily push to complete the tasks helped him complete them. Student J noted that his mentor setting objectives for him inspired him and made him more open to his mentor since he knew he could connect with him easily.

3.4. Suggestions of the Students in the Application of PAL for the next school year

The participants were asked for suggestions that they can give in order to improve the implementation of Peer-assisted Learning for the next school year. Mentors' and mentees' answers share one commonality which is giving a mentoring time in the class schedule. This can help them catch up with each other and ask for things that mentees need for clarification. The mentor of student H even added that the seating arrangement in class in case face-to-face classes will be implemented should also be based on peer mentoring as this will help the mentee without spending too much time finding their mentees in the class. Aside from this, Student G and I suggested having a club purely dedicated to mentoring. Student A agreed with this and added: "Having a program or club made for this will also attract more mentors to be part of this project and at the same time the mentees will be open to asking for help."

(Student A) Based on the data gathered from the teachers of Creative Writing for Grade 11 and 21st Century Literature for Grade 12, mentee's submission rate before the implementation of PAL was low with 10% as the average. Upon the conduct of the Peer Assisted Learning Strategy in the said group of students, the submission rate of the 10 mentees had increased as perceived in the submission rate from Weeks 3-8 which became 61.43%. With the conduct of this learning strategy to the selected students, the student's perception of this project was positive, and considered this a helpful strategy for both mentors and mentees. This could also be reflected in the experiences that participants shared while participating in this project. Suggestions were also provided by participants which suggested that implementing this kind of strategy in the actual classroom setup and other subjects could be helpful as well. With this increase in the submission rates of the students from 10% to 61%, PAL was indeed helpful and proved helpful to both mentors and mentees.

4. Conclusion

The submission rate showed an improvement from pre-implementation and implementation of Project PAL. Participants had a positive perception of this strategy knowing that participants saw this strategy as helpful for them. Implementation of this strategy in class such as mentoring time and seating arrangement based on mentor and mentee pair were the general suggestions of the students regardless if they were mentors or mentees.

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