

Reading Through Service Learning and Peer Mentoring: Groundwork for a School-Based Leadership Program

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Abstract— This study aimed to explore the potential of a peer-mentoring model through service learning to enhance reading proficiency among elementary learners and recognizing reading proficiency as foundational to academic success. It investigates how integrating service-learning principles within a learner government framework can support students in developing literacy skills. Through qualitative interviews with tutors and tutees, the research examined participants' experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of peer-to-peer reading support. Findings suggest that peer mentoring and service learning are great successes in enhancing the reading proficiency of the participants. Additionally, this study concludes that there is an increase in reading proficiency among the tutees and the tutors. These results highlight that peer mentoring as a service-learning program both enhances the reading proficiency and the leadership skills of the learners through a service-learning framework.

Keywords— peer mentoring, learner government, reading proficiency, service learning, tutees, and tutors.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Sasan (2021), every school strives for excellence, but there are many obstacles, overwhelming difficulties, overwhelming commitments, and worries for everyone in the learning community. However, educators cannot deny the reality that, despite their best efforts to stay current with the rapidly changing realities in the educational system, even teachers cannot pay attention well in teaching and remediating learners, especially in reading.

Results in PISA (2019) indicated: "Reading is a window to the world" is a simple saying but has a profound meaning because, by reading, people can explore the whole world and vice versa.

Ursache (2020) mentioned that peer mentoring is an important strategy in reading remediation, and identified this as an intervention program where students learn to value people who had taught them and they develop a value for gratitude. Teachers were less concerned, especially when bright students helped slow learners. Moreover, Sasan (2021) would like to think that encouraging every child to read will improve or lessen both student and school performance. Although the program may seem unattainable, every instructor is encouraged to accept and actively embrace it. They are questioned over the proverb "reading maketh a full man.

Based on Goodrich (2021), another factor that may impact the efficacy of peer mentoring programs is the

utilization of digital platforms for mentoring implementation. This trend intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic when many existing programs were rapidly transitioning to digital formats, posing significant challenges to universities and raising questions about the effectiveness of digital programs.

In this context, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of peer mentoring in students' reading skills. This qualitative research was conducted to examine the effectiveness of peer mentoring on the reading skills of the mentees of the reading program. We used to teacher-make interview questions for the respondents. All gathered data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

This qualitative research was conducted to determine how a service-learning approach can enhance reading skills among elementary learners, specifically through peer tutoring. By involving Supreme Pupil Government Officers as tutors, the program aims to foster a supportive learning environment where the tutees receive personalized reading assistance while SPG Officers develop leadership and teaching skills.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of tutors and tutees in peer tutoring as a component of service learning, in improving reading among elementary learners?

2. What challenges and successes are experienced by the tutors and tutees while implementing peer mentoring to improve reading skills?
3. In what ways does service learning become a framework for peer tutoring in a learner government program?

Review of Related Literature

The concept of learning through peer tutoring is based on a social constructivist view of learning that emphasizes the role of the students to generate learning where students coach peers through social interaction within their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than applying a stimulus/response process, users are actively engaged in making meaning through cognitive accommodation and/or assimilation (Piaget, 1969). Vygotsky argued that learning comes about through social negotiation within a cultural context, with language as the primary enabling tool. This social constructivist philosophy has been expanded on recently, introducing the notion of cognitive apprenticeship (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989) through which students learn like traditional apprenticeships. The students access expertise through mentors, whose role is to facilitate rather than teach, and learning aims to solve realistic and practical problems in an authentic setting. For a peer tutor, this setting is a very realistic human setting. Just as in traditional apprenticeships, learners engage in activities 'on the job' rather than through the didactic teaching of abstract concepts. The argument is that students are better equipped to approach non-familiar problems and produce solutions that are appropriate to a given culture. Peer tutoring is aligned with these aspects of social constructivist theory by enhancing social negotiation with the student tutor and tutee, where knowledge construction is promoted through communication and dialogue, which is helpful for the tutees.

Peer tutoring is also valuable for the tutor, ie "learning is enhanced through teaching". In an evaluation study conducted by Hartman (1990), a reported outcome of peer tutoring was an increase in student motivation toward learning. These results are supported by Whitman (1982), Annis (1983), and Benware & Deci (1984) who argue that peer tutoring can be the most intellectually rewarding experience of a student's career and that they perform better on higher-order conceptual understanding scales than students who read the material simply for study purposes. The benefits of peer tutoring are summarized by Goodlad (1999) as follows: • Student tutees found lessons more interesting, easier to follow,

more enjoyable and seemed to learn more; • Student tutors practiced communication skills, felt that they were doing something useful with their knowledge, got to know people from different social backgrounds, gained insights into how other students saw subjects, increased self-confidence and reinforced subject knowledge; • Teachers found lessons easier to handle, teaching was more enjoyable and reported that pupils seemed to learn more.

Vygotsky and Piaget developed two widely accepted theories of learning (Piaget, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978) that have made lasting contributions to our societal understanding of learning, and in the process, developed a foundation for peer teaching. Vygotsky developed the Sociocultural Theory of Learning based on the active involvement of peers, adults, and teachers in the learning process. Specifically, Vygotsky believed advanced or more knowledgeable peers, teachers, or other adults greatly aided the learner in the construction of knowledge. Adults or peers, with a greater degree of knowledge, are capable of assisting and directing the learner in such a way as to promote a learning dialogue (O'Donnell & O'Kelly, 1994; Palincsar, 1998). As the learner engages with more knowledgeable individuals, the learner can begin the process of the construction of knowledge. Co-construction was defined by Woolfolk (2001, p. 44) as, "A social process in which people interact and negotiate (usually verbally) to create an understanding or to solve a problem." During the co-construction of knowledge, the learner can acquire the skills and confidence necessary to begin the process of concept mastery (Woolfolk, 2001).

II. METHODS

This study aimed to determine how a service-learning approach can enhance reading skills among elementary learners, specifically through peer tutoring. A teacher-made interview was used and validated through content validation. Permission was obtained from the 6 participants through consent from their parents. Interviews were conducted privately and lasted approximately 10-20 minutes. Their answers were then transcribed verbatim, ensuring accuracy and completeness. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret patterns of meaning within the interview data.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Qualitative data from the interview provided further insights, as presented below.

Theme 1: Building Skills in Service Learning

Participants in the service-learning group reported increased confidence in their reading abilities, a greater understanding of the challenges younger students face, and improved communication skills through tutoring. One participant answered, "I am happy to help my schoolmates improve not just in reading but also in spelling." Participants described gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the teachers when teaching one participant reflected, "It made me realize how important it is to be patient when my tutees are naughty."

For the tutee's side, they expressed greater enthusiasm for reading and a more positive attitude towards reading. One learner shared, "I gained a lot from my tutor not just in reading but also some other words which I cannot fully understand". Learners demonstrated increased confidence in their reading abilities and a greater willingness to participate in reading activities. Teachers also noted that several learners who had previously been reluctant readers were now more actively engaged in reading tasks.

Service-learning is an experiential pedagogy that combines learning through action, structured engagement with community partners, and reflection to facilitate deep learning and increase skill transfer (Turk and Pearl, 2021)

Theme 2: Accomplishment and Satisfaction

A recurring theme that emerged from the tutor interviews was a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with the program's impact. One tutor remarked, "I feel satisfied and accomplished every time my tutees learn to read new words 'The emphasis on building relationships aligns with research highlighting the importance of positive tutor-tutee interactions in promoting learning. According to Lundberg et al., 2022 In a study comparing peer tutoring to teacher-led instruction, peer tutoring was more constructive in increasing students' spelling abilities. The tutors' focus on creating a supportive environment suggests that peer tutoring can foster a sense of belonging and trust, which are crucial for effective learning. According to Thurston et al., 2021 Peer tutoring, and particularly the experience of serving as a tutor, can be an effective way to improve reading comprehension skills.

The findings suggest that the program fostered a more positive attitude towards reading and increased learners' motivation. This also demonstrates improvement in the

leadership and communication skills among service-learning groups. Schools should consider integrating peer mentoring within their learner government and student development programs to foster academic support and leadership opportunities. Educational policymakers should promote the service-learning model as a complement to traditional teaching methods, particularly in areas where additional support is needed, such as reading and literacy.

Theme 3: Building Relationships

Interviews revealed that tutors gained valuable leadership skills through their roles in the program, such as motivating their tutees and collaborating with other tutors. One tutor shared "I learned how to integrate games during peer mentoring so that they will enjoy the things that we do especially reading."

Tutees also reported improvements in their skills, particularly in reading comprehension, confidence, and communication. One tutee stated, "I can now read and understand the text my teachers wanted me to read."

It was concluded by Roma et al. (2019) that peer tutoring has a strong effect in teaching reading comprehension of narrative text. Peer tutoring strategy has a good effect and effective in reading comprehension to the eight grade students (Sholikhah, 2018).

A Framework of Peer Tutoring through Servant Leadership in Schools: An Implication of the Study

These findings are consistent with research suggesting that peer tutoring can provide opportunities for leadership development, fostering communication, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. The learner government program's service-learning component appears to have created a valuable learning experience for both tutors and tutees, enhancing their skills and preparing them for future leadership roles.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study highlights how peer mentoring within a learner government framework has positively impacted the reading proficiency of participating students. Service-learning students, the tutors, take an active role in helping others has proven to be a powerful approach for enhancing reading skills among the tutees. The program also successfully fostered leadership, accountability, and mentorship among the tutors and the tutees. This model of service learning provides a sustainable way to address reading challenges by leveraging student-to-student support. Given its benefits, the peer mentoring model be integrated into the

learner government programs more broadly, expanding it to include other academic and personal development areas. Findings also revealed significant improvements in reading comprehension, empathy, and communication skills among participants. Furthermore, the qualitative data highlighted the development of a deeper connection in reading, increased empathy for younger learners, and a growing sense of mentoring capacity. It also revealed that reading-based service learning can not only enhance learners' academic skills but also the sense of responsibility towards others. As educators and policymakers seek innovative ways to support learners' development, programs like this deserve serious consideration and investment. By empowering young people to become both skilled leaders and compassionate mentors, we can create a ripple effect of positive change within our schools.

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