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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PEER TUTORING PROGRAM FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Abstract. This study investigates the impact of a peer tutoring initiative at a university in Uzbekistan designed to help students struggling with English proficiency in an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) environment. Although the institution requires a minimum IELTS score of 5.5 for admission, faculty observed that many students still encountered difficulties, especially in speaking and writing. To address these challenges, a pilot peer tutoring program was introduced, offering structured language support through volunteer student tutors. The research employed a mixed-methods design, utilising pre- and post-program surveys, tutor session reports, and faculty feedback. Results demonstrated marked improvements in students' confidence and English skills, with speaking emerging as the central area of concern for 75% of participants. After the program, 83.3% of students reported greater confidence in using English, and tutors observed high participation rates, with 76.9% of tutees actively engaged in sessions. Despite this, tutor recruitment and retention, inconsistent attendance, and gaps in institutional support posed challenges to program sustainability. The findings attest to the effectiveness of peer tutoring as a means of supporting languages in EMI environments but emphasise the importance of formal tutor training, designated tutorial spaces, and incentives in an attempt to enhance long-term outcomes. More research is recommended to measure the effect of the program on grades as well as long-term language acquisition.

Keywords: peer tutoring, English proficiency, EMI, student support, higher education, language learning, academic success

Introduction
English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Uzbekistan: Policy, Capacity Building, and Challenges

During the past three years, there has been an intensified focus on English language learning in Uzbekistan, led by the government's initiative for internationalisation of higher education and improving the employability of graduates. The change is noticeable in higher enrollment of students in English language courses and growing interest in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programs in HEIs. Uzbekistan holds the 98th position out of 116 countries in the EF English Proficiency Index (2024), indicating the country's comparatively low proficiency in the English language. In response, the government has set out broad reforms, including the Concept for the Development of Higher Education until 2030, to strengthen English education throughout the national school system, from primary grades to university level (British Council, 2024). These reforms reflect the government's recognition of English as a fundamental skill for academic success, international competitiveness, and professional advancement.

Nowadays, Uzbekistan has a total of 210 HEIs, including 115 state universities, 65 private universities, and 30 foreign universities (FLEDU, 2023). In the broader education reform context, many HEIs have incorporated EMI into mainstream pedagogical practice. As Dearden (2015) noted, "the use of EMI is a rapidly growing global phenomenon in grade school and higher education (HE) outside the Anglophone world" (Rahman M. et al., 2018). EMI programs are a strategic means of aligning Uzbekistan's higher education system with international norms, promoting academic collaboration and enhancing the competitiveness of graduates in the global labour market (British Council, 2024). Despite all the efforts, however, the majority of students are not able to meet the English language requirements of universities, especially in speaking and writing.

There is evidence that 5.5 on IELTS may be a challenging score for students to cope with English-medium academic content. Yen and Kuzma (2009) found that students who enter higher education with an IELTS score of 5.5 struggle with course content, assignments, and assessment demands. Research conducted on students at the University of Worcester determined that students with an IELTS score of 6.0 or higher typically struggled to comprehend lectures, sometimes requiring personal interpreters to attend course discussions. The authors think that although the score a student obtains on an IELTS test is intended to show whether or not the student possesses an adequate level of English language ability to be able to meet the language demands of tertiary study, it does not mean that they will academically succeed or that they will not experience any language difficulties" (Yen & Kuzma, 2009, p. 2).

Furthermore, their study indicates that poorer IELTS scores, especially in the Listening and Writing domains, are related to unsatisfactory academic performance, thereby corroborating the view that an admission-ineligible score could be insufficient for academic success. This study's findings align with those of Rahmanova and Ekşi (2023), who indicate that, despite EMI implementation intended to enhance English competence, students still face considerable challenges in accessing academic content due to insufficient language capacity (p. 460). Refer to Table 1 below for details on *Language Proficiency in the Class of 2028*.

It is against this background that peer tutoring has appeared as a viable means of mitigating language skill issues in the university. This peer learning method involves more experienced students assisting peers in acquiring academic skills and has gained considerable acknowledgement for its role in fostering language skills, confidence, and overall academic performance (Falchikov, 2001; Topping, 1996). Chan et al. (2016) define peer-assisted learning as "the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active help and support among status equals or matched companions" (p. 1818). Whereas Arco-Tirado et al. (2020) point out that structured peer tutoring schemes are capable of significantly improving students' academic performance, particularly in those subjects with intense language use (p. 103). Likewise, Chang (2010) discovered that peer tutoring promotes both linguistic and cognitive growth, as tutees benefit from diverse approaches to learning and tutors consolidate their own knowledge (p. 59). In the Uzbekistan context, where cultural issues such as the reluctance to seek assistance due to fear of being perceived as lacking can impede language acquisition, peer tutoring offers a non-hierarchical, student-centred setting that fosters mutual support and active participation. Rahmanova and Yangın Ekşi (2023) note that one of the most significant challenges of EMI in Uzbekistan is that "students' English deficiencies make it difficult to fully engage with subject content," suggesting that additional language support is necessary for success (p. 462).

A closer examination of student language proficiency highlights the distribution of English competency among students in an EMI setting at the university in Uzbekistan (see Table 1). The data indicate that only 4.79% of students achieved an IELTS score of 5.5, while the majority demonstrated higher proficiency levels, such as IELTS 6.5 (21.25%), 7.0 (25.63%), and 7.5 (22.08%). Nevertheless, a substantial proportion still fell within the lower bands, including IELTS 6.0 (11.25%) and TOEFL iBT 51–60 (7.29%), which may pose challenges in effectively comprehending academic content. These figures further support the argument that language proficiency plays a critical role in students' ability to succeed in EMI programs. Although EMI initiatives aim to promote English competency, students with lower IELTS scores are likely to require additional academic support, such as peer tutoring, to strengthen their comprehension and engagement with course materials.

Table 1. *Language Proficiency in the Class of 2028*

Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
IELTS 5.5	23	4.79
IELTS 6.0	54	11.25
TOEFL iBT 51-60	35	7.29
IELTS 6.5	102	21.25
IELTS 7.0	123	25.63

IELTS 7.5	106	22.08
IELTS 8.0	21	4.38
TOEFL iBT 63-67	5	1.04
TOEFL iBT 105-116	2	0.42
IB Certificate Holders	14	2.92

Note. Percentages are based on a total of 480 students.

To combat the issue of poor English skills among EMI university students, a peer tutoring program has been introduced as a support mechanism. The programs enable more capable students to tutor their peers in developing academic English skills, enhancing comprehension, and building confidence in using English for educational purposes. Arco-Tirado et al. (2020) demonstrated that peer tutoring greatly promotes both tutees' and tutors' academic achievement, emphasising that organised peer interaction supports active learning and language acquisition (p. 107). Similarly, Huang (2015) contends that "peer tutoring in EMI contexts provides students with opportunities for authentic interaction in English, reinforcing academic vocabulary and fluency" (p. 73).

While most universities require a minimum score of 5.5 in the IELTS or 46 in the TOEFL IBT, some students still struggle, particularly with speaking and writing. Recognising this deficiency, we observed that some of the students were working, and accordingly, a Peer Tutoring Program was introduced in Week 9 of the fall semester as a pilot study. The program, despite tutor recruitment challenges, aimed to offer one-on-one assistance in a peer-led setting to help students overcome challenges in EMI courses.

The mission of the Peer Tutoring Program is to help underperforming students through personalised language support to enhance their confidence and academic success. By fostering a nurturing, student-driven learning environment, the program bridges the gap between institutional language demands and actual levels of proficiency. This study explores the effectiveness of peer tutoring in improving students' English ability and academic performance. It seeks to identify how a peer tutoring program improves the English language capacity and academic performance of students in an EMI university. Specifically, it examines whether peer tutoring assists students in having better comprehension, developing confidence, and succeeding in EMI classes. Accordingly, the central research question guiding this study is: To what extent does a peer tutoring program improve English language proficiency and academic performance in an EMI university?

Literature Review
Peer Tutoring in Higher Education
Peer tutoring refers to a collaborative learning approach in which individuals of equal social status teach each other, typically involving a more experienced peer tutoring a less experienced peer (Ching & Chen, 2019). The practice is an effective intervention from both economic and educational perspectives, promoting learning motivation while simultaneously offering social and academic gains to the involved individuals (Tulqinov, 2023). Seo and Kim (2019) conceptualise peer tutoring as a learning method in which "academically successful tutors, who are more advanced in their knowledge of subject matter or academic skills, provide learning assistance to less-advanced tutees" (p. 99). Peer tutoring's two-way nature allows for skill acquisition for both tutees and tutors, as tutors acquire leadership and communication skills, and tutees are provided with one-on-one instruction (Seo & Kim, 2019). However, Tulqinov (2023) stresses that the tutor-tutee relationship is "ongoing, developmental, and reciprocal," and thus needs continuous involvement (p. 10). In contrast, Seo and Kim (2019) point out that tutees tend to make more academic progress than tutors, the latter's main gain being skill and confidence development.

Peer tutoring has found widespread application as an efficient pedagogical tool in higher education. Topping (1996) has described it as "a system of instruction in which learners help each other and learn by teaching" (p. 322), emphasising the fact that both tutors and tutees gain from the experience. Falchikov (2001) points out that peer tutoring helps tutors to learn the material better and also fosters a collaborative learning environment that benefits everyone involved. Likewise, Boud, Cohen, and Sampson (2001) highlight the importance of peer learning in acquiring critical thinking

and communication skills that are essential for academic success. Stigmar (2016) posits that peer-to-peer teaching offers pedagogical gains, especially in enhancing students' critical thinking, learning autonomy, and motivation. Current research further suggests that peer tutoring can effectively narrow knowledge and skill gaps, particularly among diverse student groups (Arco-Tirado et al., 2020; Colvin & Ashman, 2010). The effectiveness of such schemes is especially pronounced in environments where students begin their tertiary studies with differing degrees of readiness, a situation that is characteristic of Uzbekistan. However, the success of such programs is contingent upon the motivation and readiness of peer tutors, as well as the institutional support provided to them (Topping, 2005).

Problems Associated with Language Competency in Higher Education

Language competency is one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement, especially for non-native speakers of English. Hyland (2006) asserts that "language is the medium through which academic knowledge is constructed and assessed" (p. 24), so competence is crucial for students who seek higher education. Most students, however, struggle with the requirements of academic English, specifically in speaking and writing. This is particularly true in Uzbekistan, where students who achieve an IELTS score of 5.5 tend to struggle even though they have met the requirement for admission. Cummins (2008) distinguishes between cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), with students possibly acquiring conversational fluency but not the academic language required at the university level. Kirkpatrick (2011) and Dearden (2015) identify the absence of immersive linguistic environments in countries where English is not the first language as a significant contributing factor. Rahmanova and Yangın Ekşi (2023) point out that English-Medium Instruction (EMI) exposes Uzbekistan to different challenges, to which additional linguistic support for both lecturers and students is required. It is thus imperative that universities adopt some interventions, such as peer tutoring, to mitigate these challenges and assist students in attaining the required proficiency levels.

The Effects of Peer Tutoring on Language Acquisition

Research indicates that peer tutoring has a significant impact on language learning, especially in speaking and writing skill development. According to Roscoe and Chi (2007), peer tutoring can be effective in promoting active participation, which is an essential aspect of the language learning process. They point out that "tutees benefit from personalised feedback and the opportunity to practice in a low-stakes environment" (p. 298). These results are corroborated by the results presented by Arco-Tirado et al. (2020), in which students demonstrated greater confidence and better academic performance following their involvement in a peer tutoring program. Furthermore, research by Topping (2005) and Falchikov (2001) highlights the role of peer tutoring in enhancing metacognitive attributes, including self-regulation and reflection, which are crucial for language learning competencies. Chan, Phan, Salihan, and Dipolog-Ubanan (2016) say that peer-assisted learning enhances social and academic development, particularly in high-risk classes. However, the effectiveness of peer tutoring is dependent on the quality of interaction between tutors and tutees, and how well the program aligns with students' needs (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

Challenges in Using Peer Tutoring Programs

There are challenges in using peer tutoring programs despite their benefits. A second major issue regards recruiting and retaining qualified tutors. Topping (2005) claims that "the effectiveness of peer tutoring schemes is reliant to a great extent on the motivation and ability of the tutors" (p. 645). In the context of Uzbekistan, this barrier was evident in the difficulties encountered in finding voluntary tutors with expertise in English who were willing to dedicate their time to the program. Another issue is maintaining consistency and high quality in tutoring sessions. Boud et al. (2001) emphasise the need to offer tutors training to give constructive feedback and establish a positive learning environment. If tutors are not qualified, they could unintentionally reinforce mistakes or overlook their tutees' individual needs (Li et al., 2022). Also, institutional support is essential for the long-term viability of such programs since they typically need training materials, resources, and assessment (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Arco-Tirado et al., 2020).

Assessing the Effectiveness of Peer Tutoring

Assessment of the effectiveness of peer tutoring programs needs to be rigorous in its approach. Topping (2005) suggests combining quantitative and qualitative measures, i.e., pre- and post-tests, questionnaires, and session reports, for assessing both learning outcomes and participants' attitudes. Post-program questionnaires and session reports were used in the Uzbekistan study to evaluate the development of language ability and confidence levels (Rahmanova & Yangın Ekşi, 2023). Roscoe and Chi (2007) suggest that self-assessment and reflection are valuable aspects of assessment because they offer informative insights regarding the metacognitive advantages of peer tutoring.

Directions for Future Research and Best Practices in Peer Tutoring

To maximise the efficacy of peer tutoring interventions, future efforts must attend to best practices delineated in the existing literature. Topping (2005) suggests offering extensive tutor training, such as methods for delivering positive feedback and group process management. Moreover, programs must be tailored to meet the unique needs of the population of students, as highlighted by Colvin and Ashman (2010). The aspect of institutional support is also vital to the long-term viability of such programs. Boud et al. (2001) advocate for incorporating peer tutoring into the overall curriculum and recommend offering incentives for participation, such as credit or recognition. In addition, the use of technology, such as online platforms, can help increase access to peer tutoring and lead to better interactions among tutors and tutees (Roscoe & Chi, 2007). By using these best practices, schools can maximise the benefits of peer tutoring and more effectively address language proficiency challenges.

Methodology

This study evaluates the effectiveness of a peer tutoring program within an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) university context. It uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods for gathering data. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effects of peer tutoring on students' confidence, English language skills, and general academic achievement.

Participants and Recruitment

To join the program as tutees, 20 students expressed interest, which was sufficient, as only three students volunteered to serve as tutors. Because there was an insufficient number of tutors, the program coordinators targeted multiple students and invited those who scored 8.0 or above on the IELTS to participate. We contacted them privately and asked them to become a tutor in this program. Finally, nine tutors voluntarily agreed to help their peers. However, during the six- to seven-week program, only five tutors remained active, as four others withdrew for various reasons.

Those five tutors consisted of one female and four males. The male tutors represented a range of disciplines and academic levels, including two Software Engineering majors (Year 2 and Year 3), one Chemical & Materials Engineering major (Year 2), and one Mechanical Engineering major (Year 1)—all four self-reported English proficiency at the C1 level. The female tutor was a Teaching Assistant from the English Department, whose advanced English skills were evident through her teaching role, although her exact proficiency level was not formally documented. Although 20 students initially signed up as tutees, three withdrew before the program began, leaving 17 who formally agreed to participate. However, not all provided data for analysis. Of these, only 12 completed the pre-survey and subsequent feedback instruments. Therefore, findings reported in this study are based on the 12 respondents, while the larger number reflects overall sign-ups.

Program Development and Implementation

To plan the entire tutoring process, the program organisers created application documents that contained specific expectations for both tutees and tutors. Each group was issued separate guidelines to ensure that each participant understood the project's goals, activities, and scope. These issues were incorporated into the program's design using faculty surveillance and informal dialogues with students. Initially, it was envisioned that the classroom peer tutoring would take place in a classroom with more than 90 students. However, the program coordinators came to realise that there may be more supporters than were noticed. Therefore, a wider system of tutors was implemented, and we asked students to sign up via Google Forms, and within no time, 20 tutees had signed up.

Coordinators prepared a presentation for the meeting with the tutors and explained the core objectives of the peer tutoring program. Before the start of the tutoring sessions, it is expected that students will be provided with a supportive environment that encourages them to express themselves freely and use English without fear of ridicule. Research suggests that students in Uzbekistan may be hesitant to seek help due to cultural factors, including a fear of appearing incompetent or lacking knowledge (Bozorov, 2024). To address this, the workshop advocated for a non-authoritarian, collegial approach, which emphasised cooperation above and beyond simple teacher-pupil relationships. Tutees, unlike tutors, did not have to participate in an orientation. So, program coordinators convened with them midway through the program to monitor their advancement and remind them of their duties. Although several tutees remained engaged, only three attended the meeting, likely because cultural factors made open scholarly conversation somewhat uncomfortable.

Data Collection

To comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of the peer tutoring program, this study employed three primary data collection methods: pre- and post-program surveys, tutor session reports, and faculty observations, supplemented by recruitment forms and final evaluation activities that provided additional contextual information.

1. Pre- and Post-Program Surveys: Tutees completed online questionnaires before and after the program. The pre-program survey (Google Form) captured baseline data on motivations, expectations, confidence in English, and specific areas of need. It combined closed-ended items (e.g., confidence ratings, priority skills such as speaking, writing, vocabulary) with open-ended questions (e.g., "What do you hope to achieve by the end of the program?"). Of the 20 students who initially signed up, three withdrew voluntarily; only 12 completed the pre-survey. At the end of the semester, the post-program survey was distributed among tutees to reflect on their learning experiences, perceived improvements, and challenges.

2. Session Reports: After each session, tutors submitted concise reports documenting the topics covered, tutee engagement, session length, and notable observations. These reports provided insights into learning activities and participation patterns while minimising unnecessary administrative burden.

3. Faculty Observations: Faculty members teaching Academic and Communication Skills informally observed student performance during regular coursework. These observations highlighted students' difficulties in speaking, writing, and listening, which motivated the design of the program. Although not formally recorded, notes from discussions with lecturers about their classroom observations were used to triangulate the survey and tutor report findings.

Supplementary Sources: Recruitment forms collected during the sign-up stage provided demographic and background information (e.g., program of study, self-rated proficiency, preferred tutoring format and frequency, specific goals). Additionally, at the program's conclusion, an evaluation meeting and certification ceremony recognised tutors' contributions, though we did not use these events as formal data sources.

The findings from these three primary sources, supported by supplementary recruitment information, were analysed to determine the extent to which the peer tutoring program improved students' English proficiency and confidence in an EMI university context.

Data Analysis

We used a mixed-methods analysis approach. Quantitative data from pre- and post-program surveys were analysed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency counts, percentages, and rating scale averages) to identify changes in students' confidence levels, self-reported proficiency, and areas of need. Figures were generated to visually represent key findings such as primary language challenges, confidence levels, and self-reported progress. Qualitative data from open-ended survey responses, tutor session reports, and faculty observations were analysed thematically. After rereading open-ended responses multiple times, we coded inductively to identify recurring patterns and grouped them into themes such as "confidence building," "speaking as primary challenge," and "active

participation." Triangulation across surveys, tutor session reports, and observations strengthened the interpretation of findings by allowing comparisons of perspectives from tutees, tutors, and faculty.

Validity and Reliability

To enhance validity, multiple data sources have been presented above (surveys, session reports, and faculty observations), which were used for triangulation, which reduced reliance on any single perspective. Consistency in tutor session reporting was maintained through a standardised reporting template. Reliability was strengthened by using the same pre- and post-program survey structure, enabling comparison across time points. In addition, findings were reviewed by program coordinators and faculty to ensure that interpretations aligned with observed patterns. While this study primarily relied on self-perception data from tutees, the inclusion of tutor reports and faculty observations provided additional qualitative evidence to corroborate student accounts. Future research should incorporate standardised language assessments or other objective measures of proficiency to provide stronger quantitative evidence of language gains.

Findings and Analysis of Peer Tutoring Program Effectiveness
Quantitative Data

The pre-survey results indicate that 50% of students (6 out of 12) joined the peer tutoring program primarily to gain confidence in using English, while the remaining students aimed to enhance their English skills for a higher IELTS score. The most critical area where students needed support was speaking (83.3%, 10 out of 12) (see Fig. 1), followed by vocabulary (16.6%, 2 out of 12).

The most frequently cited skill was vocabulary improvement as a notable area of progress in the post-program survey. The primary motivations for joining the program were improving English speaking skills (100%, 12 out of 12), followed by gaining confidence in communication (91.6%, 11 out of 12), and improving grammar (66.6%, 8 out of 12). The post-survey analysis confirms that speaking proficiency was the primary concern among participants.
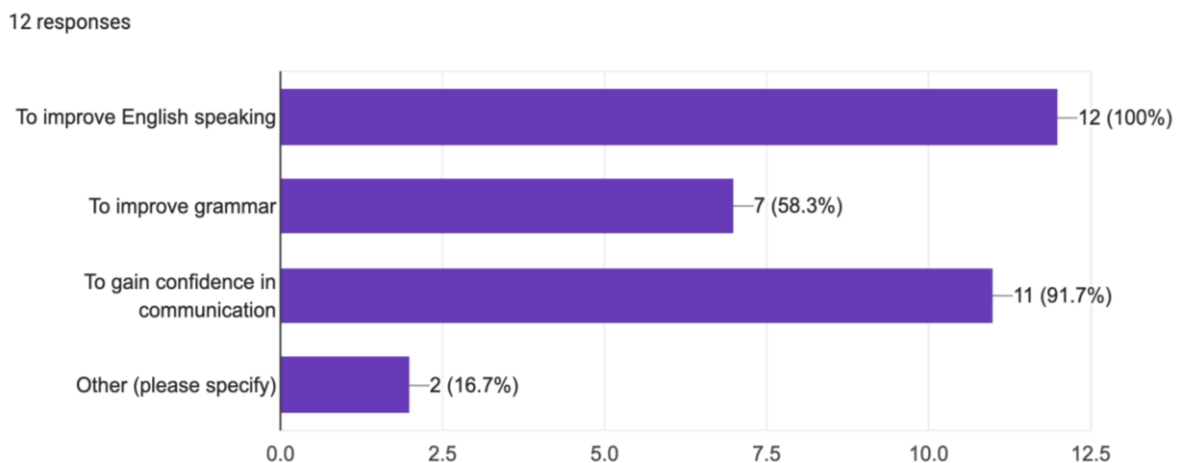

Figure 1. Main Reasons for Joining the Peer Tutoring Program

In Figure 2 below (see Fig. 2), it is apparent that the single area where students feel they need the most support in their English was again speaking skills. Among the 12 respondents, 75% (9 out of 12) indicated that speaking is their biggest challenge, highlighting the importance of oral communication in their academic and social interactions. The lack of immersive English environments may explain this, as research shows that students studying English outside Anglophone contexts often develop reading and writing skills before achieving oral fluency (Cummins, 2008; Dearden, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2011; Rahmanova & Yangın Ekşi, 2023).

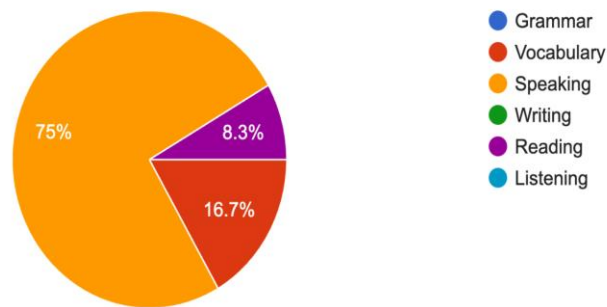Which single area do you feel you need the most help with right now?
12 responses

Figure 2. Areas where students need the most help in English

This aligns with everyday concerns in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) settings, where students often struggle to express themselves fluently and confidently. Additionally, 16.7% (2 out of 12) identified vocabulary as their primary area of difficulty, suggesting that while students may have a basic understanding of English, they lack a strong lexicon to support effective communication. Only 8.3% (1 out of 12) reported reading as their primary concern, indicating that comprehension skills are relatively stronger compared to productive skills like speaking and vocabulary use. These results suggest that interventions, such as peer tutoring programs, prioritise speaking-focused activities while also incorporating vocabulary-building exercises to support students' overall language proficiency.

A majority (58.3%, 7 out of 12) rated their confidence at level 3 on a 5-point scale, indicating moderate self-assurance but also room for improvement (see Fig. 3). Meanwhile, 16.7% (2 out of 12) selected level 4, suggesting a higher degree of confidence. In comparison, another 16.7% (2 out of 12) placed themselves at level 1, showing a lack of confidence in their abilities. Only 8.3% (1 out of 12) rated their confidence at level 2, reinforcing the idea that some students struggle with their self-perception in English communication. Notably, no students reported the highest confidence level (5), suggesting that even those with stronger language skills still feel they need improvement. These findings emphasise the need for structured speaking opportunities, confidence-building exercises, and continued peer support to help students enhance their self-efficacy in English.
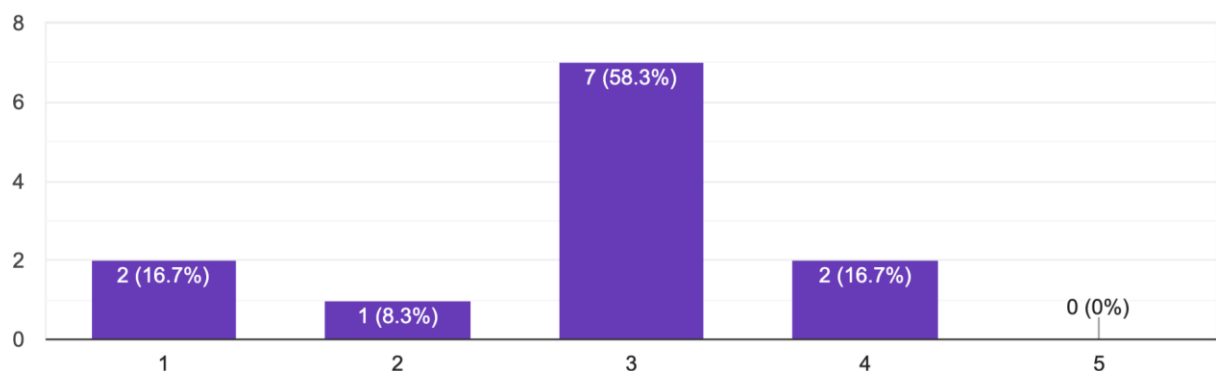

Figure 3. Confidence Levels in English Proficiency

Post-program responses indicate a notable increase in students' confidence in their English usage. 83.3% (10 out of 12) of students reported improved confidence, while 16.6% (2 out of 12) described their confidence as "greatly improved" (see Figure 4). The informal and peer-led nature of the program was a key factor in its success, as one tutee noted, "It was a great experience for me to be part of this program. The classes were conducted in an informal style, which made the program very interesting and enjoyable." This highlights the effectiveness of peer tutoring in fostering a relaxed and engaging learning environment.
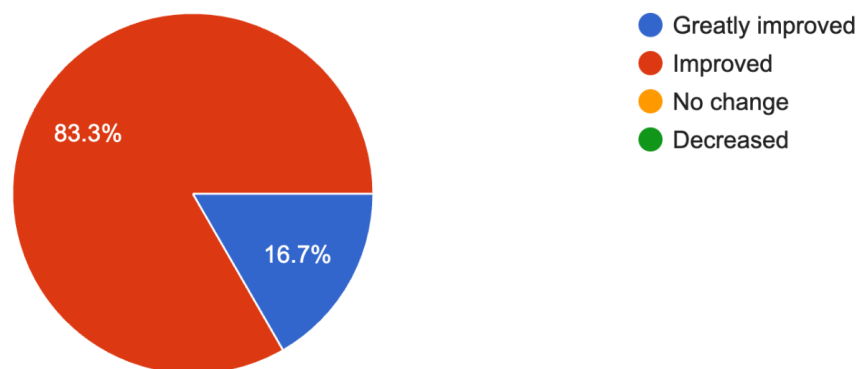

Figure 4. Impact of Peer Tutoring on Students' Confidence

The session reports from tutors reinforce the program's focus on speaking as the primary area of improvement, with over 26% of sessions exclusively dedicated to speaking and an additional 50% integrating speaking with other skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and discussion-based activities. Common topics covered included sentence structure, pronunciation practice, past and present tenses, AI debates, and vocabulary related to travel, technology, and university life. The majority of tutees were reported as "very active" (73%), while 23% were "somewhat active." Tutors highlighted challenges such as students being shy and hesitant to speak, which aligns with the pre-survey findings that confidence was a significant concern.

The research question aimed to determine the extent to which a peer tutoring program improves English language proficiency and academic performance in an EMI university. The data presented in Figure 5 (see below) suggests that the majority of tutees experienced a notable improvement in their understanding of the material. With 60% of respondents rating their comprehension at the highest level and an additional 28% providing a strong rating, the program has had a positive impact. This aligns with prior research on peer tutoring, which suggests that such programs can enhance academic learning by providing individualised support and fostering an interactive learning environment. The small percentage of students rating their understanding at a moderate level (12%) may indicate that some tutees required additional time or more targeted assistance to achieve greater progress.

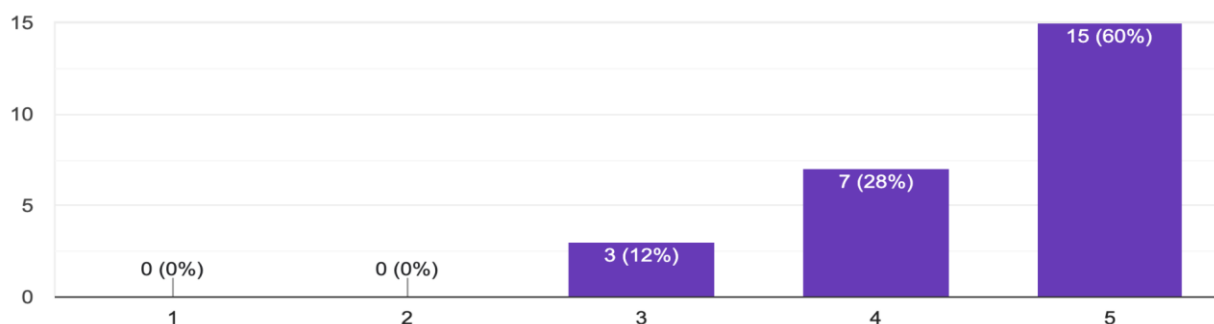Rate tutee's understanding (1poor-5excellent):
25 responses

Figure 5. Tutees' Progress in Understanding During the Peer Tutoring Program

Additionally, the high level of engagement among tutees, with over three-quarters (76.9%) reporting that they were "very active" during tutoring sessions. The other 26.9% indicated that they were "somewhat active," meaning that all of the students were involved to some degree. This rate of participation is notable, as active participation is associated with more language acquisition and more confidence in English usage. The fact that no students reported low levels of participation also suggests the success of the program at providing an interactive and engaging learning environment.

Cumulatively, these results confirm the effectiveness of the peer tutoring program in enhancing students' English capacity and motivation, thereby responding to the first research question. However, despite these positive results, further research is warranted to establish long-term retention and the actual effect on academic performance beyond perceived understanding as measured through self-reporting. Regardless of these successes, there were problems with the program as recruitment of tutors and consistency in some of the sessions were fraught with challenges. Tutors recommended assigning a permanent classroom to tutoring and distributing printed materials as ways to streamline the program. They also recommended the addition of more speaking practice to a regular schedule, review of vocabulary exercises, and focused practice on tricky grammar topics (e.g., conditionals, past tenses) in future sessions.

Qualitative Data: pre-survey analysis

To complement the quantitative results, this section presents a thematic analysis of open-ended feedback collected from the tutee pre-program survey. The purpose is to provide students with a voice, making visible their motivations, expectations, and concerns in their own words. These responses contextualise the peer tutoring program by linking learners' lived experiences to the broader concerns of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) difficulties identified in the literature. One of the dominant themes across the pre-survey responses was the necessity to build speaking and confidence in English, which validates Hyland's (2006) contention that language capacity is at the core of academic achievement and Cummins' (2008) distinction between conversational fluency and academic proficiency. One student answered that their main ambition was "speaking confidently in classes," while another stated the aim of achieving "IELTS score 8.0." Both succinct short-term academic needs and long-term plans for global mobility are reflected in these answers, resonating with Dearden's (2015) contention that EMI students tend to struggle with productive skills in non-immersion conditions. Speaking was the most oft-cited area of support, with one student stating, "Improving my speaking in English," and another citing "fluent speaking" as his hoped-for outcome.

Along with speaking, grammar, vocabulary, and writing were also pinpointed by students as areas of need, suggesting that although oral skills were prioritised, overall linguistic competencies were also seen as barriers to success. For instance, one respondent explained that they joined the

program "to improve grammar and vocabulary," while another emphasised the necessity of writing by selecting "considerable help needed" in this skill. These findings align with Topping's (1996) description of peer tutoring as a system that enables learners to address multiple skill deficiencies simultaneously. Surprisingly, no students expressed strong reservations about being part of the program, responding with "Not at this time" or simply "No." This suggests that students were mainly open to the idea of peer support despite cultural limitations in Uzbekistan, where, as Bozorov (2024) discussed, students may be hesitant to seek help for fear of appearing incompetent.

Post-Survey Analysis

Following the program, tutees completed a post-survey to assess their experiences, growth, and overall satisfaction with the program. Qualitative feedback is valuable in that it provides comparison with their expectations prior to the program and illustrates perceived value of peer tutoring in addressing language concerns. Following are the most salient themes presented through direct quotes of students. A significant theme was the perceived improvement in confidence and English usage, which corresponds with Roscoe and Chi's (2007) emphasis on the value of practice in low-stakes environments. Several students explicitly stated that their confidence had *"improved"* or *"greatly improved,"* with one respondent adding, *"I feel better prepared for my academic courses after the program."* Another described the experience as *"a great experience for me to be part of this program. The classes were conducted in an informal style, which made the program very interesting and enjoyable."* These reflections align with Arco-Tirado et al. (2020), who found that structured peer tutoring significantly enhances student performance by fostering motivation and active participation. At the same time, the data reveal that personalised interaction and discussion-based learning were especially valued. One student highlighted that the best aspect of the program was *"discussion and one-on-one working,"* while another noted *"the teacher's ability to adapt to my interests."* These insights echo Huang's (2015) argument that EMI learners benefit most when programs provide authentic, engaging interaction tailored to student needs. Significantly, when asked whether they would recommend the program, every respondent replied "Yes," underscoring the overall acceptance of peer tutoring as a supportive mechanism. Still, some limitations remained, as one participant mentioned the program was *"not finished,"* hinting at challenges of continuity that mirror Topping's (2005) caution about sustaining peer tutoring schemes over time.

Session Report Analysis

To further capture the dynamics of the program, 26 session reports from five tutors were analysed. These reports, completed after each class, provide insight into the nature of tutoring activities, participation, and the challenges encountered. They serve as a complement to the pre- and post-survey data by showing how the program operated in practice. A recurring theme was the active participation and growing engagement of students. Tutors frequently described their tutees as "very active" or "ready for the classes and actively participating in discussions." One report noted that "students are learning vocabulary that will be useful for their academic studies." At the same time, another reflected, "in comparison to what we had at the start of the semester, there is visible progress in speaking." These observations align with Arco-Tirado et al. (2020), who emphasise that structured peer tutoring environments boost confidence and encourage more consistent practice. The focus on topics such as debates, retelling, and one-on-one speaking also resonates with Huang's (2015) argument that authentic, discussion-based peer learning strengthens oral proficiency in EMI settings. At the same time, the reports highlight challenges in sustaining participation and ensuring resources. One tutor shared, stating "there are students who are really shy, and it is difficult to get them to speak," while another noted that "some students do not regard the lessons as a high priority" which demotivates tutors to teach tutees. Practical concerns were also raised, such as the need for "the ability to print resources for lessons" or the difficulty of keeping students motivated without variation by saying that "not every time, but sometimes, it is kind of difficult to maintain energy [in the class]." These comments echo Colvin and Ashman's (2010) finding that peer tutoring requires both institutional support and strategies to address learner hesitancy. While overall feedback suggests significant learning gains, these challenges reflect Topping's (2005) caution that peer tutoring programs must carefully balance enthusiasm with sustained support mechanisms.

Discussion

These findings are consistent with prior research that highlights peer tutoring as an effective mechanism for enhancing speaking skills and building learner confidence in EMI contexts. For example, Arco-Tirado et al. (2020) found that structured peer tutoring significantly improved academic performance, while Huang (2015) emphasised its role in reinforcing fluency and academic vocabulary. Similarly, Roscoe and Chi (2007) demonstrated that tutees benefit from low-stakes environments where they can practice without fear of failure, a pattern mirrored in the present study. At the same time, some divergence exists. While previous studies (Falchikov, 2001; Seo & Kim, 2019) noted substantial reciprocal benefits for tutors, the present study did not formally measure tutors' academic gains, focusing instead on tutee outcomes. This creates a gap that future research should address by systematically capturing the perspectives of tutors. Another point of contrast is that although prior research (Colvin & Ashman, 2010) emphasises the importance of institutional support for sustainability, our study highlighted challenges with tutor recruitment and retention that indicate weaker structural backing, suggesting that program impact may be constrained in resource-limited settings.

Taken together, the present findings reinforce much of the existing literature on the effectiveness of peer tutoring in language development, while also underscoring contextual challenges such as cultural reluctance to seek help and limited institutional support, which are less emphasised in international studies. This combination of consistency and divergence highlights the need for EMI universities in Uzbekistan to adapt peer tutoring practices to their specific sociocultural and institutional contexts.

Conclusion

The results indicate that peer tutoring is a possible way of closing language proficiency gaps in an EMI university context, even over a short duration. The flexibility in scheduling and one-on-one setting of peer tutoring enabled positive student experiences, with the majority of students claiming growth in confidence and speaking ability. The informal, student-centred approach of the program fostered a relaxed and interactive atmosphere, allowing tutees to build their English skills in a low-pressure setting. The findings indicate that peer tutoring can serve as a valuable complement to classroom learning, particularly for students seeking to improve their speaking and grammar. However, despite these positive outcomes, the program faced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining tutors, which threatened its long-term sustainability. The difficulty in attracting committed tutors highlights the need for formal incentives, such as course credit or official recognition, to ensure student participation.

The research findings indicate that peer tutoring is an effective support mechanism for EMI students, particularly in enhancing their spoken English and confidence. Although vocabulary and grammatical ability also developed, talking was the main issue and area of improvement. The high levels of tutor engagement further attest to the program's success in active participation. However, future programs must address the primary challenges by having formal tutor training, providing dedicated tutoring areas, and providing incentives for tutors and tutees. Long-term studies should also be conducted to ascertain the retention of language improvement after program duration. Through enhancing and expanding the peer tutoring programme, universities can offer additional support to EMI students to overcome language challenges and achieve academic success.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations to this study must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. One of the primary limitations was the brief time period since the program only ran for 6-7 weeks, and it was challenging to measure long-term language proficiency gains. Another limitation is the small sample of tutors and tutees, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to a larger population of students. The research was conducted using tutor session reports and self-reported questionnaires instead of standardised tests, so the perceived development in language ability may not accurately indicate actual progress. Tutors were chosen based on high English proficiency (IELTS

8.0), but they were not formally trained in tutoring skills, which could have compromised the quality and consistency of support offered. Voluntary sign-up led to selection bias, with students who were already interested in learning English more likely to sign up, so it was not known if the program would work as well with less motivated students. Cultural constraints in Uzbekistan, where students are reluctant to seek academic assistance for fear of being seen as incompetent, possibly restrict sign-up and attendance at sessions. In addition, issues of irregular attendance and commitment problems arose, with some tutors pulling out of the program due to time constraints and some tutees failing to attend the sessions regularly, which undermined continuity of learning. Institutional support was also weak, with no dedicated tutoring facilities for the program, no formal curricular recognition, and no financial incentives for tutors, all of which would have facilitated program sustainability. The syllabus placed its greatest emphasis on oral skills, while other equally significant aspects, such as academic writing, listening, and reading skills, were treated as secondary. This imbalance may have limited its overall impact on students' English proficiency. Next, the study did not determine whether the language gains made by students were long-lasting because no follow-up testing occurred once program completion had occurred. Hence, it cannot be said to what degree peer tutoring is effective within an EMI university setting in the long term. These limitations can be addressed in future versions of the program to enhance its effectiveness and yield more robust evidence on the role of peer tutoring in contributing to students' English proficiency and academic performance.

The peer tutoring initiative may also be expanded and reach even more areas of study wherein students can equally falter. The project has already been utilized in calculus, introduction to computer science, and physics courses at the same university, which speaks to its adaptability and potential to permeate more studies. As effective as peer tutoring has been in language development, universities providing EMI need to institutionalize such courses so that students are provided with systematic and structured scholarly support from peers. Formal acknowledgment of tutors, provision of special tutoring rooms, and incorporation of peer tutoring into university policy can also maintain the program's longevity. Language retention in the long term, the impact of peer tutoring on academic performance, and how to increase students' participation levels should also be explored in future research. Expansion of this program to other disciplines will enhance its achievement as a holistic support system, fostering academic as well as linguistic success for students in EMI environments.

Another significant limitation is that numerous of the measures relied on students' own subjective accounts of confidence and language development and not evidence-led measures of proficiency. While tutor session reports and staff observations were used for purposes of triangulation, the absence of standardised language tests or other quantitative performance indicators limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research should therefore incorporate objective testing to complement self-reported outcomes and provide more robust evidence of program impact.

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АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІН ҚОЛДАУҒА АРНАЛҒАН ӨЗАРА ОҚЫТУ БАҒДАРЛАМАСЫНЫҢ ТИІМДІЛІГІН БАҒАЛАУ

Аңдатпа.Бұл зерттеу Өзбекстандағы бір университетте ағылшын тілінде оқытылатын (EMI) ортада ағылшын тілін меңгеруде қиындықтарға тап болған студенттерге көмек көрсету үшін енгізілген тең құрбылар (Peer) тьюторлығы бастамасының ықпалын зерттейді. Университетке қабылдау үшін ең төменгі IELTS 5.5 деңгейі талап етілгенімен, оқытушылар көптеген студенттердің, әсіресе сөйлеу мен жазуда, қиындықтарға тап болғанын байқады. Осы мәселелерді шешу мақсатында еріктi студент-тьюторлардың құрылымдалған тілдік қолдауын ұсынатын пилоттық бағдарлама іске қосылды.

Зерттеу аралас әдістер дизайнына сүйеніп, бағдарламаға дейінгі және кейінгі сауалнамаларды, тьюторлық сессия есептерін және оқытушылардың пікірлерін қамтыды. Нәтижелер студенттердің сенімділігі мен ағылшын тілін меңгеру дағдыларының айтарлықтай жақсарғанын көрсетті, ал сөйлеу 75% қатысушылар үшін негізгі мәселе ретінде анықталды. Бағдарламадан кейін 83,3% студент ағылшын тілін қолдануда сенімділіктерінің артқанын хабарлады, ал тьюторлар 76,9% тьютилердің сабақтарға белсенді қатысқанын атап өтті.

Соған қарамастан, тьюторларды тарту мен ұстап тұру, сабақтарға тұрақсыз қатысу, сондай-ақ институционалдық қолдаудың жеткіліксіздігі бағдарламаның тұрақтылығына кедергі келтірді. Тұжырымдар Peer тьюторлығының EMI ортасында тілдік қолдауды қамтамасыз етудің тиімді әдісі екенін дәлелдегенімен, ұзақ мерзімді нәтижелерді жақсарту үшін ресми тьюторларды даярлау, арнайы сабақ өткізу орындары және ынталандыру жүйесі қажет екендігін көрсетеді. Бағдарламаның бағаларға және тілдің ұзақ мерзімді игерілуіне әсерін бағалау үшін қосымша зерттеулер жүргізу ұсынылады.

Түйінді сөздер: Peer (теңқұрбылар) тьюторлығы, ағылшын тілін меңгеру, EMI (ағылшын тілінде оқыту), студенттерді қолдау, жоғары білім, тіл үйрену, академиялық жетістік.

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ОЦЕНКА ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТИ ПРОГРАММЫ ВЗАИМНОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ ДЛЯ ПОДДЕРЖКИ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

Аннотация.Данное исследование рассматривает влияние инициативы равноправного (Peer) тьюторства в одном из университетов Узбекистана, направленной на поддержку студентов, испытывающих трудности с английским языком в условиях обучения на английском языке (EMI). Несмотря на то, что минимальное требование для поступления в университет составляет IELTS 5.5, преподаватели отмечали, что многие студенты продолжают сталкиваться с проблемами, особенно в устной и письменной речи. Для решения этих трудностей была запущена пилотная программа равноправного тьюторства, в рамках которой добровольцы-студенты оказывали структурированную языковую поддержку.

Исследование опиралось на смешанный дизайн, включавший анкетирование до и после программы, отчёты о тьюторских сессиях и отзывы преподавателей. Результаты показали значительное повышение уверенности студентов и улучшение их навыков английского языка; при этом устная речь оказалась основной проблемной областью для 75% участников. После завершения программы 83,3% студентов сообщили о большей уверенности в использовании английского языка, а тьюторы отметили высокий уровень вовлеченности, при котором 76,9% подопечных активно участвовали в занятиях.

Тем не менее набор и удержание тьюторов, нерегулярное посещение и недостаточная институциональная поддержка стали вызовами для устойчивости программы. Полученные данные подтверждают эффективность Peer тьюторства как средства поддержки студентов в условиях EMI, однако подчёркивают необходимость формальной подготовки тьюторов, выделенных учебных пространств и системы поощрений для достижения долгосрочных результатов. Рекомендуются дальнейшие исследования, чтобы измерить влияние программы на академические оценки и долгосрочное освоение языка.