

Experimenting Peer Mentoring in Pakistani ESL Context

Shumaila Zaman¹
Raja Nasim Akhar²
Shamim Ali³
Tanvir Akhtar⁴
Mali Ajmal Gulzar⁵

Abstract

Large sized classes are one of the gravest problems faced in ESL context of Pakistan. While a number of strategies have been proposed to overcome this challenge, yet a viable and effective strategy is lacking. This study aims to experiment the peer mentoring as an approach to tackle the issue where 'More able' students in the class were asked to mentor their less able peers in paragraph writing skill. An experimental approach was used in the light of Vygotsky's Sociocultural theoretical framework. The treatment was carried out for seven weeks in a government school at secondary level, for which pre-test and post-test of control group and experimental group were conducted and analysed statistically by using SPSS. The study found that the experimental group who worked through peer mentoring technique performed comparatively better than the control group in the use of parts of speech and idea development, suggesting that peer mentoring technique can be recruited as an effective means to counter large sized classes glitch. The study also recommends that this strategy should be made a mandatory part of teacher training as well as classroom teaching as a technique to overcome the large sized class issue.

Keywords: *More Knowledgeable Other, Peer Mentoring Strategy, Large-sized Classes, ESL*

1. Introduction

Teaching of English as a second language in government schools in Pakistan confronts, amongst numerous others, two major challenges, namely, shortage of

¹ Lecturer English, Foundation University, Rawalpindi

² Professor, Foundation University, Rawalpindi

³ Assistant Professor, AIOU, Islamabad

⁴ Associate Professor, Foundation University, Rawalpindi

⁵ Associate Professor, AIOU, Islamabad

teachers and large-sized classes. As for the former, many government schools have only one- school one- teacher situation where the teacher is responsible for all classes. The scenario is further worsened by the fact that the schools teachers are also assigned non- teaching jobs like election duties etc.

As regards the class size, according to Sarwar (2001), the classroom size can be 40-100 students in Pakistani state school (average class size in elite should be 25-30). Given the situation, the individual attention ideal remains unfulfilled. This affects the quality of teaching English which requires a personalized approach to enhance learning. The overall plight is further aggravated by the fact that a large number of teachers teaching in government schools are not adequately trained in handling large sized classes i.e. classroom management skills (i.e. pair and group work etc).

Traditionally, the situation is handled by encouraging students to rote learn as the easiest remedy to the problem. It has also been established that a large number of the teachers teaching at school level lack good communication skills (Coleman 2010) which fails to provide the adequate level of input considered essential to language learning (Krashen 1985). Most of the teachers, as a result, resort to using Urdu, or a local language for that matter, to teach English and restrict themselves to providing a translation method.

This extraordinary situation calls for an out-of-the-box solution. Several approaches have been suggested in order to overcome the challenges similar to the ELT situation in Pakistan. Yet a doable solution is still lacking to overcome this gigantic problem which seriously undermines school education in government schools of Pakistan, especially teaching of English. In short, there is a need to find a solution which, on the one hand, can offer a remedy to the shortage of teachers, and allow us to handle the large sized classes, on the other hand. Peer-mentoring is the approach which promises to address the complex situation which emerges as a consequence of the nexus of the two problems, namely lack of required mindset of teachers who have to teach English as well as a larger number of students in one class. This study intends to try this strategy with a view to seeing whether this can provide the desired effects.

The purpose of this study is to experiment the peer-mentoring technique with an English class in a government school in Rawalpindi (one of the twin cities including Islamabad, capital city of Pakistan) using Sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky (1968) where one of the able students is appointed as a peer-mentor to assist a less able fellow student in teaching of English. The idea is to see if and

how use of peer tutoring can be used as a means of solving the problem of inability on part of the teacher to give individual attention to each student in the class. The notion of peer tutoring is based on Sociocultural theory's notion of More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) where anyone who is superior in knowledge and skills can be appointed to help a student to learn a language. In this case, a fellow abler student is assigned this role who is supposed to tutor a fellow student with teaching of English under the overall supervision of the class teacher.

1.2 Research Objective

- To experiment the peer-tutoring strategy in English language classroom in Pakistani government schools.
- To determine the impact of peer-tutoring strategy in language classroom in Pakistani government schools.

1.3 Research Questions

- How can peer tutoring helps in developing and organizing ideas for paragraph writing skill?

2. Review of Literature

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian developmental psychologist, argued that social interaction is key in language and cognitive development in individuals which is embedded in social events. His view was in direct contradiction to the earlier view held by Piaget who regarded the cognitive development as a natural process. Contrary to this view point, Vygotsky, in his theory referred to as Sociocultural theory, emphasized that language learning and cognitive development is subject to interacting with other fellows in social context. This point of view gained popularity and many researchers and writers started experimenting this theory to teach language and gradually the theory got entrenched firmly in the field of education.

Vygotsky maintains that mediation of cultural tools, egocentric speech, social interaction, the role of Zone of Proximal Development (hence ZPD), More Knowledgeable Other (hence MKO) are key players in a child's development to regulate learning. According to his theory ZPD represent the distance between actual development and potential development, basically its difference between what a learner has achieved and what he/she can achieve. An MKO on the other hand can be anybody, whosoever is better in performance/ knowledge and can be a teacher, parent(s), elder siblings or peers (Vygotsky, 1986). The basic function

of an MKO is to provide scaffolding which facilitates the learner to achieve the potential, mainly through providing social interaction opportunities to the learner in the learning process.

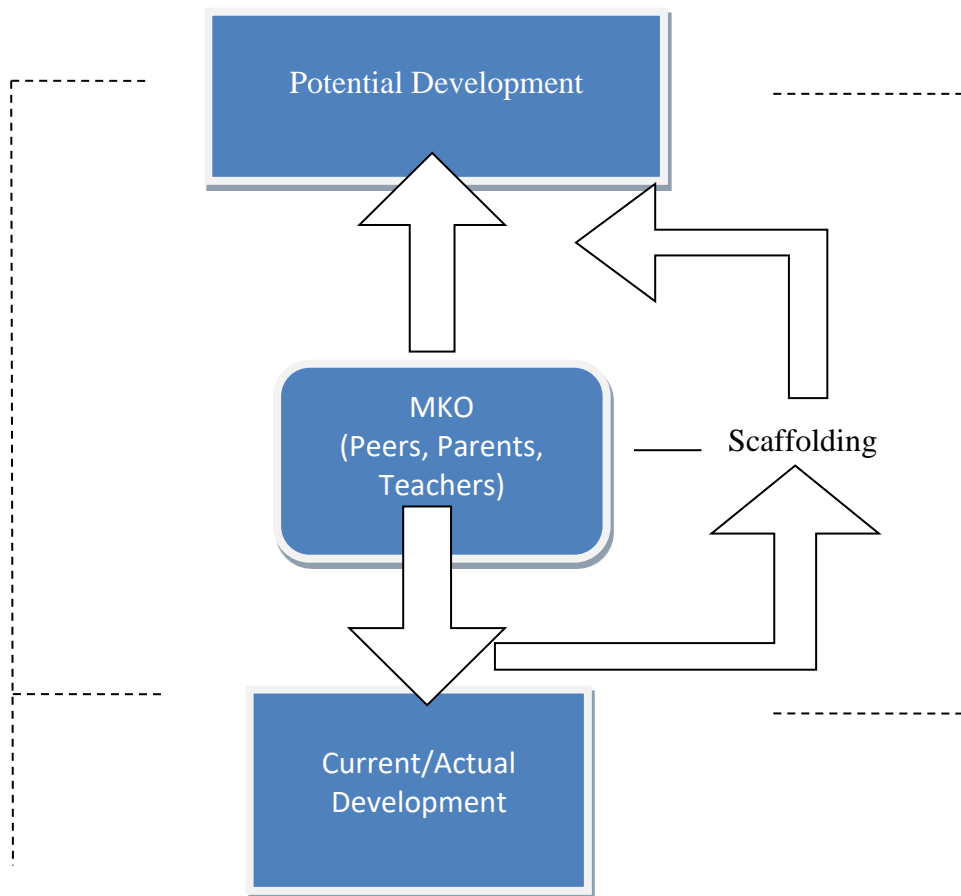
The most important notion, however, is that language is the main tool of carrying out all these tasks, that is, language is the means of interacting and understanding the interlocutors. This implies that cognition is embedded by linguistic activity in the social setting which helps in solving complex tasks and leads to higher development. Vygotsky is of the view that this egocentric speech becomes louder when the learner collaborates with other learners in solving a difficult task and also plays role of instructor when no external assistance is available for learner.

Vygotsky also makes a distinction between the levels of child's cultural development, which according to him, occur at interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. The interpersonal takes place on the 'social level', whereas the latter is carried out on the 'individual level'.

Reinforcing the idea, Cole (1996) holds that social process and context has an important value and the human mind and body is not bound to biological development only, but social artifacts also play their role in learners' development. This equates to claiming that learner's internal regulation is a result of an external process/social involvement before it is regulated, and this is carried out through speech, imparting speech a pivotal role in the whole process. Following Vygotsky, he also draws a distinction between the inner and outer speech relation.

This is attributing to learners' capacity to learn and the potential of enhancing learning with the aid of two more important elements, that is, ZPD and an MKO. According to Gibbon (2002), under this zone the learner is being enabled to achieve the task by providing aid. Whatever a learner knows can be enhanced by providing assistance through dialogic relation and learners' actual level can be increased by reaching to potential level. Moreover, in achieving this potential development various factors play their key role, these are MKOs who provide scaffolding for completing the task which he /she was not capable of doing alone and enhancing their learning as well.

Zone of Proximal Development



Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT) gained huge popularity as a new insight into teaching and learning languages. The framework has been extensively used for language teaching and specifically for second language teaching by teachers and researchers with encouraging achievements (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). However, Vygotsky’s Sociocultural theory is an umbrella term which covers a number of language strategies implemented in second language learning and teaching classrooms by providing interactive and collaborative environment (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Harmer, 2007). Under these strategies, the concept of scaffolding language learning is one of the highly appreciated techniques to enhance learners’ command in second language, particularly English (Gibbons,

2002; Walqui, 2006). First coined by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), on bases of Vygotsky's SCT framework, the term scaffolding refers to "temporary, but essential nature of mentor's assistance" Maybin, Mercer, and Steirer, (1992) provided within a classroom to "help learners to move towards new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding" (Gibbons, 2002,). In this study peer mentors' (competent learners)scaffolding was provided to their peers in the classroom to complete and learn certain skills in the English language classroom. The traditional view of mentoring was that only a teacher can be a mentor as according to the traditional definition, as mentor is a person advanced in knowledge and experience who works for upward mobility of learners (Ragins, 1997). Recent research has broadened this traditional view of mentoring to formal, informal mentoring and diversified mentoring where the learners are being mentored by the peer, irrespective of gender and race (Bozionelos, 2004). As peers offer emotional and psychological support by contributing to learners learning, this replaces the role of the traditional mentor in the classroom (Thomas et al., 2001; Krame & Higgins, 2001).

Peer mentoring happens amongst peers of the same age, but different in knowledge. It involves peer interaction to help learners' improve their performance and result in an outcome. The teacher sets the environment in the classroom where competent peers help the other (less competent) to solve the task by making it understandable. According to Terrain and Leonard (2007) peer mentoring can occur in a formal and informal classroom setting for the sake of gaining functional pursuits. Peer mentoring provides an opportunity to the learners for transferring and retaining their knowledge. Moreover, learning by teaching is a fine skill also for learners (Santrock, 2006). The traditional concept of peer mentoring involves a dyadic relation where the mentor provides face-to-face help to the mentees in a particular area. However, this concept has been changed now and it can be occurred with aid of online sources as well (Sinclair, 2003; Single & Muller, 2001).Peer mentoring is a helpful strategy in a way that the learners work in the same zone to achieve their goals and there is extensive literature which supports learners working together in a small group (Wood & O' Malley, 19960).

The idea of peer mentoring has been successfully implemented in several studies with promising results.(Le Cornu, 2005; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2010).While the approach has been widely used in many studies, it has not been as commonly used in Pakistan context. The only serious attempt at the application of Sociocultural theory in a school context of Pakistan was used by Rezvi (2012) who tried to

assess students' achievement through peer mentoring. In the experiment, she appointed Grade-10 learners as peer-tutors to teach text books to their Grade-9 counterparts, using sociocultural framework. The study proved that the learners who were taught by their mentors showed better results when compared to the learners taught through the traditional method. The strength of the study was to use learners to mentor learners, a technique not hitherto experimented.

Similarly, Jabeen (2013) also conducted an experimental study to teach communicative language skills. Her treatment spanned over three months and this time the students were taken from Federal Colleges of Pakistan. The purpose of the study was to assess the effectiveness of collaborative learning for improving speaking and listening skills of the college students. Her study proved that teaching through interaction and collaborative learning, yielded better results and brought about effective changes in the oral and aural skills of the learners taught through this technique.

In a more recent study (Alwi, Rauf & Soomro 2016), conducted on a small group of fifth grade students to increase their reading fluency, vocabulary and communication skills, the findings revealed that improved performance was achieved through peer mentoring in reading accuracy and pronunciation, attendance, confidence, self-image and self-esteem. Apart from teaching, the study also created an environment which proved to be conducive to better learning. Cross-age and peer-tutoring assisted in creating a non-threatening environment and providing interesting activities which they enjoyed. The study concludes that in the Pakistan scenario, it was a versatile research as it introduced how the young learners could be trained to be a teacher.

In Pakistan, the concept of peer mentoring is not new in the sense that it is not been formally used under a given and elaborate framework which specifically aims at employing peer mentoring in a formalized fashion. Moreover, studies prove that peer mentoring is a good way to develop the learners' social skills and personal development along with academic improvement (Johnson & Johnson 1986; Kaendz & Fech, 2001). Not only does peer mentoring help to improve classroom instructions and strategies, but it also helps to keep learners engaged and motivated.

Given the tall claims about peer mentoring in redressing difficulty circumstances, it is yet to see whether this technique can be used as a curing remedy for large sized class scenario which characterize Pakistan government school situations. As

mentioned above, the teacher has to confront the tall order of teaching classes where the number of students is enormous and which prevents him from ensuring whether each learner received the personal attention he/she deserve and whether learning is taking place. This is what this study aims to look into by experimenting peer mentoring technique as a remedial measure to conquer the challenge of tackling big classes.

2.1 The Gap

As pointed out above, in Pakistan government schools the number of students in a class are in most cases large and truly qualify for the 'difficult circumstances' classes. Obviously, the teacher (usually one-teacher-one-class situation prevails) cannot provide individual attention to students individually or on a one to one basis, hence, lack of proper feedback and mentoring. The plight can be mitigated by introducing the notion of peer mentoring, where the 'abler' students can play the role of the 'More Knowledgeable Other' to support and mentor less-able fellow students in learning English at school level. These peer mentors can prove to be a great help to the teacher who are hamstrung due to large number of students to deal with singlehandedly. This study aims to experiment peer mentoring in a Government Girls Schools under Vygotsky's peering mentoring notion within the framework of Sociocultural theory with the purpose of finding out whether the idea of peer mentoring can be successful, which, if it does, would encourage the teachers to follow suite and can be crucial in alleviating the plight of the teachers as well as can improving teaching of English situation in government schools of the country.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is based upon Lev Vygotsky's Socio cultural framework. Vygotsky, s was a socio cognitive theorist who valued cognitive growth as well as society's role in human learning. The basic tenants of his theory consist of mind, tool, ZPD and community of practice.

According to him, learning cannot take place without cultural settings and the interaction within the outer world. Therefore, human cognitive development is embedded in the social or interpsychological plan to the individual or interpsychological plane. The important elements of his writings are the social sources of individual thinking and the role of tools in individual development. He believes that every function in a child's cultural development happens twice; interpsychologically (social level) and intrapsychologically (internal or individual level). On the interpsychological level, the learners co-construct learning with

collective activities, whereas on intrapsychological level the learners self – regulate the learning which is a result of consistent outer support. The development of the learner is the transformation process from an interpersonal process to intrapersonal. A consistent outer event helps in regulating an internal development which becomes part of learning. Vygotsky emphasized the role of interaction with competent or advanced learners to reach higher development. To reach these planes, human beings use cultural tools which help in the learner’s psychological development. Amongst them is also language, which is the most commonly used tool in communicating. In addition, other cultural tools include art, computer, maps, signs and codes, which provide a base to develop the learners higher order skills; e.g. reasoning and thinking. Adults use these tools by assisting learners to internalize the process and develop higher order development. Human cognitive functioning is dependent upon the mediation of the above mentioned tools. According to Lantolf & Thorne (2007), Vygotsky did not reject the role of neurobiological functioning for the human development, rather he has focused on the vital role of interaction, whether it be with teacher, parent, adult or peer for the learner’s cognitive development. Indeed, Vygotsky’s Socio cultural theory considers learners as actual problem solvers and meaning makers who reach the solution through negotiation and the assistance of other individual and interacting to them.

The child is not alone in the world, but the support and instructions of a competent person greatly help him in development. The given assistance provided through the usage of language supports and instructions can only work when provided under the Zone of Proximal Development of learners. This is an area where the distinction can be made clear between the task a learner is capable of doing alone or under the assistance of a more capable learner. It is the important distance between can and cannot, the relationship between matured and making mature functions. Essentially, it is a phase where if a learner is provided enough help, it would enable him to do the task alone in the future.

ZPD is the transformation from interpsychological to intrapsychological. In this zone, where by joint activities, the expert helps by all means to the novice to reach or achieve the task. According to Fahim & Haghani (2012), the variety of internal functions can be developed with the help of interaction provided by peers or adults. The actual implication of this theory is to produce independent learners from dependent learners and create an autonomous classroom. Lantolf (2000) is correct in saying that ZPD is an opportunity provided to learn with and from the others. The tasks which they themselves are not capable of achieving, with

repeated practice and assistance, they can achieve adult role and responsibility. For successful learning, the community of practice is very important in which they will get an opportunity to work collaboratively with the joint expertise for the achievement of common goals. Vygotsky's theory of learning is not only applicable and effective in an ESL classroom, rather it is also beneficial for other subjects taught at educational institutes.

3. Research Design

The research design of the present study is essentially experimental. Two selected groups of students of 8th grade of a government Girls school were chosen. The groups were divided into control and experimental group. The treatment spanned over seven weeks and after the intervention period was over, a post-test was conducted as originally planned. A post test was also given to the control group in parallel to be analyzed later for comparison. Adhering to the standard experimental practice, the activities were divided into three phases including:

- Pre test
- Treatment Period
- Post test

Before the start of intervention period, a pre-test was carried out on both of the groups. The fundamental aim of conducting the pre-test was not only to examine the learner's language skill at the point of starting the study but to identify the peer mentors from amongst the students of experimental group. The selection of the peer-mentors was made on the basis of their performance in the pre-test. In addition, their previous academic record (i.e. score in exams and class tests as well as prior academic record) was also taken into account in selecting them for the given role. The willingness of peer mentors for playing the assigned role was also sought formally. The control group was taught paragraph writing skills by their own school teachers, as before, by using the traditional method, while the experimental group was taught the content by the researcher using peer mentoring technique under the supervision of the class teacher. The researcher designed a range of activities aimed at teaching paragraph writing.

3.1 Procedure

3.1.1 The Pre Test

As mentioned above, the aim of the pre-test was to assess the learners current language skills at the point of starting the study (then) with regard to parts of speech, sentence structure, and use of punctuation, spellings, vocabulary and

development of ideas. The pre-test was conducted with both the (experimental and the control) groups. As mentioned above, the results of pre test were also to be used for the purpose of making selection of peer mentors for the job. Yet the key purpose of the pre-test was to determine the point of reference for both of the groups to which the post test results were to be compared with the subjects' situation. This process spanned over a week as sufficient time was required to establish and develop understanding of the situation because the researcher was an outsider. After taking stock of the situation and given the time for study writing skills were further narrowed down to development of idea in a paragraph and use of parts of speech in a given context only.

3.1.2 Treatment Period

The pre test was followed by a treatment spanning over 08 weeks. Before the commencement of the treatment period, a weeklong session (pre- peer teaching) was held, consisting of model presentations by the researcher. The model presentations given to the would-be mentors were to serve as guidelines to be followed by the latter during their peer mentoring job. Paragraph writing skill was focused so that their own concept of idea development and mastery of use of parts of speech got honed.

This practice was carried out for a week so that the learners could develop a clear understanding of how to write a descriptive paragraph. The content used for teaching during this stage was also carefully chosen for its clear paragraph writing structure. Then the class was split into small groups- one mentor and four mentees formed a group. The former were then trained on how to assist their peers in improving and developing their paragraph writing skill following Zachary's (2000) "Tips for mentors in providing feedback" checklist (Annex).

A range of activities were used during the treatment period, comprising varied and diverse tasks. Different seating arrangements were used, marking a departure from the traditional classroom settings, which is largely theatrical. The idea of having them around a table was aimed at making the sit facing each other maximizing interaction amongst the learners. Clear and unambiguous instructions as to how to carry out the tasks were given, followed by mentees working under the mentorship of the mentors appointed for the group.

The activities were broken down in the following manageable components for clarity and ease of learning:

- Brainstorming by mentees

- Preparing a first draft
- Editing/re-drafting (adding and deleting)
- The final draft

The class teacher and the researcher went around seeing whether everything was going well and doing the mending job whenever communication broke down or if the peer mentors needed any further guidance in carrying out their job. For assistance, the mentors and mentees were provided with a glossary consist of relevant vocabulary items expected to be used in the lesson at hand as well as examples of sentence structures that might potentially be required for practicing descriptive paragraph writing. The idea was to provide every support required in completing the task.

3.1.3 Post test

After going through the four week intervention, the learners of both groups were given a topic to write unseen descriptive paragraph which were from the routine life. The results were then compared with their pre test in order to measure how much improvement, if any was effected/gained in by teaching writing skill (idea development in a paragraph writing and appropriate use of parts of speech). The design and assessment variable in pre- and post test were the same so that only improvement was easily assessed, keeping other variables constant. In the post test, the learners worked individually, without any external aid.

3.1.4 Observation

As mentioned above, another tool of study was the observation checklist. The checklist consisted of items which observed the behavior during the teaching. Classroom activities were observed by the researcher as a participant observer in an unimposing way without letting the students know that they were being observed. This naturalistic observation was done throughout the intervening period at different intervals to observe the learner's attitude during the performance of the activities, peer interactions patterns and reaction to this new strategy. It was made sure that these aspects of the learners' behavior were observed when the learners were working as peer mentors and peer mentees. The observation sheet was designed to observe elements which were likely to play an important role in creating an environment conducive to learning writing skills and facilitating each other in carrying out this writing skills activities.

3.1.5 Observation Checklist

| Observation Questions | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| Were the learners confused? | | |
| Were the learners shy? | | |
| Were the learners hesitant? | | |
| Were the learners taking interest? | | |
| Were the learners co-operative? | | |
| Were the peer mentees asking questions frequently? | | |
| Were the peer mentors explaining to peer mentees well? | | |

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Pre-test and Post-test

Post tests were conducted on both the groups (control and experimental). The results are given below:

| Experimental group | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|------|-----------|------|-------|----|
| Variables | Pre test | | Post test | | T | P |
| | M | SD | M | SD | | |
| Writing skills | 3.10 | 1.14 | 5.53 | 1.43 | 22.58 | 00 |
| Control group | | | | | | |
| Writing skills | 3.24 | 1.16 | 2.73 | 1.28 | 2.568 | 05 |

The pre test and post test paragraphs writing were marked on the basis of idea development, organization and coherence including the errors in parts of speech. The paired sample t-test shows an increase in the experimental group results and a decrease in control group results. It was found that after an intervention period, learners of the experimental group were capable of writing better than their control group counterparts with regard to development and organization of ideas.

The post tests showed a significant change in the learners' ability in the use of linguistic items as well as in the idea organization and development. They were now able to write opening statements and provided supporting details, were capable of relating and connecting ideas, and jotting down their ideas. In addition, they learnt to remain focused on the given topic while writing as well as putting together supporting details in a coherent manner and refraining from

including irrelevant' ideas. Moreover, the post-test registered a considerable improvement in the use of connectors as well as subject verb agreement. They became more aware of using a single tense consistently in the same paragraph. They used conjunctions approximately and did not jump from one form of the verb to another randomly while constructing sentences which they often did in pre test.

As far as the errors in parts of speech of both the groups were concerned, the experimental group committed more errors in number (not in proportionate) than the control groups as mentioned in above mentioned tables. The reason was not that the experimental group had not improved in this area what happened infact was as number of sentences increases and most mistakes occurred. No significant improvement in use of parts of speech in the control group can be explained plausibly keeping in view the fact that this area was not focused for teaching. Thus, if, in general, it remained unchanged largely.

Experimental Group (Error Analysis)

| Pre tests | | Post tests |
|----------------|--------|------------|
| Spellings | 38.84% | 44.44% |
| Capitalization | 24.25% | 25.32% |
| Adjectives | 3.86% | 1.64% |
| Prepositions | 5.79% | 3.61% |
| Articles | 3.16% | 3.28% |
| Verb | 15.99% | 14.80% |
| Pronoun | 5.09% | 4.60% |
| Punctuation | 2.98% | 2.30% |

The above mentioned statistics show the results of observation during treatment stage.

4.2. Findings of the Study

The study has revealed several important findings with regard to employing the peer mentoring strategy in English language teaching in government schools in the Rawalpindi district. The marked difference between the pre tests and the post tests clearly demonstrated that in comparison to the traditional method of teaching English as a second language, this alternative strategy was very effective and can be safely replicated to achieve positive results.

The above mentioned analysis also revealed encouraging results regarding the strategy. Firstly, in the post tests, the experimental group performed better in the area of idea development than their fellow students taught through the traditional method. As far as parts of speech errors committed by learners were concerned, both the groups committed mistakes, the only difference in experimental groups' writing was that in post tests their ideas were focused, relevant and increased in numbers whereas the control group did not show any improvement in their idea development and size/number of sentences in their writings.

However, individual differences were found in both the groups (control and experimental) because of the mixed ability class, but the results had shown a little improvement in the performance of the experimental group after the given intervention in the English Language classroom. However, as regards to parts of speech and their uses, the results were different.

Most of the students could not assign the individual words to their respective grammatical category i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions etc. It was surprising that despite the fact that in English classes a lot of emphasis is placed on teaching the parts of speech, that is, recognizing the grammatical category of a given word the performance in identifying the class of the word was very disappointing.

The numbers indicate that lack of these skills contributed significantly to students' inability to develop the idea in writing a paragraph. This is a plausible explanation that lends weight to the claim mentioned above that there is a strong link between the ability to recognize what category a word belongs to and the development of idea in writing. This also provides a justification for choosing these two aspects of language teaching. Another negative impact stemming out of lack of knowledge of grammatical categories on paragraph writing was that the former led students to use the same words and sentences more than once which resulted in illogical repetition and cluttering. This was possibly because of the absence of teacher's individual assistance provided to the students while practicing writing skill.

The observation data showed that peer mentoring gave the mentees a sense of having support, closer by as they knew someone was available to help if they got stuck. Moreover, this provided them the environment to be more adventurous and encouraged them to undertake the tasks they would otherwise have been shy to attempt. A sense of ability to rely on someone who could bail them out of a

difficult situation provided a great moral support. Moreover, breaking away from the traditional seating arrangement encouraged them to take involvement in interactive conversation. They felt relaxed in the absence of directly facing the teacher which is being imposed on them and they had less freedom to turn around and interact with their fellow students. This strategy worked as a kind of invitation to ask help freely from their mentors when needed.

It was also observed that peer mentoring also helped the less competent students with respect to their writing skills. Firstly, they felt at ease to ask for peer assistance without any sense of getting their face threatened, which created a positive impact. They appeared to have the freedom of seeking the help of their peers with whom they felt relaxed. Thus, they were able to ask questions where they were unsure or they wanted to reconfirm their knowledge or skills. Secondly, the assistance provided to mentees by their peer mentors also proved helpful in developing their writing style and the basic English structures. The practice of writing during the experimental period enabled them to organize and develop related ideas according to the topic as shown by the post test results. They received a good deal of practice and guidelines by working collaboratively which resulted in significant improvement in their writing skills.

5. Discussion

The analysis of results indicates that the peer mentoring strategy experimented in this study helps the learners to develop and organize their ideas in a better way. The less competent learners who were assigned peers to mentor them had the feeling (1) that there was someone, the mentor, they could resort to for help and guidance when they needed it (2) they received individual attention to solve their difficulties and answer their questions which was not available to them before because the teacher could not attend to their individual needs, that is, that there was someone who could bail them out when they were stuck. This psychological as well as teaching aid boosted their moral and motivated them to learn.

Moreover, as can be seen from the post test results, the mentees didn't commit repetition of same idea or vocabulary as they did before the mentorship help (pretest results). In addition, the strategy helped in creating an interactive environment where students were engaged in extensive communication process by maximizing use of English in the class room. This turned the teacher-centered methodology into a student-centered classroom where everyone is busy instead of a silent listener.

It is important to note that not only did the strategy brought benefits to the mentees in receiving useful help in learning English through individualized attention, but the mentors also accrued benefits from this exercise in that it resulted in building their capacities and enhancing their own communication skills in the process of explaining rules, giving feedback participants guiding theory partners. The mentors felt more confident and motivated. However, while the experiment highlighted several benefits to both the stakeholders in the entire process (mentors and mentees) in terms of enhancement of language and communication skills it didn't register significant advancement in certain respects.

Firstly, as revealed post tests show, there was no significant improvement as far as parts of speech were concerned. The learners continued to commit the same mistakes in this domain in contrary to the hope that the process would also lead to improvement in the use of parts of speech. This setback, however, can be explained and is understandable given the fact that the period of intervention was not long enough to being about significant improvement in learning this part of the grammar. Probably dedicated and exclusives classes are required to correct or unlearn the mistakes they make in the use of parts of speech. This problem couldn't not be addressed because of shortage of time available and the focus of the study. So, this begs further investigation. However, the experiment suggests that this is achievable if students are given more time to use English in a real context and extensive exposure to listen to it, which unfortunately is main stumbling block in the whole process of teaching English as a second language in Pakistan context.

Moreover, through observation it was noticed that the students felt at ease and found it convenient to consult their mentors whenever they came across any kind of difficulty during task performance. As for sharply contrasts with their level of uneasiness and nervousness they exhibited while consulting with their teacher. This Pakistan context, there is always a psychological barrier in students approaching their teacher for help for help and guidance. As a matter of fact, based on our personal experiences, a fear is 'inbuilt' in students annoy the teacher which inhibits them to approach them fearlessly. The major reason cited for this shyness is the face threatening acts performed by teachers when the students resort to them for mentorship and assistance. In fact, this the peer mentoring strategy argued for in this study points to the conclusion that a non- threatening and tendon free environment is essential to creating a learning environment in the class.

To sum up, the peer mentoring strategy experimented in this study, though at a small scale, can boldly suggest that it can be an effective tool in bringing about a qualitative change in ESL classroom in Pakistan and can hugely reduce the burden on the teachers who seem helpless in the face of dealing with large number of students. It is also a winner in the sense that it doesn't require any additional resources or financial implications. Above all, the strategy allowed both mentors and mentees to gain confidence which is key to make them efficient learners and user of English in real contexts.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study are complex. Firstly, the study had certain limitations in the sense that the duration of the intervention was short of ideal. We believe that the extended treatment should have yielded unambiguous outcome.

Secondly, what was experimented was very unconventional and largely against the social grain of educational set up. That is, for a pupil to take over the function of a mentor in the presence of the teacher is like asking someone to drive who has never been in the driving seat before. The point being made is that inculcating such a culture, in particular educational context, cannot happen in a short duration as that of this study. Yet, there are indications which are encouraging and bring some hope. Despite the fact that it was a completely new thing for the students to teach and learn from their fellows, there were positive sign that this approach is doable.

In a nutshell, the study was a mix success and failure. Failure in the sense that in the given period of intervention the grammar of the learners didn't improve significantly. And was not expected to because learning language structures is long tedious and complex process which cannot be mastered in few weeks. Thus, the poor performance in this respect seems pretty explainable and isn't a source of worry as far as this study is concerned. The study recognizes that the strategy augurs well if it is implemented over a longer period of time.

On the other hand, the success story is more interesting and encouraging. The peer mentoring strategy adopted in this study has proved to be a successful initiative in creating an environment conducive to learning. It has offered an encouraging alternative to the traditional methodology which is characterized by several setbacks.

Additionally, this strategy supplements teaching methodologies in a language

classroom and proves a support to the teacher. Large classes and the teachers' lack of expertise in government schools are the problems which need to be rectified. In a condition where teachers do not hold a relevant degree, they must be provided with pre-service and in-service trainings to overcome this shortcoming. To overcome the ELT challenges, it is essential to improve the overall educational system in state schools in which the maximum number of the Pakistani students is enrolled. Peer-mentoring is not a teaching substitute but can prove useful for peer mentors and mentees. It is a positive alternative to overcome the problems of large sized classes, yet this peer-mentoring has to be used properly and carefully. If not used carefully, it can be counterproductive in terms of wastage of time and lack of interest. Moreover, while this is a useful technique to fall back on when the situation becomes uncontrollable due to large size classes but it can't be teacher's replacement in the classrooms. In the end, it can be safely concluded that this strategy is worth replicating and should be made an integral part of teacher training to alleviate the situation where there is a shortage of teachers and classes having a large number of students.

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Annex-A

Peer mentoring Feedback Checklist

EXHIBIT 6.3

Tips for Mentors in Providing Feedback

| What to Do | How to Do It | Example |
|--|---|--|
| Align your feedback with the mentee's agenda. | Provide real-time feedback. Make it usable and realistic. Offer concrete practical steps and options. | "I have a few ideas that might help ..." "What works for me is ..." |
| Provide feedback about behavior that the mentee can do something about. | Stay with the mentee's behavior rather than succumb to the temptation to evaluate it. | "Tell me about the impact of the behavior ..." "How might someone else see that behavior?" |
| When you talk from your perspective, remember that your reality is not the mentee's reality. | When you talk about your own experience, set a context and be descriptive so that the mentee can see the parallels. | "In my experience, which was ..., I found that ... I know that is not your situation, but maybe there is something to learn here." |
| Check out your understanding of what is being said. | Listen actively. Clarify and summarize. | "If I understand what you are saying ..." "Help me understand what you mean by ..." |
| Use a tone of respect. | Take care not to undermine the mentee's self-esteem. | "I liked the way you ..." "I am curious ..." "I wonder ..." "Have you ever considered ...?" |
| Be aware of your communication style and how that works with that of your mentee. | Share information about communication styles with your mentee, and discuss the implications for the feedback cycle. | "I find that I get defensive when ..." "I react positively to ..." |
| Avoid giving feedback when you lack adequate information. | Ask for time to get the information you need. Faking it doesn't work. | "To be honest with you, I need to think about that a little more." |
| Encourage the mentee to experience feedback as movement forward rather than interruption from the journey. | Continuously link progress and learning to the big picture and the journey. | "When we started out ... And then ... And now ..." |