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The Use of Peer Tutoring to Improve the Reading Skill of Seventh-Grade Students at SMPN 4 Tanjung

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Abstract: Developing reading competence among junior high school students remains a persistent challenge in EFL contexts, particularly when conventional instruction fails to accommodate diverse learner needs. This study examined whether a peer tutoring approach could produce measurable gains in reading skill among seventh-grade students at SMPN 4 Tanjung. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design was employed, involving 60 students distributed equally across an experimental class (VII-1, n=30) and a control class (VII-2, n=30). Over a period of four to six weeks, the experimental class participated in structured peer tutoring sessions, while the control class continued to receive teacher-led conventional instruction. Reading ability was assessed through narrative text comprehension tasks administered at the start and end of the intervention. Results revealed that the experimental group's mean score climbed from 58.33 to 73.33, whereas the control group's mean moved from 59.13 to 66.88. A paired-sample t-test confirmed within-group improvement in the experimental class (sig. = 0.000, $p < 0.05$), and an independent-sample t-test established a significant between-group difference at post-test (sig. = 0.000, mean difference = 15.03). These outcomes indicate that peer tutoring is a viable and effective instructional strategy for fostering reading development in secondary EFL settings.

Keywords: peer tutoring, reading skill, EFL, quasi-experimental, junior high school

INTRODUCTION

Reading occupies a foundational position in language learning because it connects students not only to new vocabulary and grammar structures but also to broader domains of knowledge across all academic subjects. For learners who are acquiring English as a foreign language (EFL), the challenge of reading is compounded by unfamiliar linguistic patterns, limited vocabulary repertoire, and insufficient exposure to authentic texts outside the classroom. When these difficulties go unaddressed in the early years of schooling, they tend to cascade into broader academic struggles that become progressively harder to remedy (Woolfolk, 2022).

At the junior high school level in Indonesia, English instruction typically runs for two to three sessions weekly, each lasting forty to sixty minutes. This constrained time allocation makes it difficult for a single teacher to provide individualized guidance to every student. Classroom observations at SMPN 4 Tanjung revealed that many seventh-grade students struggled to engage meaningfully with English texts: they often remained silent when asked to respond to reading passages, demonstrated low confidence in expressing ideas, and lacked strategies for decoding unfamiliar words or identifying the main ideas of a text. A notable portion of students failed to reach the school's minimum competency threshold (KKM) of 75.

Responding to this situation requires instructional innovation that goes beyond adding more teacher-fronted lesson time. One promising avenue is peer tutoring, a collaborative instructional approach that has consistently demonstrated positive effects on students' academic achievement and engagement (Topping, 2005; Slavin, 2015). Unlike ordinary group work, peer tutoring involves clearly assigned tutor–tutee roles, structured learning activities, and purposeful interaction, all of which are key characteristics of effective cooperative learning (Johnson et al., 2014). From a theoretical standpoint, the tutor benefits by consolidating and reorganizing personal knowledge through the act of explanation, while the tutee gains access to a learning partner who communicates in language and reasoning patterns closer to their own experience than that of a teacher (Roscoe & Chi, 2015; King, 2016).

Reading, in particular, is well suited to peer tutoring because many reading activities—discussing a passage, clarifying vocabulary, asking comprehension questions, summarizing key events—are naturally collaborative in character. When students engage in these activities with a peer rather than waiting for teacher-directed turn-taking, they spend more time actively processing text and receive more frequent, immediate feedback (Hampton & Resnick, 2017). Beyond comprehension gains, the interpersonal dimension of peer tutoring can reduce reading anxiety, a factor that is especially relevant for EFL learners who may feel self-conscious about their language proficiency. In addition, collaborative reading activities encourage learners to negotiate meaning, explain concepts to one another, and monitor comprehension through dialogue, processes that have been shown to improve reading comprehension (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Webb, 2008).

Previous research conducted in Indonesian educational settings lends support to this approach. Suryana (2021) found that peer tutoring improved pronunciation accuracy in Arabic reading among seventh-graders by approximately 30%, and Nugroho et al. (2020) documented a 15% mean score improvement in early literacy among elementary students who participated in peer-assisted learning. Loru Milla (2019) further demonstrated that peer tutoring yielded significantly

greater gains in written expression at the university level compared to conventional instruction. While these studies are encouraging, they leave open the question of how peer tutoring performs when applied specifically to English reading comprehension in a secondary school context, which is the focus of the present investigation.

This study, therefore, set out to determine whether implementing a structured peer tutoring program would produce a statistically significant improvement in the reading skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 4 Tanjung, and whether students who participated in peer tutoring would outperform peers who received conventional instruction.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test/post-test control group structure, which is appropriate when full random assignment of participants to conditions is not feasible within an intact school setting. Two existing classes were selected: class VII-1 served as the experimental group, and class VII-2 served as the control group. Both groups were assessed with identical reading instruments before and after the intervention period.

The design can be represented as follows:

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental (VII-1)	Y1	X (Peer Tutoring)	Y2
Control (VII-2)	Y1	-	Y2

Participants

The study population comprised all seventh-grade students enrolled at SMPN 4 Tanjung during the 2024–2025 academic year. From a total of four available classes, two were selected purposively, yielding a sample of 60 students: 30 in the experimental group and 30 in the control group.

Instrument

A reading comprehension test based on a narrative text—specifically a short fable in the form of *The Hare and the Tortoise*—was constructed as the pre-test and post-test instrument. The test required students to identify characters and their roles, determine the main sequence of events, locate key details, identify the moral lesson, and answer inferential comprehension questions. Both the pre-test and post-test used the same instrument to allow direct score comparison.

Procedure

Pre-test. Both groups took the reading test on May 19, 2025, to establish baseline reading ability.

Intervention**.** The experimental group received peer tutoring treatment across four sessions conducted on May 21, 23, 26, and 28, 2025. Before the first session, students who scored highest on the pre-test were identified as tutors. These individuals were trained by the teacher and researcher to use accessible explanation techniques, to ask open-ended guiding questions, and to provide encouraging feedback rather than simply supplying answers. Each tutor was paired with one or two tutees. Sessions lasted 30–45 minutes and followed a consistent structure: an opening warm-up, a shared reading phase in which tutor and tutee read the text together, a discussion phase targeting comprehension, vocabulary, and story structure, and a brief reflection at the close of each session. Meanwhile, the control group continued with the standard teacher-led curriculum without any peer tutoring component.

Post-test. On May 30, 2025, both groups completed the post-test under identical conditions.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, median) were computed for each group at pre-test and post-test. A normality check using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted before inferential analysis. A paired-sample t-test was applied to evaluate within-group change in the experimental class, and an independent-sample t-test was used to compare post-test means between groups. All analyses were performed using SPSS, with a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pre-test and Post-test Score Overview

Table 1 presents the raw score summary for both groups across the two testing occasions.

Table 1. Summary of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Statistics	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	58.33	73.33	59.13	66.88
Maximum	74	89	77	88
Minimum	43	46	42	46
Median	58	75	59	62
Standard Deviation	18.83	15.80	8.81	8.81
Total Score	1750	2200	1774	2004

Before the intervention, both groups were at a comparable starting point: the experimental group averaged 58.33 and the control group 59.13, a difference of less than one point. After the intervention period, a divergence emerged. The experimental group's mean rose by 15 points to 73.33, while the control group's mean moved upward by approximately 7.75 points to 66.88. The number of students meeting the KKM standard of 75 increased from zero to 18 in the experimental group, compared to only 8 in the control group at post-test.

The higher standard deviation observed in the experimental group's pre-test (18.83 vs. 8.81) indicates greater heterogeneity in that class at the outset—a spread that was to be expected given that tutor selection was based on identifying students with above-average ability alongside peers who needed support. The post-test standard deviation in the experimental group (15.80) showed a slight reduction, suggesting that peer tutoring helped bring lower-performing students closer to the group mean.

Deviation Score Analysis

To examine the magnitude of individual change, deviation scores (post-test minus pre-test) were calculated for each student. In the experimental group, the total deviation across 30 students was 450 points, yielding an average individual gain of 15 points. The corresponding total for the control group was 230 points, with an average individual gain

of approximately 7.67 points. These figures underline that the gains observed in the experimental group were not merely a product of test familiarity or general maturation but reflected a substantially larger growth trajectory.

Normality Test

Before applying parametric tests, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov procedure was used to assess distributional normality. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Normality Test Results (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Data	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test Experimental	.107	30	.200*
Post-test Experimental	.185	30	.010
Pre-test Control	.107	30	.200*
Post-test Control	.101	30	.200*

Three of the four distributions produced significance values at or above 0.200, well above the 0.05 cutoff, confirming normality. The post-test distribution for the experimental group yielded a p-value of 0.010, indicating a slight departure from a perfectly normal distribution. Given the sample size of 30 and the minor rather than extreme deviation, this result is considered acceptable for parametric analysis, consistent with common practice in educational research (Field, 2018). The t-test analyses, therefore, proceeded on this basis.

Paired-Sample T-Test (Within-Group Change)

A paired-sample t-test was conducted on the experimental group's pre-test and post-test scores. The test yielded a significance value of 0.000, which falls well below the 0.05 threshold, confirming that the difference between the group's pre-test mean (58.33) and post-test mean (73.33) was statistically significant. The mean difference of 15.00 points, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from approximately 59.37 to 63.33, indicates that the improvement was both real and practically meaningful. On this basis, the null hypothesis—that peer tutoring would have no significant effect within the experimental group—is rejected.

Independent-Sample T-Test (Between-Group Comparison)

An independent-sample t-test was then applied to compare the experimental and control groups' post-test scores. Levene's test for equality of variances produced a significance value of 0.687 (> 0.05), supporting the assumption that the two groups' variances were comparable. Using the equal variances assumed row, the t-test returned a two-tailed significance value of 0.000, again far below 0.05. The mean difference between the experimental group (73.33) and the control group (66.88) was 15.03 points, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from –19.60 to –10.47. This finding establishes that the experimental group's superior post-test performance was not attributable to chance but reflected a genuine advantage conferred by peer tutoring. The alternative hypothesis is accordingly accepted: peer tutoring significantly improved reading skill relative to conventional instruction.

Discussion

The pattern of results is consistent with the theoretical reasoning that underpins peer tutoring. When a student explains a passage to a classmate, the act of articulating comprehension requires organizing and evaluating one's own understanding, a process that is known to deepen learning more reliably than passive re-reading (Roscoe & Chi, 2015). For the tutee, receiving explanation from someone who recently navigated the same material offers a language model that is closer to their own developmental level than teacher speech, which can reduce cognitive load and lower affective barriers (Indrianie, 2015). These findings are also consistent with broader evidence that cooperative learning improves academic achievement by increasing active participation, peer interaction, and individual accountability (Slavin, 2015; Johnson et al., 2014).

In the sessions observed, students who functioned as tutors were observed asking their partners to identify story events in sequence, to locate words they found confusing, and to predict how the narrative would unfold—activities that require active engagement rather than surface-level decoding. Such interactions promote elaboration and knowledge construction because students are required to explain, question, and justify their understanding during peer discussion (Webb, 2008). Tutees who initially hesitated to volunteer answers in whole-class settings demonstrated noticeably more willingness to attempt responses in the peer context, aligning with Hampton and Resnick's (2017) observation that peer learning environments tend to foster greater participation and self-confidence.

The control group's gains of approximately 7.75 points, while smaller, nonetheless indicate that conventional instruction was not without effect. The gap between the two groups is better interpreted as evidence that peer tutoring adds value over and above baseline classroom teaching rather than as evidence that teacher-led instruction is ineffective. The 15-point between-group difference in post-test performance represents a practically significant advantage—one that, over an academic year, could meaningfully shift students' overall reading trajectory.

These findings align with earlier work in Indonesian contexts. Suryana (2021) documented gains in reading accuracy following peer tutoring in a different subject domain; Nugroho et al. (2020) confirmed advantages in literacy development at the elementary level; and Loru Milla (2019) extended the case for peer tutoring to written language production at the tertiary level. The present study adds to this body of evidence by focusing specifically on English reading comprehension at the secondary level, a context that previous Indonesian research had not directly addressed.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated whether a structured peer tutoring program could produce statistically significant improvements in the reading skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 4 Tanjung. Drawing on a quasi-experimental design with 60 participants divided equally between an experimental and a control condition, the findings demonstrate clearly that it can. The experimental group's mean reading score increased

by 15 points across the intervention period, a gain that was statistically significant at the 0.000 level and that substantially exceeded the approximately 7.75-point improvement recorded in the control group. The between-group post-test comparison confirmed that the experimental group's higher performance was a product of the peer tutoring intervention rather than coincidental factors.

From a pedagogical standpoint, these results carry practical implications for English teachers working in resource-constrained environments where individual teacher attention is limited. Peer tutoring does not require additional classroom hours or specialized materials; it reorganizes existing human resources—students themselves—into a learning structure that benefits both those who explain and those who receive explanation. Schools and curriculum developers considering strategies to close the reading achievement gap, particularly in EFL settings, may find peer tutoring a cost-effective and scalable option worth integrating systematically into reading instruction.

Future research might usefully examine longer intervention periods to determine whether the gains observed here are sustained over time, explore whether specific aspects of reading—such as inferential comprehension or vocabulary breadth—respond differently to peer tutoring, or investigate how variables such as tutor-tutee compatibility and training quality moderate outcomes. Qualitative approaches capturing students' own perceptions of the experience would also enrich the predominantly quantitative picture presented here.

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.S. and I.M.S.; methodology, A.S., I.M.S., and K.A.; software, A.S.; validation, I.M.S. and K.A.; formal analysis, A.S.; investigation, A.S.; resources, A.S.; data curation, A.S.; writing original draft preparation, A.S.; writing review and editing, I.M.S. and K.A.; visualization, A.S.; supervision, I.M.S. and K.A.; project administration, A.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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