

## Who is at Edge – Tutors or Tutees? Academic, Social and Emotional elevation through Peer Tutoring

**Reema Srivastava**

Centre for Foundation Studies  
Middle East College

Knowledge Oasis Oman, Al Rusayl, Muscat, Oman

**Muhammed Rashid**

Centre for Foundation Studies  
Middle East College

Knowledge Oasis Oman, Al Rusayl, Muscat, Oman

### Abstract:

Peer tutoring or peer assisted learning is an effective instructional strategy that involves active and interactive participative learning process resulting in a deeper understanding of concepts for both 'Tutors' and 'Tutees'. The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of peer tutoring on Academic achievements of the students in the General Foundation and Undergraduate Programmes at a private college in Oman. It will further explore other advantages, especially social and emotional benefits, the tutors and tutees may gain by taking part in peer tutoring programme held at Middle East College, Oman. The study was conducted through an online survey, personal interviews and judging the in-class performances of these students. The results revealed some interesting benefits for both the 'Tutors' and the 'Tutees'. For the 'Tutors' it was a bolstering experience as it led to increased knowledge and skills; self-confidence; and a sense of responsibility. The 'Tutees' on the other hand developed – (i) a better liking for the subject concerned; (ii) better cooperation skills among their peers; (iii) increased motivation to study a particular subject; (iv) better communication Skills; (v) better stress management; and (vi) confidence. Peer tutoring is seen as a great advantage to gain learner autonomy to reap the full benefits of academic life by nurturing innate talent and abilities. The shift from teacher-led to student-centered classes has been hailed as a milestone in order to foster learner autonomy and productive learning.

**Keywords:** academic support, at-risk, feedback, flexible environment, learner autonomy, peer assisted learning,

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## 1. Introduction

Peer tutoring comprises of students serving as academic tutors and tutees in a flexible environment where high performing student is paired with a lower performer to review critical academic or behavioral concepts (Hott & Walker, 2012). “Peer tutoring is an approach in which one child instructs another child in material on which the first is an expert and the second is a novice” (as cited in Kalkowski, 2007). It is not a new concept, its genesis can be found in the use of archons by Aristotle but it was theorized by a Scotsman, Andrew Bell in 1795 after observing Indian orphans teaching alphabets to each other by writing on sand. It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it was implemented in English and French schools (Briggs 2013). In the present system of education, the main aim is to instill a belief in the learners that “Their putative failures or shortcomings can be ascribed to a lack of effective strategies rather than to a lack of potential (Thanasoulas 2000). As Vygotsky (1978) says “Learning is an internalised form of a formerly social activity, and 'a learner can realize [his] potential interactively - through the guidance of supportive persons such as parents, teachers, and peers'” (as cited in Wenden, 1998: p.107). Every educational institution has students of different academic abilities and thus lies the necessity of academic support in the form of peer tutoring especially for the at-risk and high-risk students to help them pass their courses. This study investigates the effects of **Peer Tutoring** on the final grades of ‘Tutees’ and their ‘Tutors’ in the General Foundation and Undergraduate Programmes in Middle East College in Oman. It studies the differences between the final grades of at-risk and high-risk students before and after Peer tutoring. The results of this study were analysed after conducting interviews with both ‘Tutees’ and ‘Tutors’ and also getting them to fill up a detailed questionnaire on Peer Tutoring.

## 2. Literature Review

Raheem, Yusuf, & Odutayo (2017) conducted a study examining the effect of peer tutoring on the academic performance of economics students in Ilorin-South Local Government of Kwara State, Nigeria and its gender wise bearing. The experiment was conducted on two classes in two different secondary schools to determine the difference in performance between students taught with peer tutoring and conventional instructional strategy in economics. The experimental (peer tutoring) group had a population of 40 students while the control (conventional instruction) group had a population of 38 students. A 50-item multiple-choice objective test titled Economics Performance Test (EPT) was used to measure academic performance. The research questions were: (i) What is the effect of peer tutoring and conventional instructional strategies on students’ performance in economics? (ii) Will the performance of students taught using peer tutoring instructional strategy vary on the basis of gender?

The results of the test showed that the students taught with the peer tutoring method had a greater mean score ( $M = 14.94$ ) than those taught with the conventional instruction method ( $M = 10.07$ ), thereby proving that peer tutoring instructional strategy has a significant effect on students’ academic performance. Peer tutoring depends on the process of mutual help between classmates that allows the transfer of control to the students in the classroom. The teachers get involved when the tutors have difficulty explaining a particular concept or have issues understanding the language used by the tutees. Another reason for its success is that knowledge is approached from multiple and missing perspectives, which allows students to learn from one another. It was also found that, gender had no role to play in the performance of students taught

with peer tutoring strategy. Improved academic performance in economics had no gender bias, i.e. it did not favour male over female students or vice-versa. Both male and female students showed improvement in their performance when exposed to peer tutoring.

Thus it was observed that peer tutoring not only helps in academic improvement of students but also increases the quality of interaction with their peers. Although not everyone may gain equally from participation, peer tutoring offered the opportunity for each participant to become aware of his / her weaknesses. It was also suggested that teachers can help by exposing students to peer tutoring instructional strategy while passing out instructions in the classroom to create awareness among the students.

### 3. Methods

A study was conducted at Middle East College, Muscat, a private college in Oman, to investigate the effectiveness of peer tutoring on academic achievements of the students in the General Foundation (GFP) and Undergraduate (UG) programmes. The list of the ‘Tutors’ and the ‘Tutees’ was procured from the peer tutoring coordinators in different departments of the college. Both the ‘Tutors’ and ‘Tutees’ were asked to fill out a detailed online questionnaire about their reflections and perceptions of the peer tutoring programme they were engaged in. Interviews of some of the ‘Tutors’ and ‘Tutees’ were also conducted, the respondents were from both GFP and UG programmes. The sampling size was: 18 tutors, 30 tutees from GFP and 30 tutors, 50 tutees from the UG programmes.

### 4. Results of the survey – Reflections on Peer Tutoring

Following are the results based on the responses to some of the questions of the online survey:

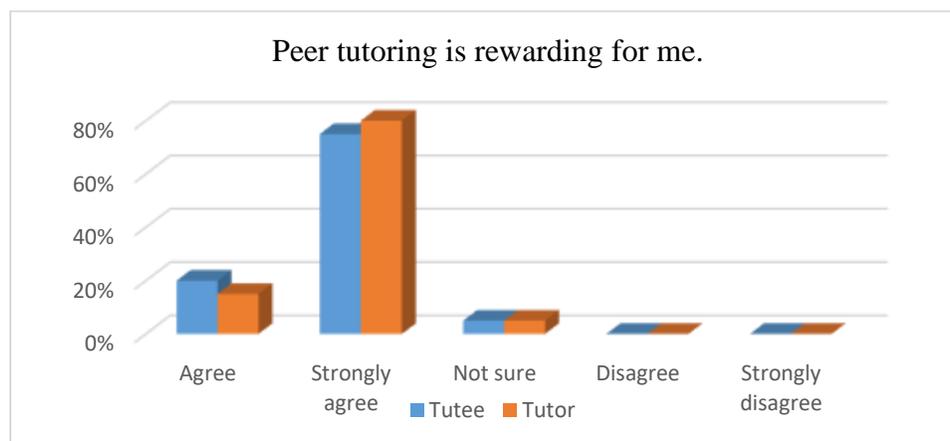


Figure 1. Peer tutoring is rewarding

Figure 1 shows that nearly 95% of the tutees and tutors agreed that peer tutoring had been rewarding for them. This is a very encouraging response for the continuity of this endeavor as undertaken by the college.

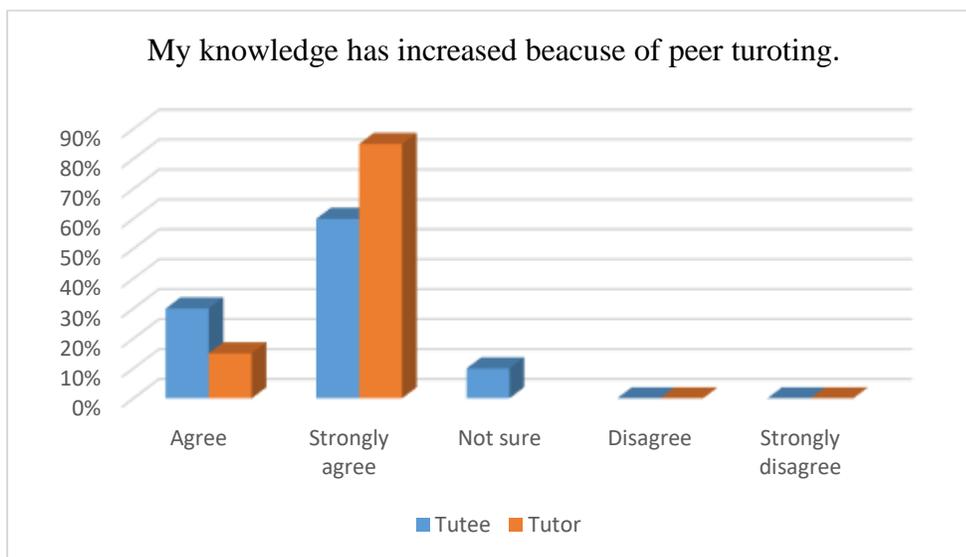


Figure 2. Increase of knowledge

There was an overwhelming response to this question (Figure 2). All tutors agreed that their knowledge had increased whereas only 10% tutees were unsure about it. This might have been because the improvement in their results were marginal. But it was certain that there was an enhancement of the knowledge of the students in general.

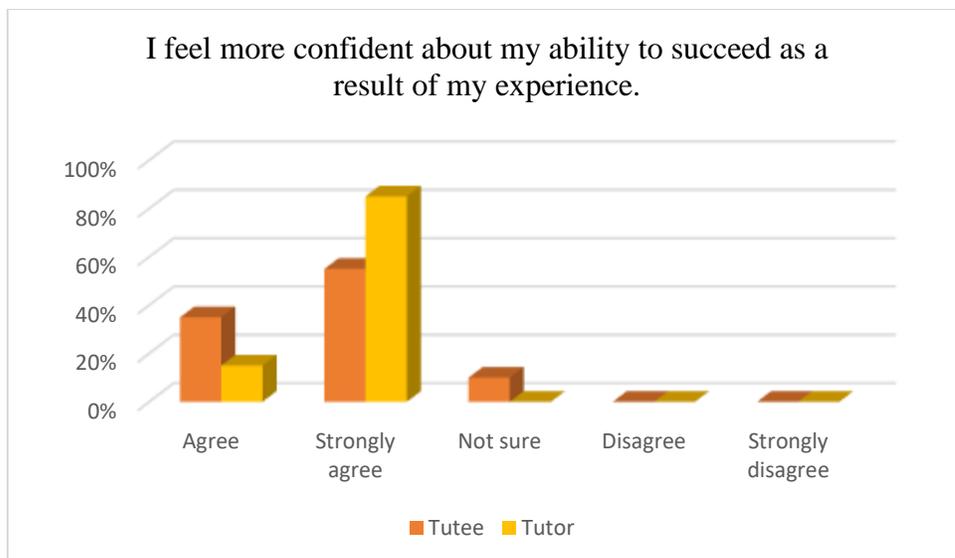


Figure 3. Increase in confidence

All the tutors felt that their confidence level in that particular subject had increased (Figure 3). 10% of the tutees were uncertain about it but the rest 90% were happy that they were more confident after they went through the peer tutoring programme.

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Figure 4. Greater Sense of Responsibility

Figure 4 shows that 70% of the tutees felt that they experienced a greater sense of responsibility for their success and 95% of the tutors opined that peer tutoring has given rise to a sense of greater responsibility. This proves that peer tutoring helps both the tutees and the tutors in developing their overall personalities.

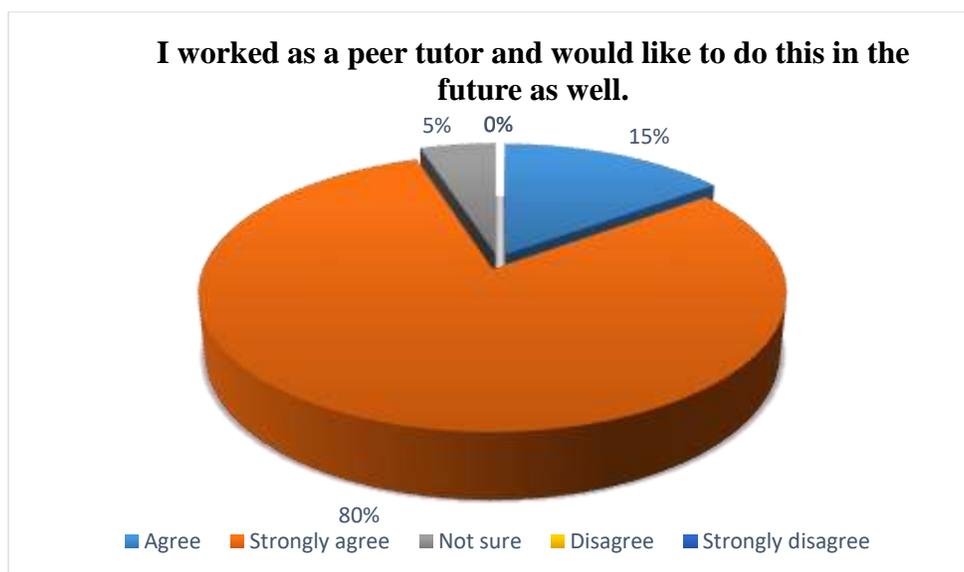


Figure 5. Future perspective on peer tutoring (peer tutors’ point of view)

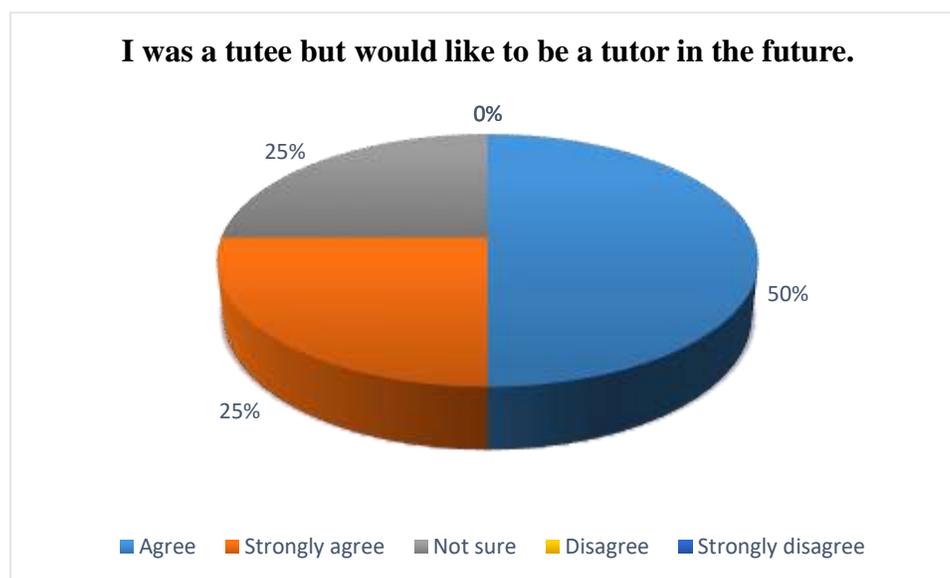


Figure 6. Future perspective on peer tutoring (tutees' point of view)

In figures 5 & 6, both the tutors and the tutees were asked to give their opinions about the future of peer tutoring in the college. The responses show that they were satisfied with this programme and would very much like to continue with it. The fact that many tutees wanted to be tutors in future indicates that they would like to step into the shoes of the tutors. All these data prove the success of peer tutoring programme at MEC.

From the results mentioned above it can be inferred that peer tutoring transforms the classroom from a place where not only does the dispersal of knowledge takes place but also with a multiple approach and perspective. It, thereby allows students to learn from one another. Invariably, peer tutoring depends on the process of mutual help between classmates, allowing the transfer of control to the students in the classroom. Peer tutoring allows the teachers to accommodate a classroom of diverse students, including slow learners, at-risk and high-risk students (AbdulRaheem, Yusuf, Oduyayo, 2017)

## 5. Benefits of Peer Tutoring

There are some general benefits of Peer Assisted Learning for all associated with it. For *Tutees*, they (peers) usually find their own ways of communicating with each other and many times they present a concept in a better way than the teacher. They use fresh ideas from their own personal experiences and use communicating symbols that make learning easier. This results in making: Lessons more interesting; easier to follow and more enjoyable and learners also seem to learn more. For *Tutors*, they gain a feeling of doing something useful with what they have already learnt and reinforcing their knowledge of the subject: they spend time in revising the subject matter they are going to teach to their peers which results in making their knowledge deeper and clearer. It is said that we learn 95% of what we teach. The peer tutors develop their ability and skill to teach and guide other students and also get an insight into how others feel about a particular subject. The self-esteem of the tutors rises and they feel that have done something useful when they see their tutees succeed. They also enjoy respect from tutees. Structured peer tutoring

improves communication and cooperation among students, enhances the team spirit and helps socialization, and they get to know about people from different social backgrounds. For *Teachers*, Peer tutoring helps them by making lessons easier to handle and makes teaching more enjoyable and the pupils also seem to learn more. Teachers can devote more time to preparing their lessons (Goodlad, 1998).

Thus peer tutors should be trained by: defining and developing procedures for social skills they may need throughout peer tutoring like sharing, taking turns, using respectful language, and accepting criticism or feedback; defining and developing procedures for moving into peer tutoring groups quickly and quietly; explaining and allowing students to practice prior to the first peer tutoring session (using a prepared script for practicing interactions. Fulk & King, 2001); training them in providing feedback for correct and incorrect peer responses, including praise; teaching them how to carefully monitor their own and their partner's progress; for at-risk students providing academic intervention in the form of tutoring is necessary like self-determined tutoring, academic advisor scheduled tutoring, group tutoring, one-to-one tutoring, peer tutoring, and professional tutoring (Hott & Walker, 2012).

## 6. Importance of Peer Tutoring

Peer Tutoring / Peer Mentoring / Peer Assisted Learning is a two way reciprocal learning activity also defined as “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions” (Topping & Ehly 1998, p.1). “Peer tutoring is a form of cooperative learning that teaches students to work together in a positive manner and to coach one another as they develop specific skills” (Sanders, 2001). It is a cost-effective means of providing academic support to students using a valuable teaching and learning resource, namely other students (Beasley 1997). Peers are students who are generally of the same age having similar abilities which makes them approachable as they have a better understanding of the problems faced by their fellow learners. High achievers / successful students are trained to assist the low achievers / slow learners in a collaborative environment which richly benefits both the parties (Beasley 1997). Peer tutoring is beneficial to both the ‘Tutees’ and ‘Tutors’ as it improves: their understanding of the subject concerned; their confidence level and performance; and mutual trust and friendship by sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience. It can be described as a way of moving beyond independent to interdependent or mutual learning (Boud, 1988). The ‘Tutors’ not only provide guidance in teaching they also act as mentors and counsel their ‘Tutees’. The ‘Tutors’ develop skills in organizing and planning learning activities, working collaboratively with others, giving and receiving feedback and evaluating their own learning. Peer learning is becoming an increasingly important part of many courses, and it is being used in a variety of contexts and disciplines in many countries (Boud 1988). The ‘Tutors’ often want to continue their mentoring as they realize that that the best way to really develop one's understanding of an area is to teach it to some-one else

Academicians and researchers like Egger and Sadovi (2008), claim that peer-tutoring helps the tutors to enhance their knowledge about the subject as they are thoroughly looking for the right material and sources to offer a well-grounded support to the tutees. Also in order for tutors to be capable of teaching, they need to study the materials, they are supposed to teach, carefully, which requires them to spend more time reviewing and preparing (Sadovi, 2008). Tutors

are more likely to go back and check some reference books and sources to achieve their tutoring task professionally. Since Peer tutoring is “building a student support network” (Korinek et al., 1999) exchanging teaching tips with the other peer tutors and teachers helps improve the whole process of learning. Therefore, students' academic performance is likely to be affected positively by being peer tutors (Eggers, 1995). It is a proven fact that our concept and understanding of a topic becomes more solid and comprehensive when we teach that topic, especially, when a course is well-structured and implemented with explicit objectives (Sadovi, 2008).

## 7. Types of Peer Tutoring

Academic peer tutoring at various colleges or universities maybe of different types, namely: (i) *Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)*: PALS, involves a teacher pairing students who need additional instruction or help with a peer who can assist (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Burish, 2000). There is flexibility in forming groups and they often change often according to the subject or skills. All students get an opportunity to function as a tutor or tutee at different times. Students are typically paired with other students who are at the same level, and having similar abilities. (ii) *Class-wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT)*: also known as cooperative learning divides classmates into small groups, with each person in the group responsible for teaching others, and each contributing a unique piece to the group performance on a task. Typically, CWPT involves highly structured procedures, direct rehearsal, competitive teams, and posting of scores (Maheady, Harper, & Mallette, 2001). The entire class participates in structured peer tutoring activities two or more times per week for approximately 30 minutes (Harper & Maheady, 2007). The class is divided into groups of two to five students and they act as both ‘tutors’ and ‘tutees’. The members of the groups keep changing. (iii) *Cross-age Peer Tutoring*: also known as Surrogate teaching, common at larger universities, involves giving older students, often graduates or advanced undergraduates, some or all of the teaching responsibility for undergraduate courses. Here the positions of tutors and tutees do not change. The older student serves as the tutor and the younger student as the tutee. Tutors ask questions, encourage better study habits and serve as a model of appropriate behavior. (iv) *Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT)*: A more specific version of cooperative learning, divides classmates into pairs to tutor each other (Goodlad & Hurst, 1989 and Topping, 1998). Two or more students alternate between acting as the tutor and tutee during each session, with equitable time in each role. The ‘tutors’ are encouraged to prepare teaching material, monitor answers, and evaluate and encourage peers. Higher performing students are paired with lower performing students. (v) *Same-age Peer Tutoring*: Peers who are almost of the same age are paired to review key concepts. Students with similar ability levels or a more advanced student can be paired with a less advanced student. When pairing students with differing levels, the roles of tutor and tutee are alternated, allowing the lower performing students to quiz the higher performing students. Same-age peer tutoring, like Class wide peer tutoring, can be completed within the students’ classroom or tutoring can be completed across differing classes. Procedures are more flexible than traditional class-wide peer tutoring configurations.

## 8. Peer tutoring support provided at Middle East College (MEC)

MEC provides different types of peer tutoring support to the students at both General Foundation Programme (GFP) and Undergraduate levels, which are as follows: (i) *Instructional Peer Tutoring*: here older, brighter students coach the juniors either on a one-to-one basis or by one-to-a group basis. There is a mutual agreement on how the assistance will be provided. This is

practiced when there is a big difference between tutors and tutees. (ii) *Monitorial Tutoring*: here the class is divided into groups of 4 or 5 members with a monitor assigned to lead each group. The teacher has more time to attend to the rest of the class while tutors monitor and help their tutees. (iii) *Pair tutoring*: here students of the same age, one better skilled than the other interact and help one another to pursue the learning activity, by reading and discussing together. (iv) *Structural Peer Tutoring*: It is applied in specific cases and for particular subjects, and follows a well-structured plan prepared by the teacher. It is generally spontaneous, well planned by experienced teachers who combine tutors and tutees appropriately in order to have good results. Assistance of trained tutors is required in following instructions or definite procedures that are provided in the coursework.

### **8.1. Roles and Responsibilities of Peer Advisors at MEC**

**Peer Advising** is a part of a strategic plan to widen communication channels with the student population. A few well trained peers can disseminate information more effectively and serve as role models to the rest of the student community. On the basis of their academic and attitude profiles, a few students have been selected as Peer Advisors. Those selected will attend training sessions conducted by the Registration Department and the Academic Advising Committee designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to guide other students. The duties and responsibilities of Peer Advisors are: (i) To guide students who are unfamiliar with the online registration process; (ii) To try to get students to understand the role of an advisor; (iii) To encourage online student feedback; (iv) To explain the process of module selection and other programme regulations if students are unsure. (Peer advisors are not authorized to select modules for students but only to clarify to students the process of module selection); (v) To guide students to the student counselor if approached with attitudinal and other behavioral problems; (vi) To inform students of their advisor if students are unaware; (vii) To inform the members of the Academic Advising Committee any concerns or problems regarding Academic Advising brought to their notice; (viii) Student advisors will be expected to fulfill their responsibilities only during the registration period and Add/Drop period.

### **8.2. Procedures for conducting peer tutoring at Middle East College (MEC)**

The Student Success Centre (SSC) at MEC is responsible for the overall coordination and smooth conduct of the peer tutoring programme across various academic departments. Peer-tutoring coordinators in each academic department is responsible for arranging and supervising peer-tutoring for modules (especially with high failure rate) offered by the departments. The peer-tutors are responsible for conducting peer-tutoring sessions and the tutees are responsible for registering for sessions via the peer-tutor coordinator in the respective academic departments.

The peer-tutoring programme coordinator at SSC informs Heads of the different Departments to appoint peer-tutoring coordinators for their own departments. He/she conducts a meeting in week 1 of every semester with the peer-tutoring coordinators and updates them on the handbook on peer-tutoring and important procedures that need to be followed. A list of prospective peer-tutors (students fulfilling the academic eligibility criteria as mentioned in peer-tutoring handbook) is provided to the peer-tutoring coordinators who may further filter the list according to their requirements. Peer-tutoring coordinators in various departments arrange and supervise peer-tutoring for the modules offered by the department, based on the student/faculty requests and

availability of peer-tutors. Workshops are conducted by the peer-tutoring programme coordinator at SSC to familiarize faculty (especially new joining) with different forms of peer-tutoring and peer-tutoring programme. At the end of Fall and Spring semesters (every year) a feedback is taken from the tutees, tutors and faculty. A ceremony is also organized (annually) to felicitate the peer-tutors where they receive mementos and certificates of appreciation.

<u>Programme</u>	<u>No. of Tutors</u>	<u>No. of Tutees</u>	<u>Module</u>
General Foundation (GFP)	18	30	60% in Writing. 40% in Listening, Speaking and Reading.
Undergraduate	30	30	70% in mathematics and Engineering modules. 30% in computing and other modules

Table 1 shows the involvement of students in peer tutoring for the academic year 2017-2018 at MEC. 128 students were involved either as tutors or tutees across all the programmes including Engineering, Mathematics, Computing and English. English was encouraged as the language of communication although when concepts were difficult, Arabic was also used. At UG Levels, though peer tutoring support was available for all the subjects, majority of the tutees, (between 50% -70 %) sought help for mathematics and engineering modules. On the other hand, only 30% asked for help in computing and management modules. For GFP, most of the students, about 60%, showed interest in taking help from their peers in writing skills, whereas 40 % opted for other skills like listening, speaking and reading.

## 9. Limitations

Despite its popularity and success, peer tutoring has come under considerable scrutiny in recent years. Teachers might share the teaching tips and guidelines but students cannot be expected to become expert educators. There are chances that the tutor might not be able to support the tutees properly because of their **inexperience**. Sometimes pairing of students can backfire because of their **hesitancy** or there might rise a feeling of inferiority when the tutees are taught by their own classmate or someone of the same level. Tutees might not put in required effort because of lack of keenness. This might create tensions between the ‘tutors’ and the ‘tutees’. Generally the students are aware of the identity of the ‘tutor’ and the ‘tutee’ which creates an opinion about a low achiever and a high achiever. Too much of **transparency** might lead to segregation among the students in a particular class (Guido, 2017). At times the tutees tend to depend too much on their peers to guide them, even for the easiest of the topics they look for support. This attitude might create a negative situation and can sometimes defeat the main purpose of peer tutoring and lead to **‘over tutoring’** and in the end the tutees do not learn anything. **Unclear roles** can also lead to questions on the credibility of tutors – in the absence of proper orientation some tutors might fail to live up to the expectations of the tutees and thus the credibility of the tutors comes under scanner. There should be certain laid down criteria for choosing peer tutors so that the teachers do not fall prey to

bias. The main objective of peer tutoring will not be achieved if favoritism is used in the choice of tutors and they are incapable of imparting knowledge to their peers.

### 10. How to make peer tutoring a success

To make peer tutoring a success teachers should expose students to peer tutoring instructional strategy in passing out instruction in the classroom to aid the development of students' generic skills. The things that need to be considered are (Briggs 2013): (i) *Providing adequate tutor training* – the students who are to become peer tutors should maintain a minimum GPA and obtain approval from their teachers before being paired with struggling students. Tutors should receive quality training in effective ways to work with their tutees. They should also be trained how to give positive verbal feedback, how much of it should be given and when it should be given without being very critical. Students can be prompted to come up with a list of standard statements which they feel may be positively reinforcing. (ii) *Using a reward system* – promise of a reward for students serves as a great encouragement in the participation in peer tutoring and improvement of grades. (iii) *Emphasizing on confidentiality, positive reinforcement, and adequate response time* – The tutors should design activities for extra practice, watch out for and correct mistakes, and provide positive feedback and encouragement. Opportunities should be presented for the students to formulate their own questions, discuss issues, explain their viewpoints, and engage in cooperative learning by working in teams on problems and projects. (iv) *Choosing appropriate learning exercise* to engage students in peer learning like role playing and modeling and reap the benefits of peer teaching. (v) Tutees must practice using a new task on their own. Tutors must provide *instructional scaffolding*, and gradually reduce their influence on a tutee's comprehension. A tutor who engages in directive tutoring becomes a surrogate teacher, taking the role of an authority and imparting knowledge. The tutor who takes the non-directive approach is more of a facilitator, helping the student draw out the knowledge he already possesses. Under the directive approach, the tutor imparts knowledge on the tutee and explains or tells the tutee what he should think about a given topic. Under the non-directive approach, the tutor draws knowledge out of the tutee, asking open-ended questions to help the student come to his own conclusions about the topic. Both of these are valid methods, but different levels of each should be used with different students and in different scenarios.

To facilitate successful peer learning, teachers may also choose from an array of group strategies like **Buzz Groups**: A large group of students is subdivided into smaller groups of 4–5 students to consider the issues surrounding a problem. After about 20 minutes of discussion, one member of each sub-group presents the findings of the sub-group to the whole group. **Affinity Groups**: Groups of 4–5 students are each assigned particular tasks to work on outside of formal contact time. At the next formal meeting with the teacher, the sub-group, or a group representative, presents the sub-group's findings to the whole tutorial group. **Solution and Critic Groups**: One sub-group is assigned a discussion topic for a tutorial and the other groups constitute "critics" who observe, offer comments and evaluate the sub-group's presentation. **Teach-Write-Discuss**: At the end of a unit of instruction, students have to answer short questions and justify their answers. After working on the questions individually, students compare their answers with each other's. A whole-class discussion subsequently examines the array of answers that still seem justifiable and the reasons for their validity.

## 11. Conclusion

Research has proven that peer tutoring is a useful strategy for all levels of students, working together, whether they have similar or different academic capabilities. The students who are average or below average are the ones who benefit the most. Peer tutoring as we have found out reinforces tutor's own knowledge and skills, builds self-confidence and self-esteem, and a sense of responsibility. Observations made during this study show that students' exposure to peer tutoring improves their interaction with their peers significantly both socially and academically. Although not everyone may gain equally from participation, it offered an opportunity for each participant to become aware of his weaknesses. Based on their test scores and student observations, it was concluded that peer tutoring can help to achieve the objectives of the modules. There have been two satisfying findings of this study: empowered and happy students and satisfied teachers. This study demonstrates that there was a great impact on the learners both at General Foundation Level and at Undergraduate level. What happened in these special sessions is a positive reinforcement for the use of peer tutoring. The results indicate positive impact of peer tutoring on students' academic achievements. Students thus also demonstrated improved cooperation skills with peers and an increased motivation to engage in writing and oral reading. It is thus recommended that classroom teachers should implement peer tutoring into their daily classroom instruction as much as possible (Horvath 2011). According to Topping (1998), both tutees and tutors can yield significant academic gains through peer tutoring as it is a bolstering experience for tutors and increased motivation for tutees to study a particular subject and improved attitudes towards academics. It should be noted that the majority of peer-tutoring programs for students are intended to complement, not substitute for, regular classroom instruction. Tutoring should never be a substitute for professional teaching. An ideal learning atmosphere is a rich blend of peer and adult instructional strategies.

### About the Authors:

**Dr. Reema Srivastava** is a Fellow of HEA, UK, has PGCERT and CELTA. She has Master's in International Politics (JNU, New Delhi, India), Master's and PhD in English Literature (Rohilkhand University, India). She has 25 years of teaching experience at schools, engineering college in India and 7 years of EFL teaching. She is Placement Test Coordinator, MEC and interested in Flipped Learning. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4680-4579>

**Rashid Muhammad** has worked at Centre for Foundation studies of MEC as an English teacher since 2005. He teaches ESL modules to students at Elementary, intermediate and advanced levels. He has a master's degree in English Language and Literature, a bachelor's degree in education, University of Jammu and Kashmir and CELTA from Cambridge University, UK. He has worked in Kashmir Institute for Advanced Studies, Mirpur, Pakistan as English lecturer from 2000-2005. His main interest area is linguistics. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4680-4579>

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