

## **IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' WRITING THROUGH PEER TUTORING**

### **[MENINGKATKAN KETERAMPILAN MENULIS MAHASISWA PEMBELAJAR BAHASA INGGRIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING MELALUI TUTORING OLEH TEMAN SEBAYA]**

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#### **Abstract**

This study investigates the writing challenges faced by Indonesian EFL students and examines the effectiveness of peer tutoring in enhancing their writing skills. Through a mixed-methods approach, data were collected via open- and closed-ended survey responses and writing assessments' scores to 40 students as tutees, and semi-structured interviews with 4 peer tutors. The findings indicate that students struggle primarily with vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and translation. These difficulties are interconnected, as limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge hinder their ability to construct clear and coherent sentences. The results show that most tutees found peer tutoring beneficial, as it provided a supportive learning environment, personalized guidance, and reduced the pressure of traditional teacher-student interactions. However, some tutees reported minimal or no improvement, which could be attributed to factors

such as lack of engagement or scheduling conflicts. These findings are analyzed through the lens of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, particularly the concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding or assistance. The study highlights how peer tutoring facilitates learning by providing social interaction with more knowledgeable peers, enabling students to progress beyond their current level of competence. These insights suggest that educational institutions should integrate structured peer tutoring programs into EFL writing courses and provide teachers with the necessary training and resources to offer appropriate scaffolding tailored to students' individual challenges. Future research should explore targeted interventions for students with lower engagement and investigate strategies to enhance the effectiveness of peer tutoring in EFL writing instruction.

**Keywords:** EFL writing challenges, peer tutoring, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Zone of Proximal Development, scaffolding

## Introduction

In today's globalized world, English has become the lingua franca, essential for communication in academic, professional, and social contexts. In an academic environment, such as university, English proficiency plays a crucial role in enabling students to fully engage with coursework, research, and global academic communities. A comprehensive mastery of English encompasses all core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Zein et al., 2020). However, for university students, writing is particularly crucial, as it is an essential part of academic work. Academic writing is vital for producing research papers, essays, reports, and other scholarly documents all of which contribute significantly to academic success (Bacha, 2002; Marsaulina, 2024; Zein et

al., 2020). However, for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, particularly those from Indonesia who may have limited opportunities to use English in their daily lives, mastering writing skills can be especially challenging, primarily due to complex grammatical structures and linguistic differences (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Famularsih & Helmy, 2020; Suprpto et al., 2022).

English grammar presents significant challenges for Indonesian EFL students in writing, as highlighted by several studies conducted in the Indonesian context. One major area of difficulty is grammatical errors, including issues with subject-verb agreement, verb tense, articles, prepositions, and misformation of parts of speech. These errors, frequently observed in studies by Mubarak and Budiono (2022), Aziz et al. (2020), and Merizawati (2018) reflect struggles with both fundamental grammar rules and more complex structures. Another common issue is organizational and structural errors, which involve problems with sentence fragments, word order, coherence, and cohesion, as noted in Surjowati's (2023). Additionally, lexical and vocabulary-related errors, such as improper word choice, incorrect word forms, and confusion between homophones, were identified in research by Isma et al. (2023) and Mubarak and Budiono (2022).

Moreover, issues related to redundancy and unnecessary words were recognized, particularly in Mubarak and Budiono (2022) and Merizawati's (2018) studies, which hindered clarity and conciseness in students' writing. Other errors, such as spelling mistakes, possessives, and ambiguous communication, were also frequently mentioned, as found in Burhanuddin's (2020) and Isma et al.'s (2023). Beyond linguistic challenges, cognitive and emotional factors have also been identified as influencing students' writing, including psychological barriers and language transfer, as discussed in Bulqiyah et al.'s (2021) and Febriani's (2023) studies. Additionally, teaching and learning factors, such as misconceptions, ineffective teaching methods, and cognitive obstacles in understanding writing conventions, were discussed in studies like Surjowati's (2023) and Bulqiyah et al.'s (2021), emphasizing the need for improved pedagogical approaches.

EFL students often find English grammar challenging to master, as they may not receive sufficient instruction in their English classes to fully grasp grammatical rules or enough opportunities to practice the language in meaningful contexts (Angraeni et al., 2024; Poedjiastutie et al., 2018; Zein et al., 2020). In traditional classroom settings, teachers provide guidance, but the large number of students in a typical class limits the amount of personalized, targeted feedback on writing. This lack of individualized support can lead to students feeling uncertain about their writing abilities, negatively affecting their confidence and progress.

To address this issue, peer tutoring has emerged as an effective and innovative approach. Peer tutoring involves structured interactions in which students help one another, often with more proficient learners guiding those with less experience (Bolich, 2001; Colvin, 2007; Foulkes & Naylor, 2022). The underlying premise is that students learn more effectively through active engagement and collaboration, with peer tutors providing guidance, feedback, and encouragement (Marsely, 2020). In the context of EFL learning, peer tutoring provides students with valuable opportunities to receive personalized attention, refine their writing skills through meaningful practice, and gain insights from their peers. Peer tutors, in turn, benefit from reinforcing their own knowledge (Sullivan & Cleary, 2014).

### **Research on Peer Tutoring**

Research on peer tutoring has been conducted in various countries, including, Oman, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru and Indonesia. In Oman, studies by Srivastava and Rashid (2018) and Alrajhi and Aldhafri (2015) found that both tutees and tutors benefited from peer tutoring programs. Srivastava and Rashid (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study using surveys and interviews with 128 tutors and tutees. Their findings revealed that tutees experienced significant improvements in academic performance and stress management related to their studies. Meanwhile, tutors reported increased self-confidence, as teaching reinforced and deepened their own knowledge and skills. The study highlighted that peer tutoring not only supported academic growth

but also contributed to the emotional and social development of both tutors and tutees. Similarly, Alrajhi and Aldhafri (2015) conducted research involving 125 participants from Sultan Qaboos University, utilizing the Students' English Self-Concept Scale (SESCS) and the Tutorial Programs Factors Scale (TPFS) for data collection. Their study found that peer tutoring positively influenced students' self-concept regarding their English language skills, benefiting both tutees and tutors.

Similar to the studies conducted in Oman, Sullivan and Cleary (2014) research in Ireland found that peer tutoring benefits both tutors and tutees by enhancing their understanding and skills, ultimately contributing to a richer learning experience. Sullivan and Cleary (2014) examined the impact of peer tutoring on academic writing and discovered that peer tutors—selected for their strong writing skills and reflective approach—not only improved their own writing abilities but also positively influenced their tutees' progress. This reciprocal process of knowledge sharing fostered a collaborative learning environment, demonstrating that peer tutoring is an effective strategy for promoting academic growth in writing.

However, several studies have focused on how tutees benefit from peer tutoring programs. In Malaysia, Chan et al. (2016) conducted an ethnographic study that identified three key advantages of peer tutoring for tutees. First, by reducing the power distance between tutors and tutees, peer tutoring created a more open and collaborative learning environment, enhancing communication and engagement. Second, it helped build friendships, which increased students' motivation and participation. Lastly, it promoted metacognitive skills by encouraging tutees to reflect on their learning processes, ultimately fostering greater independence and self-regulated learning.

Similar studies in Mexico and Peru have reinforced these findings while emphasizing the importance of tutor supervision and training. In Mexico, Flores et al. (2018) investigated the effectiveness of peer tutoring in improving academic performance among non-English-speaking students. Using a quasi-experimental design, the study involved 213 students divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental

group participated in an 11-week peer tutoring program, where tutors, under the guidance of teachers, engaged students in structured activities such as note-taking, peer feedback, and addressing misunderstandings. The results showed that students who received peer tutoring demonstrated significant academic improvements compared to those in the control group. The study also underscored the need for structured tutor training and systematic program organization to maximize the effectiveness of peer tutoring.

Meanwhile, Pozu-franco and Guevara (2023) examined the impact of peer tutoring on university students in Lima, Peru, focusing on academically at-risk first-year students. Using the Risk Identification Tool (RIT), these students were paired with higher-achieving peers, forming 101 tutoring groups with a total of 458 participants. Unlike informal tutoring approaches, this program provided specialized training for peer tutors, equipping them with strategies to support their tutees in academic content, study techniques, and time management. The findings revealed that peer tutoring significantly improved students' academic performance while also fostering stronger interpersonal relationships and a more collaborative learning culture.

Nevertheless, peer tutoring can be a demanding experience for tutors, as they often face a variety of challenges. In their qualitative study, Chai and Lin (2013) explored these challenges through observations, interviews, and diary entries involving 10 tutors who tutored approximately 50 students in Malaysia. The study revealed several key difficulties faced by the tutors: effectively conveying information, managing the duration of tutoring sessions, handling group dynamics, and maintaining tutees' engagement. Additionally, tutors struggled with keeping tutees motivated and interested throughout the sessions, as well as feeling inadequately prepared to address all the questions or needs of their tutees. These challenges highlight the complexities of peer tutoring and underscore the need for adequate support and training for tutors.

In the Indonesian context, although research on peer tutoring at the university level remains limited, existing studies highlight its effectiveness in enhancing various aspects of language proficiency,

demonstrating its potential as a valuable instructional strategy in higher education. Rahmasari et al. (2024) investigated the impact of integrating peer tutoring with KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) charts to improve inferential reading skills among advanced Indonesian EFL students. Using a mixed-method design, the study collected data through observations, pre-tests, post-tests, and close-ended questionnaires. The findings indicated a significant improvement in students' inferential comprehension after implementing peer tutoring alongside KWL charts. Additionally, students reported increased engagement, enthusiasm, and enjoyment in their reading activities, reinforcing the benefits of this combined approach. Increased engagement and comfort to learn English due to having a peer tutoring program are also found in Eliza's (2024) study. Examining 55 students enrolled in English Language Teaching (ELT) programs, Eliza (2024) collected data through questionnaires and interviews, offering insights into the experiences of both tutors and tutees. The findings revealed that peer tutoring significantly improved students' academic performance, as evidenced by higher quiz scores. Tutors also found the experience beneficial, as teaching their peers reinforced their own language skills.

Several studies have explored the role of peer tutoring in grammar learning (Fitroh et al., 2024; Muchyidin, 2015). Muchyidin (2015) conducted an experimental study with control and experimental groups to evaluate the effectiveness of peer tutoring in improving students' understanding and performance in English grammar. The findings showed that students in the experimental group, who received peer tutoring, achieved significantly higher scores than those in the control group, confirming its effectiveness as an instructional strategy. Similarly, Fitroh et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative study that found peer tutoring to be beneficial in enhancing not only grammar skills but also vocabulary, speaking abilities, and overall language fluency. The supportive learning environment created through peer tutoring reduced anxiety, encouraged active participation, and boosted students' confidence in using English. The findings align with those of Rahmasari et al.'s (2024) and Eliza's (2024) studies. However, the study also emphasized the importance of continuous training for peer tutors to

ensure the approach remains effective and beneficial for both tutors and tutees.

Given the positive impacts of peer tutoring on both tutees and tutors, this study aims to evaluate its effectiveness in enhancing writing skills among Indonesian EFL students in non-English major departments. While research on peer tutoring in the Indonesian EFL context is still limited, studies focusing specifically on non-English major students are even rarer. This gap underscores the need for further exploration to better understand the role of peer tutoring in supporting students' academic writing development. This study will investigate the specific writing challenges faced by students and examine how peer tutoring can help address these difficulties. By analyzing both tutees' and tutors' perspectives, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how peer tutoring fosters writing improvement. The findings will offer valuable insights into the potential of peer tutoring as an effective strategy for enhancing writing skills in an EFL context. To achieve these objectives, the study will explore the following research questions:

1. What specific aspects of writing do Indonesian EFL students in a non-English major department find most challenging?
2. How do Indonesian EFL students perceive the effectiveness of peer tutoring in improving their writing skills?

### **Theoretical Framework: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory**

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978;1986) sociocultural theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and engagement with others. Peer tutoring, as a form of collaborative learning, can be deeply connected to sociocultural theory, where language is recognized as a pivotal element in the learning process. Vygotsky considered language a fundamental tool that allows individuals to interpret and engage with the world, playing a critical role in cognitive development. This perspective emphasizes the cognitive sophistication



of humans compared to other species. Language, for Vygotsky, is a distinct, symbolic tool that not only enables communication but also actively shapes and constructs human thought. He argued that language is the primary medium through which meaning is created and shared. Within peer tutoring, the tutor—acting as a more knowledgeable other—helps students navigate learning through a collaborative process. This interaction allows for the exchange of ideas and the co-construction of understanding, which aligns with Vygotsky's view that social and linguistic interactions are essential for cognitive development.

Social interaction is essential to learning. Through social interactions with peer tutors, who act as more knowledgeable others, students can achieve improved learning outcomes and reach higher levels of understanding, with the tutors offering scaffolding. Scaffolding in this context refers to the support provided by peer tutors, who, equipped with sufficient knowledge, offer tailored guidance to help learners evaluate their current knowledge and progress to the next level. These interactions enable students to move forward within their ZPD—a space where, with assistance, they can complete tasks that would otherwise be beyond their reach (Chaiklin, 2003; Shabani et al., 2014). However, even when students appear to be at similar developmental stages, they may not progress at the same pace or in the same manner. This variation depends on each student's capacity to internalize the assistance provided and to develop within their unique ZPD.

Vygotsky's ZPD theory highlights that, with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other, students are able to perform tasks they cannot do independently, as long as the task is still within their ZPD (1978;1986). If, after receiving support, a student is still unable to complete the task, it suggests that the task is still beyond their current developmental reach. In such cases, the student will require additional assistance, which should be adjusted according to their individual knowledge and current abilities. These learners may eventually be able to perform the task with the right level of support but may need more time or tailored instruction compared to others who already have a higher level of understanding. This differentiation in support highlights the need for personalized

guidance that meets the learner's current level of ability and understanding and helps them gradually progress within their ZPD.

## **Research Method**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2009), combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, and spans over a three-month period. The primary aim of this study is to assess the effectiveness of a peer-tutoring program in improving students' English writing skills. The data collection process is structured to capture both measurable improvements in writing and the participants' perceptions of the program's impact on their language learning experience. To ensure ethical compliance, all participants provided informed consent before taking part in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

## **Participants**

Data were collected from 40 students enrolled in an English course, all of whom were majoring in Electrical Engineering at a private university in Indonesia. These students served as the tutees for the study. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four tutors who had provided tutoring to the students over a three-month period. The tutors are senior students at the university, each having demonstrated exceptional proficiency in English by earning an A grade in their own English course. This high level of academic performance ensures that the tutors possess the necessary linguistic skills to effectively support their tutees throughout the study.

## **Data collection**

The first data collection method involves a survey administered to 40 students. The survey includes both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions assess students' perceptions of the program's effectiveness in improving their English skills and their perceived competence in English after receiving peer tutoring. The open-ended questions offer students the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences, providing qualitative insights into their struggles with English writing and their opinions on the peer-tutoring program. The second data collection method consists of semi-structured interviews with four student-tutors, each responsible for tutoring 10 students. The purpose of these interviews is to explore the tutors' perspectives on the impact of the peer-tutoring program. Additionally, the interviews examine whether the tutors believe the program has contributed to their own development. The semi-structured format allows for flexibility (Tracy, 2013), ensuring that the tutors' views are fully explored while maintaining focus on the research questions.

## **Data Analysis**

The data collected from students' surveys and tutor interviews were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The closed-ended survey responses were analyzed descriptively (Creswell, 2009), to determine the percentages of students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the peer-tutoring program in enhancing their writing skills and its overall impact on their English competence. The open-ended questions were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to explore students' rationales behind their perceptions and to identify common challenges they face in writing English. Similarly, the tutor interviews were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to gain insights into the tutors' perspectives on the effectiveness of the peer-tutoring program. This analysis aimed to uncover the tutors' views on the program's impact on student learning and their own professional growth.

## **Findings**

## **EFL Students' Perceptions of Writing Challenges in English**

The findings from an open-ended survey investigating tutees' challenges in writing sentences in English provide valuable insights into the difficulties they face in the writing process. Their responses highlight four key themes: vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and translation.

### **Vocabulary Challenges**

One of the most significant challenges for tutees is mastering vocabulary. Many express frustrations with their limited vocabulary, which impedes their ability to clearly and accurately convey their ideas in English. Common responses highlight how a lack of vocabulary affects both writing fluency and the quality of their work. For instance, Tutee 1 noted, "Because writing sentences requires a lot of vocabulary, and I don't understand much of it, I often end up writing English sentences with many errors." Another Tutee shared, "Because I lack vocabulary, I have difficulty expressing my thoughts" (Tutee 5). This sentiment was echoed by others who expressed frustration with the vast number of words they are unfamiliar with: "Because there is a lot of vocabulary in English that I don't know, it makes it difficult for me to write" (Tutee 14). Additionally, several tutees reported difficulty recalling words when needed, with one tutee stating, "There are some words that are not yet known and difficult to remember... there are words I want to use but fail to remember because I hardly use English" (Student 7).

### **Grammar Difficulties**

The second most common challenge tutees face is grammar, particularly the complexity of English grammar rules and tenses. Many tutees acknowledged their struggles with both general grammar concepts and specific rules. One tutee admitted, "I'm not very good at grammar, like using the correct form of verbs for certain tenses and parts of speech like nouns" (Student 12), while another expressed frustration with the number of rules to master: "too many formulas in English

grammar" (Student 2). The complexity of grammatical structures, especially in sentence construction, was identified as a significant barrier. Several students also pointed to their lack of understanding of tenses as a major issue. For example, Tutee 6 said, "when using the tenses, I am lost," and Tutee 8 explained his difficulty as stemming from a "lack of understanding of tenses." Tutee 11 added, "Because when writing in English, we need to remember the correct verb forms for certain tenses, I find it frustrating to write sentences in English". A common theme across these responses was the overwhelming number of grammar rules they have to manage. As Tutee 4 stated, "because there is so much grammar for writing a sentence, I cannot write in English ... It is too difficult for me to remember all the grammatical rules." Additionally, tutees highlighted the confusion surrounding verb forms and sentence structures as barriers to effective writing.

### **Sentence Structure Issues**

The tutees pointed out that their struggles with sentence structure were compounded by the need to understand how word order and sentence components function together in English. One Tutee expressed, "In my language, the sentence order is different, and this confuses me when writing in English" (Student 30). This shows that the structural differences between English and tutees' native languages make it harder for them to organize their thoughts coherently in English. The tutees also noted that the need to balance clarity and grammatical correctness adds to their difficulties. Tutee 27 mentioned, "I know what I want to say, but sometimes it's hard to figure out how to arrange the words so it makes sense in English." Additionally, some tutees reported feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of sentence structures in more advanced writing tasks. Some expressed frustration when attempting to write longer, more intricate sentences. Tutee 40 shared, "I struggle with writing complex sentences. I understand the basic sentence structure, but when I try to add more detail, it becomes harder to make it correct."

### **Translation Difficulties**

Many tutees also expressed difficulty with translation, particularly when converting their thoughts from their native language into English. This challenge arises from the need to maintain both the intended meaning and grammatical accuracy during the translation process. One tutee stated, "there are words that are difficult for me to translate" (Tutee 10), highlighting the struggles they face when trying to find equivalent words or expressions in English. Another tutee explained that he often needed to consult an e-dictionary to translate Indonesian words into English, saying, "translating from my language to English is very difficult for me, so I need extra time to find the translation on Google Translate" (Tutee 14). The reliance on translation tools is a clear indicator of tutees' vocabulary limitations in English, which further complicates their writing process. Additionally, some tutees mentioned the pressure they feel when trying to translate sentences or ideas, as they are often unsure whether the translation will capture the exact meaning or be grammatically correct. As one tutee put it, "I worry that what I translate may not sound right in English, so I spend a lot of time making sure it's accurate" (Student 20). This constant back-and-forth between languages creates significant stress and slows down the writing process, ultimately hindering the tutees' ability to produce fluent and coherent English sentences.

### **EFL Students' Perceptions of Peer Tutoring in Writing English**

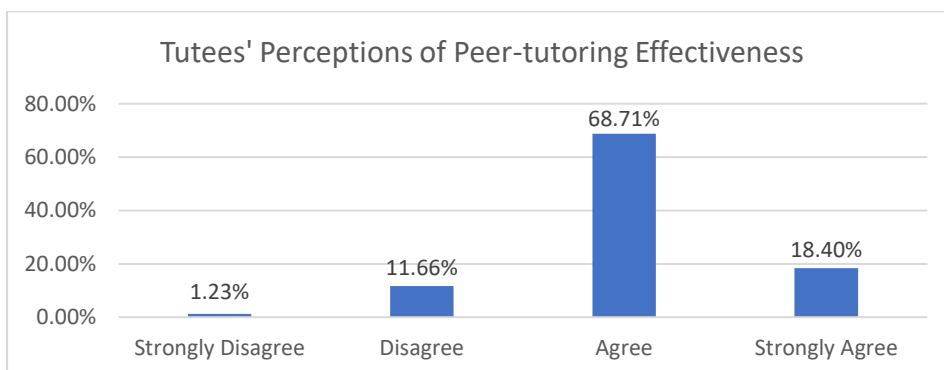
The peer tutors played a crucial role in assisting tutees during the three-month tutoring program. Below are the tutees' perspectives from the closed-ended survey on the overall effectiveness of the peer tutoring program.

### **EFL Students' Perceptions of Peer Tutoring in Enhancing Their Writing Skills**

Below are the survey results on students' agreement with the statement that peer tutoring improves their writing skills.



Chart 1. Tutees' Perceptions of Peer-Tutoring Effectiveness



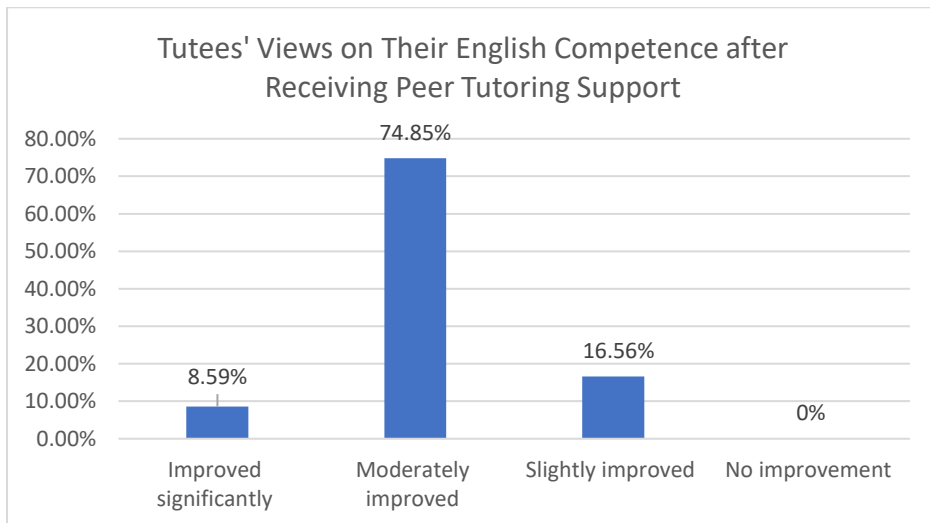
The data shows that the majority of tutees perceive the peer-tutoring program as effective in improving their English skills. A significant 68.71% of tutees agreed with the statement, and 18.40% strongly agreed, indicating that most tutees believe the program positively impacts their language development. However, a smaller portion of tutees expressed less confidence in the program's effectiveness. 11.66% disagreed with the statement, and 1.23% strongly disagreed, suggesting that while the overall sentiment is positive, there is a small minority who do not feel the peer-tutoring program has been beneficial to their English improvement.

### **EFL Students' Perceptions of Their English Competence after Peer Tutoring**

The graph below shows the tutees' self-confidence in their English competence after three months of peer tutoring support.



Chart 2. Tutees' Views on Their English Competence after Peer Tutoring



The results indicate a positive shift in tutees' self-confidence regarding their writing skills after receiving peer tutoring support. A substantial 74.85% of tutees reported that their confidence had moderately improved, showing a noticeable increase in their writing abilities. 16.56% of tutees felt that their confidence had slightly improved, suggesting a modest but positive change. Meanwhile, 8.59% of tutees experienced a significant improvement, indicating a substantial boost in their self-confidence. Remarkably, 0% of tutees reported no improvement, underscoring that all participants benefited to some degree from the peer tutoring sessions.

### Students' views on how peer tutoring improved their English skills

The tutees' responses in the open-ended survey highlight their perceptions of how peer tutoring supports their English learning. Many noted that peer tutors explain concepts more slowly and clearly, making lessons easier to understand. Tutee 31 shared, "It's really useful when the peer tutor doesn't rush and is willing to explain things a few times if I don't understand right away. I often struggle with the pace at which my teacher teaches in the classroom." Others appreciated how peer tutors simplified content, making it more accessible and relatable. Tutee 16

stated, "I find it helpful when the peer tutors explain things in a way that makes the material feel more relevant to me and easier to comprehend."

Other tutees highlighted that peer tutoring is enjoyable due to its less formal atmosphere. The relaxed setting makes them feel less pressured than in a traditional classroom, allowing them to ask questions freely and seek clarification without fear of judgment. This fosters a more open and productive learning experience. Tutee 3 shared, "In the peer tutoring sessions, the less formal environment makes it easier for me to ask questions and dive deeper into the material without feeling anxious about making mistakes."

Finally, tutees feel that peer tutoring offers them more personalized attention and extra time to process the content, unlike in regular classes where time is often constrained, and lessons must end when the scheduled period is over. Tutee 17 said, "What I like about peer tutoring is that I get more time to process everything and get the help I need, which is often hard to get in regular classes where we have to stick to the schedule." Similarly, tutee 33 added, "Peer tutoring gives me more one-on-one attention and extra time to really understand the material, which isn't always possible in regular classes where time is limited."

### **Peer Tutors' Views on Peer Tutoring's Impact on Tutees' Writing Skills**

The four tutors believe their support directly contributes to the tutees' enhanced writing abilities. They employ strategies such as explaining complex concepts, providing clear examples, and giving constructive feedback. One tutor shared, "When I tutor, I focus on explaining the concepts in a way that makes sense to each student. I also try to give plenty of examples and offer feedback that's constructive so they can improve. I want them to think independently, so I encourage them to come up with ideas on their own" (Tutor 2). Another tutor added, "I break down concepts, give examples, and provide feedback to help students improve their writing based on their individual needs" (Tutor 3). Nevertheless, one tutor representing some of the tutors raised concerns about tutees who did not fully engage with the tutoring program. One

tutor shared, "Some of my tutees did not really pay attention when I was explaining the material to them, as if what I was saying was not important" (Tutor 4). Some tutors suggested that tutees' disengagement may have stemmed from a perceived lack of tutor expertise or preparedness to effectively support their language learning.

However, some tutors noted that their tutees showed noticeable improvement in their writing skills over time. One tutor said, "I've noticed a huge difference in how my tutees write. At first, they were unsure of themselves, but after a few sessions, I can see their writing is clearer and more organized. They also seem more confident when they write" (Tutor 2). For example, one tutor shared, "There was one tutee who was really demotivated at first—he felt like English was impossible" (Tutor 1). However, through a personalized approach and consistent encouragement, the tutor said, "The tutee started showing more interest in learning and became more confident in his writing" (Tutor 1).

The tutors also emphasized the benefits of working with small groups of tutees (10 tutees per tutor). This allows them to provide more focused attention, ensuring that each tutee's unique challenges and needs are addressed. In return, the tutees feel more supported and make significant strides in their writing skills. One tutor said, "Since I only have a small group of tutees, I can give each one the attention they need. It's not like a big classroom where students might get overlooked. I spend time working on their specific challenges, which really helps them improve their skills" (Tutor 3). Some tutors are happy to help beyond their assigned tasks. As one tutor expressed, "If tutees have assignments like class presentations, the instructor can inform us so that we can help them prepare for a better presentation" (Tutor 2).

Moreover, based on their tutoring experiences, the tutors provided suggestions to the instructor to help improve the tutees' English skills faster. One tutor recommended, "I think the tutees need more practice with listening because they struggle with comprehension. By exposing themselves to more varieties of English, they can become more familiar with different words and sentence structures" (Tutor 1). Another tutor emphasized the importance of writing practice: "I think it would be helpful if the tutees were given a journal-writing assignment. They could

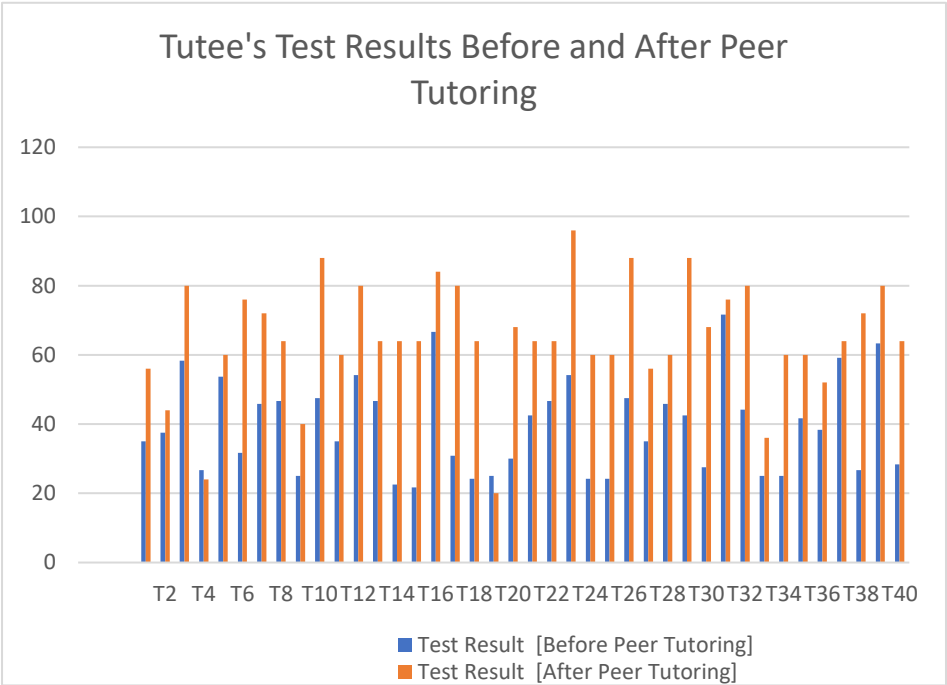
write about their own experiences or their readings. This way, they would have more opportunities to practice English" (Tutor 4).

Despite the positive outcomes, all tutors cited time constraints as a significant challenge. One tutor explained, "Time is definitely a challenge. I would love to spend more time with my tutees, but we all have other commitments—tutees with their other assignments, and tutors with our own coursework. So, I try to make the most of the time I have, even if it's only an hour or two per week" (Tutor 1). Another tutor said, "Recently, I have had several projects in my own classes, making it difficult for me to arrange time to meet my tutees" (Tutor 2). Nevertheless, all tutors express confidence in their English skills, with one saying, "I'm confident in my tutoring ability because I was selected for my strong performance in the English course, which helps me support the tutees effectively" (Tutor 3).

### **Tutees' Test Scores before and after Peer Tutoring**

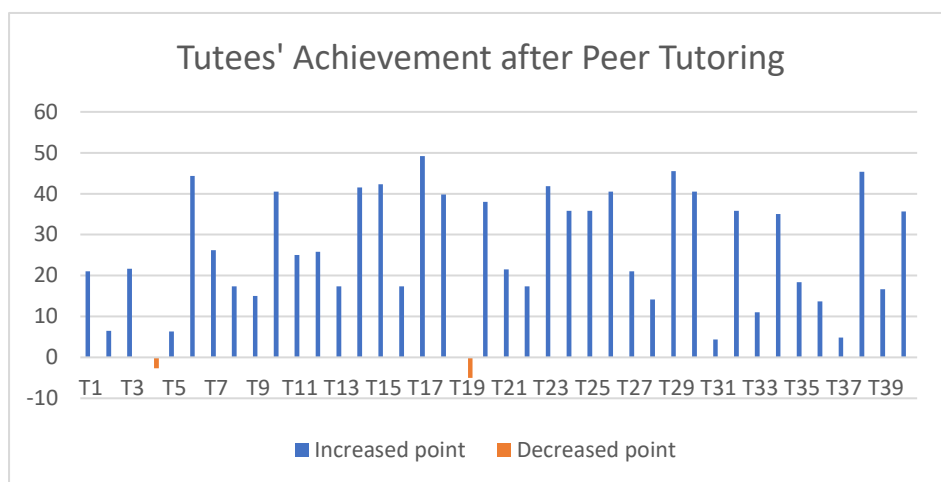
This section presents a comparison of the tutees' writing test scores before and after participating in peer tutoring sessions. The writing test requires them to construct English sentences using different structures. Comparing pre- and post-tutoring scores provides a clearer understanding of the impact of peer tutoring on the tutees' academic performance and writing skills.

Chart 3. Tutees’ Test Results before and after Peer Tutoring



The data reveals that the majority of tutees showed improved performance after receiving peer tutoring, with several achieving significant score increases. Among them, Tutee 17 demonstrated the highest improvement, gaining 49.17 points, followed by Tutee 29 with a 45.50-point increase and Tutee 38 with 45.34 points. Additionally, Tutee 6 and Tutee 15 made considerable progress, improving by 44.34 and 42.34 points, respectively. Several others, including Tutees 10, 14, 23, 26, and 30, also achieved impressive gains of over 40 points, indicating that the peer tutoring program was highly beneficial for 25% of participants.

Chart 4. Tutees' Achievement after Peer Tutoring



Meanwhile, the test scores suggest that tutees with average performance experienced moderate improvement after peer tutoring. Specifically, 17.5% of tutees showed an increase of 30 points, another 17.5% saw an increase of 20 points, and 25% improved by 10 points. However, 12.5% displayed minimal progress or less than 10 points, such as Tutee 2, who improved by only 6.50 points, and Tutee 31, with a 4.34-point increase. Notably, two tutees—Tutee 4 and Tutee 19—experienced score reductions of 2.67 and 5.00 points, respectively. These cases suggest that while the program was generally effective, it may not have been equally beneficial for few tutees.

## Discussion

The first research question examines the specific aspects of writing that Indonesian EFL students in non-English majors find most challenging, as identified through open-ended survey responses. Thematic analysis of the survey data reveals that students struggle with four key aspects of writing in English: vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and translation. These findings are consistent with previous research on writing challenges in Indonesian higher education (Aziz et al., 2020; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Febriani, 2022; Isma et al., 2023; Merizawati, 2018; Mubarak & Budiono, 2022; Surjowati, 2023).

A lack of exposure to English and limited practice may contribute to students' difficulties in using the language effectively. In general, Indonesian students rarely use English in their daily lives (Angraeni et al., 2024; Poedjiastutie et al., 2018; Zein et al., 2020). This is largely due to government regulations that restrict the use of English in classrooms, except in English language courses, as well as the designation of English as a foreign language in Indonesia (Indonesian Law, 2003). However, this policy contrasts with the government's efforts to internationalize higher education through initiatives such as partnerships with overseas universities (Sudibyo, 2007a) and the recruitment of international students (Sudibyo, 2007b) and scholars (Sudibyo, 2009). As part of this push for internationalization, English has increasingly become a mandatory language of communication in academic and institutional settings.

The findings indicate a high level of first language (L1) interference in students' English writing. L1 interference is a common issue faced by non-native English speakers (Phuket & Othman, 2015; Rass, 2015), often hindering students' ability to develop their English skills. When students think in their mother tongue while writing in English, it requires extra cognitive effort and time. The challenge is further compounded when they struggle to find direct equivalents for certain words or expressions, leading to awkward, incomplete, or incorrect sentences. Additionally, grammatical structures differ across languages, and direct translation often results in syntactic errors that affect clarity and coherence.

Moreover, English grammar is particularly complex for students. This is understandable, as Indonesian has a simpler grammatical structure; unlike English, it does not require verb variations to indicate tense. In Indonesian, the same verb form is used for present, continuous, past, future, and perfect tenses. A similar issue arises with nouns—Indonesian does not distinguish between singular and plural forms. Instead, plurality is indicated by adding a word before the noun, specifying quantity, such as "one" or "many."

Students' challenges with vocabulary and grammar are deeply interconnected with their difficulties in constructing sentences. The study found that many students struggled to compose sentences in English, particularly when required to follow standard sentence structures. Their difficulties became even more pronounced when attempting to create more complex sentences, such as compound or complex sentences involving multiple clauses. This issue arises because vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure are interdependent, complicating Indonesian students' ability to write sentences in English, as evidenced in previous studies (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Famularsih & Helmy, 2020; Suprpto et al., 2022). Limited vocabulary makes it difficult for students to select precise words, often leading them to use incorrect or vague expressions. Additionally, without a strong grasp of grammar, they struggle to arrange words in a way that conveys the intended meaning. For example, incorrect verb tense usage or misplacement of adjectives can distort the meaning of a sentence. Furthermore, sentence structure is governed by grammatical rules, meaning that errors in subject-verb agreement, word order, or the use of conjunctions can disrupt coherence and clarity (Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

The second research question, which examines how Indonesian EFL students perceive the effectiveness of peer tutoring in improving their writing skills, is addressed through an analysis of both open- and closed-ended survey questions. These questions explore students' views on the program's impact on their writing skills and overall English competence. Additionally, a descriptive analysis of students' writing test scores, both before and after participating in the peer tutoring program, provides insight into their progress. To ensure a comprehensive



understanding of the program's effectiveness, these findings are further triangulated with data from semi-structured interviews with the tutors. The quantitative analysis of students' perceptions indicates that most students found peer tutoring highly beneficial for improving their writing skills and overall English competence. This finding aligns not only with studies conducted within Indonesia but also with those from other regions, such as Oman (Alrajhi & Aldhafri, 2015; Srivastava & Rashid, 2018), Mexico (Flores et al., 2018), and Peru (Pozu-franco & Guevara, 2023).

The survey results further indicate that all students experienced at least some improvement in their English skills after participating in the peer tutoring program. Additionally, a thematic analysis of closed-ended survey responses, supported by insights from semi-structured interviews with tutors, reinforced students' overall perception that peer tutoring is an effective method for enhancing their writing skills. These findings are consistent with previous research on the impact of peer tutoring on EFL students across various regions, including Oman (Alrajhi & Aldhafri, 2015; Srivastava & Rashid, 2018), Ireland (Sullivan & Cleary, 2014), Malaysia (Chai & Lin, 2013; Chan et al., 2016), Mexico (Flores et al., 2018), and Peru (Pozu-franco & Guevara, 2023). The findings also align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Keenan et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1993; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992), particularly the concepts of the ZPD and the role of social interaction in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning is a socially mediated process in which students progress from their current level of competence to a higher level with the guidance of more knowledgeable others.

This study further reveals that Indonesian EFL students face significant challenges in vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and translation, which hinder their ability to express their thoughts effectively in English. These difficulties suggest that students are operating within their ZPD, where external assistance is essential to bridging the gap between their current abilities and their potential writing proficiency. Struggling with these linguistic challenges can create moments of crisis in the learning process, where students feel stuck or overwhelmed. However, such crises are pivotal opportunities for cognitive growth

(Hedegaard, 2012; Silalahi, 2019). With the right scaffolding, students can navigate these challenges and gradually internalize the necessary skills and strategies for independent writing. Successfully overcoming these obstacles enables learners to progress within their ZPD (Chaiklin, 2003), leading to greater autonomy and proficiency in writing. During these critical moments, peer tutors serve as more capable others by providing targeted scaffolding in a supportive, interactive learning environment. This scaffolding takes various forms, including detailed explanations with relevant examples to enhance comprehension, constructive feedback on students' writing, and motivational support to help students overcome difficulties and build confidence.

The findings also imply that the EFL classroom environment can feel intimidating for some students. Additionally, classroom instruction must adhere to academic regulations and strict time constraints, limiting the instructor's ability to provide individualized attention and address each student's specific needs. However, with peer tutors, students reported feeling more relaxed and less stressed, as tutors had more time and flexibility to help each student understand the lesson better, provide more examples, and offer individualized feedback. The relaxed, peer-led nature of the program allowed students to engage in meaningful social interactions that enhanced their overall learning experience. This finding aligns with previous studies in Indonesian universities suggesting that peer tutoring fosters a more relaxed learning environment (Eliza, 2024; Fitroh et al., 2024; Rahmasari et al., 2024).

Additionally, both data sources confirmed that students found it easier to understand lessons when explained again by tutors. The peer-tutoring setting appeared to mitigate affective barriers commonly found in traditional teacher-student dynamics, such as anxiety and social inhibition. Within the peer learning environment, tutees experienced reduced stress and anxiety, alongside increased motivation and confidence. This was largely due to the emotional safety and empathy fostered by tutors, whose presence contributed to a more relaxed, peer-oriented atmosphere. These findings align with those of Chan et al. (2016) in Malaysia, who emphasized the role of emotional comfort and peer rapport in promoting student engagement and improving learning

outcomes. Finally, the analysis confirmed that the program facilitated personalized learning, as tutors were more flexible in addressing students' needs. Tutors were willing to provide additional support and adjust their approach based on individual requirements, such as helping students prepare for tasks like presentations. These findings align with Vygotsky's (1978) idea that learning is socially constructed and that interaction with more capable peers facilitates cognitive development in a collaborative learning environment.

However, approximately 12% of the students held a contrary opinion, as they did not express strong confidence in their progress in English writing skills. This finding is reflected by their test results after the peer-tutoring program, which showed that 12.5% of the students demonstrated minimal progress, with an increase of less than 10 points. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD, which suggests that each learner has a unique ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). As a result, even with similar scaffolding, not all students progress at the same pace. Their learning outcomes depend on various factors, including their prior knowledge, motivation, the quality of support received, and their current developmental level, which influences how effectively they can internalize new skills and knowledge.

Further analysis from the semi-structured interviews provides deeper insight into this trend. Some tutors observed that certain students appeared uninterested in the peer-tutoring program. This lack of engagement may have contributed to their perception that the program was ineffective, reinforcing their disinterest and potentially impacting their learning outcomes. Additionally, scheduling conflicts between students and tutors due to time constraints may have further hindered participation. These findings align with the study by Chai and Lin (2013) in Malaysia, suggesting that such difficulties could have psychologically affected students' motivation to attend tutoring sessions, particularly if they felt pressured to meet with tutors despite their already busy schedules. The variation in students' perceptions of peer tutoring highlights the need to consider individual differences in engagement and responsiveness to social learning. Some students, especially those who showed minimal progress, may have required additional structured

guidance or motivation to fully benefit from the program. This suggests that while peer interaction is beneficial, the effectiveness of scaffolding depends on multiple factors, including students' willingness to participate, their initial proficiency, and the quality of tutor-student interactions. Since tutors are not as qualified as instructors, they need to receive proper training and supervision, as recommended by Chan et al. (2016) and Chai and Lin (2013).

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the key writing challenges faced by Indonesian EFL students, particularly in vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and translation. These issues are interconnected, as limited vocabulary and grammatical understanding hinder clarity and coherence. Many students also struggle with translating thoughts from their mother tongue, leading to syntactic errors. Encouraging direct thinking in English through structured practice and increased exposure can help build fluency and confidence. Regarding peer tutoring, most students found peer tutoring beneficial, highlighting its supportive environment, collaborative learning with peer tutors, individualized feedback, and reduced anxiety compared to traditional classroom settings. This aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in learning. Through peer tutoring, students operate within their ZPD, receiving guidance from more capable peers to advance beyond their current level of competence.

However, a small number of students reported minimal improvement due to factors such as engagement levels and scheduling conflicts. These variations highlight the need for further investigation into how individual differences affect responsiveness to peer tutoring. A crucial factor in writing proficiency is the ability to think in the target language, enabling students to construct sentences more naturally. Regular engagement in reading, writing, and speaking activities, along with structured exercises like paraphrasing and summarizing, can facilitate this transition.

This study did not fully investigate why some students found peer tutoring less effective. Future research should include follow-up interviews using purposive sampling to better understand their experiences. Additionally, refining peer tutoring by integrating teacher-led scaffolding could enhance its effectiveness. The study is also limited by its small sample of students and tutors and the exclusion of instructors. Future research should include a larger, more diverse participants and incorporate instructor perspectives for a more comprehensive understanding of peer tutoring in EFL contexts.

Finally, educational institutions may consider embedding structured peer tutoring programs into EFL writing courses. To maximize impact, teachers should be trained to provide appropriate scaffolding. A well-structured tutoring system, combined with targeted instructional strategies, can create an inclusive learning environment that enhances students' writing proficiency and overall English competence.

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