Peer Teaching to Assist Tertiary EFL Grammar Learning: Indonesian Tutors' Perceptions of Challenges and Strategies

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As an essential language component, grammar plays a crucial role in communication. However, with the need to master various L2 forms within several years and an L1 that has a very different grammatical system from English, many tertiary EFL students find grammar learning challenging. To solve this issue, peer teaching/tutoring can be a very effective way to assist students in improving their grammar. While isolated grammar teaching has its downsides, it is superior in clarifying complex concepts and promoting accuracy. It may help increase students' grammar competence when combined with other methods as an eclectic approach used in a communicative language program. As grammar tutors play a crucial role in helping their peers, this study examines the challenges they perceive in peer tutoring at the tertiary EFL education level and their strategies for overcoming difficulties. Using interviews to collect data from ten EFL grammar tutors, this qualitative study revealed some issues the tutors faced. Besides identifying problems such as motivating students, preparing the materials, and dealing with less/more proficient students, this research demonstrated that peer teaching might lead to 'cognitive dependence' among the lower-level learners. To deal with the various issues, the peer tutors applied practical strategies they had developed mainly from intuition and experience.

Keywords: peer teaching/tutoring, grammar, tertiary EFL students, challenges, strategies

Introduction

An essential element in meaning-making, grammar plays a crucial role in effective communication. However, with the need to master various L2 forms within several years and an L1 that often has a very different grammatical system from English, many tertiary EFL students find grammar learning challenging. To overcome this issue, peer teaching/tutoring may provide an effective support system to help such students (Knight, 2013; Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006; Mulatsih, 2018; Watcharapunyawong, 2018; Won, Change, & Kang, 2017), as it is difficult to simply rely on teachers' assistance from regular class meetings. Allowing a more friendly environment, peer teaching may help students improve their understanding of the subject matter. Despite this, research on peer teaching that specifically addresses EFL grammar is still scarce to date. Instead, grammar has mainly been examined as part of tutoring in language skills, especially writing (e.g., Kim, 2018; Snyder, Nielson, & Kurzer, 2016; Winder, Kathpalia, & Koo, 2016). As a lower-order issue in writing, grammar does not usually receive adequate attention in such peer tutoring. As the language element is a crucial aid for communication, this highlights the need for peer tutoring that specifically addresses grammar for students who need such support. Due to its ability to illuminate complex concepts and foster formal accuracy, isolated grammar teaching still has its place for cognitively mature EFL learners in communicative language programs (Murtisari, Hastuti, & Arsari, 2019; Murtisari, Salvadora, & Hastuti, 2020). With all these issues in mind and the central role of the tutors on the success of a peer tutoring program, this study aims to investigate the challenges they face in assisting their peers or near peers and their strategies to overcome difficulties. This research is significant for assisting tertiary language programs in their endeavor to improve their students' grammar mastery, which is an integral part of functional language competence.

Literature Review

Peer teaching/tutoring

Peer teaching or peer tutoring, which has been implemented for decades in higher education (Williams & Reddy, 2016), is a form of learning where a student teaches another student of a similar status. According to Gaies (1985), peer teaching may take the form of same-level or cross-level partnerships. In the same-level type, both the tutors and tutees come from the same class and level of proficiency. In cross-level tutoring, on the other hand, the tutors are more competent and may be the same age as their tutees (same-age tutoring) or older (intergrade tutoring). Cross-level peer tutoring is commonly applied in tertiary institutions to help students to pass a particular course or reduce the drop-out rate.

Peer teaching has been reported to benefit both tutors and tutees. With peer tutoring, tutees may understand the subject matter better because there are more opportunities to respond, more time-on-task and practice with the academic content, and more accessible feedback (Bowman-Perrott, deMarín, Mahadevan, & Etchells, 2016; Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006). It may also enhance their motivation and confidence, enable them to gain access to a learning "role model", and permit them to have a safer learning environment (Menezes & Premnath, 2016, p.160). Bohórquez, Rodríguez, and González's (2019) research also showed that peer tutoring may promote learners' autonomy, which refers to learners' (and tutors') capacity to "play an active and responsible role in designing learning agendas rooted in learners' needs" (para. 9). For peer tutors, on the other hand, peer teaching may serve as an avenue for both academic and non-academic self-improvement. "[S]hift[ing] from being students as recipients to being productive teachers," they will need to have a deeper comprehension of the subject matter to be able to teach effectively (Stigmar, 2016, p.125). This will allow them to grow cognitively as they also become more critical of what they are learning. Non-academically, peer teaching has also been shown to improve tutors' skills in communication, leadership, group facilitation (Menezes & Premnath, 2016), multi-task management (Adams, 2011), and teaching (Naeger, Conrad, Nguyen, Kohi, & Webb, 2013).

Despite the benefits, there are common problems in peer tutoring. One issue relates to the tutors' ability in teaching. There are concerns that tutors may not be able to deliver quality content because they are still inexperienced compared to faculty members (Menezes & Premnath, 2016). A lack of preparation to equip tutors has been identified as one issue that may complicate this problem. According to Irvine, Williams, and McKenna (2018), in referring to several studies, this includes a lack of time to prepare for teaching sessions and a lack of preparation to help them adjust to gaps of learning styles among themselves, the tutees, and the faculty's course instructors/lecturers. Another preparation issue the researchers mentioned is difficulties in preparing teaching materials, which was also indicated in Stanley's study (1998). Other challenges tutors may face in peer teaching are a lack of confidence about their knowledge and playing the role as a teacher (Christiansen, Bjørk, Havnes, & Hessevaagbakke, 2011), anxiety before teaching (McKenna & French, 2011), and dealing with critical students who may weaken the tutors' power as a facilitator (Irvine et al., 2018). Tutors, however, have also been reported to be concerned that they may sound arrogant when sharing their knowledge (Christiansen et al., 2011). On top of this, cultural issues may also affect peer tutoring. Takeuchi (2015), for instance, reported that the hierarchical relationship between Japanese tutors and tutees may prevent collaborative learning. As tutees look up to tutors, they tend to be reluctant to ask questions even though they do not understand. The relationship also tends to become formal with tutors assuming more power.

Apart from the above problems, research has also identified issues related to tutees. One study showed that peer teaching may cause dependence among tutees. As many as 60% of Mynard and Almarzouqi's (2006) student-teacher participants reported that their tutees developed a "high degree of dependence" on them (p. 16). According to the tutors, this was indicated by the tutees' requests to do their homework and extra sessions before English tests. However, the research on peer tutoring for English and grammar for female foundational year students in the UAE did not clearly describe the issue of 'dependence'. While asking for more tutoring to get prepared for tests may be a problem on its own, it does not necessarily comprise dependence. Irrespective of this, Menezes and Premnath (2016) also suggested that tutees tend to use peer tutoring to help them to perform well on exams rather than equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills that can help them in their careers later. It was suggested that exam-driven and teacher-centered learning have contributed to such behavior. This appears to show that students tend to be pragmatic when it comes to their studies.

Regardless of its potential challenges, peer education may be linked to two pedagogical paradigms: social constructivism and cognitive congruence. Based on the idea that learning occurs in a social context, social constructivism views knowledge as being constructed through interactions with other people. Through peer teaching, students collaborate in a context where "a less able peer is able to enter a new area of potential development through problem solving with someone more able" (Asghar, 2010, p.406). This process involves "active questioning, explaining, monitoring, and regulating in the learning process" (Stigmar, 2016, p.131) based on equal power, mutual respect, and openness to others' ideas (O'Sullivan & Cleary, 2014). Furthermore, in light of the cognitive congruence theory, while the tutors are more competent, the knowledge gap between them and their peers is much smaller compared to faculty educators. With this similarity of experience, peer tutors may explain concepts in ways that are more comprehensible to tutees, which could enhance knowledge construction during peer teaching. This may explain why the method is considered useful for promoting the learning of complex concepts (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011).

However, peer tutors' teaching styles also shape the nature of learning in peer tutoring. According to Berghmans, Michiels, Salmon, Dochy, and Struyven (2014), tutors may be directive or facilitative in their teaching. With a directive style, a tutor gives explicit directions and explanations to tutees' queries, focusing on the provision of essential content and information. Some strategies that fall within this style are informing, giving direct answers and feedback, explaining, and summarizing (Berghmans et al., 2014). Within a facilitative environment, on the other hand, a tutee is more actively engaged in the learning process by initiating more questioning and challenging their own knowledge construction (Berghmans et al., 2014). A facilitative tutor may apply methods such as hinting, questioning, prompting, guiding, filling-in-the-blank, and stimulating self-feedback. Each type of strategy has its own strengths and downsides, but in the study by Berghmans et al., the tutees discovered that the directive style offered more clarity while the facilitative one allowed more in-depth learning and hence more knowledge gains. However, their categories of strategies/methods do not seem to be mutually exclusive, as tutors may apply different combinations of strategies. Nevertheless, the research does not show if the use of teaching methods may be part of the tutors' strategies for dealing with specific types of tutees, which will be crucial to discover if this is the case.

Isolated Grammar Teaching

Isolated grammar teaching may be defined as "separate/isolated instruction especially devoted to focus[ing] on discrete grammatical items by using primarily explicit techniques" (Murtisari et al., 2020, p. 19). In tertiary EFL language programs, this traditional approach is typically carried out in independent courses based on a structure-based syllabus, which seems to be a common tradition in Indonesia. Allowing a closer focus on grammatical forms, isolated grammar teaching may effectively enhance students' understanding of L2 forms, especially of complex concepts, and promote accuracy (Murtisari et al., 2019). According to Spada and Lightbown (2008), the approach may assist students with learning grammatical items that are "rare or absent in the language they are exposed to via CLT [Communicative Language Teaching] or CBI [Content Based Instruction] classes". It is also more effective to teach students the explicit knowledge of grammar (Umeda, Snape, Yusa, & Wiltshier, 2017) that is crucial for tertiary students intending to pursue EFL teaching career paths.

Despite the advantages, isolated grammar teaching has been criticized for not being able to teach students to use grammar to communicate due to its frequently limited communicative content (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Long, 2016). However, this weakness can be mitigated by giving students more exposure to authentic L2 use and co-implementing an integrative grammar teaching approach (Focus on Form). In this way, the explicit knowledge obtained from isolated teaching can be recycled and reinforced for communicative use. As DeKeyser (1998, 2008, 2015) pointed out, explicit knowledge can become implicit or automatized through practice during which students may internalize the rules. However, teaching grammar integrally does not guarantee automaticity either. While it introduces forms in communicative contexts, it is ultimately students' practice and exposure to the L2 that will help them develop implicit language skills. Sheen (2005) discovered that his experimental study's participants taught by the Focus on Form approach continued to produce inaccurate forms. Therefore, isolated and integrative grammar teaching deliveries are complementary rather than "oppositional" (Ellis, 2015, p.10) as each has its own merits and pitfalls. With its particular strengths, isolated grammar teaching remains a highly appropriate approach for EFL language programs, especially those

expecting students to learn various grammatical forms within a relatively short time as well as the explicit knowledge of the L2.

Previous Studies

Research on peer tutoring that focuses on grammar at the tertiary level is still limited. Although the language element has frequently been addressed in studies on peer teaching, it has largely been examined only as part of the tutoring of language skills, especially writing (e.g., Winder, Kathpalia, & Koo, 2016; Kim, 2018; Snyder, Nielson, & Kurzer, 2016). In addition, while it still tends to receive substantial attention in such tutoring (Snyder et al., 2016), it has usually been addressed only as part of proofreading or editing (Bell & Elledge, 2008; La Clare & Franz, 2013). The few studies that have investigated peer teaching focusing on grammar are mainly concerned with the benefits of such a program for tutors and tutees. Hidayah (2014), for instance, found that the approach may improve high school students' understanding of the simple past tense in his quasi-experimental study on peer tutoring's effectiveness for grammar learning. By examining EFL students in a Korean tertiary context, Won, Change, and Kang (2017) also discovered that peer tutoring may improve less proficient learners' grammar. Both tutors and tutees were reported to benefit from the program. Corroborating this study, Mulatsih's research (2018) showed that over 84% of the participants believed that peer teaching helped them to study grammar more intensively and enhanced their understanding of L2 forms and skills when using them. Two advantages tutees pointed out were that the tutoring enabled them to deal with the grammatical problems of individual learners and access explanations they could understand more easily due to the more open communication channels with their tutors. In reporting about the online peer tutoring for grammar, Watcharapunyawong (2018) also demonstrated very high satisfaction with the use of the method among EFL learners. The study also revealed an enhanced sense of responsibility among the tutors, as they had to prepare well to be able to assist their peers on a specific grammatical item. However, despite all the positive results on peer grammar teaching, none discussed peer tutors' challenges and their strategies to deal with the problems. Therefore, as tutors play an important role in the success of a peer teaching program, it is crucial to examine the issues in research.

Methodology

This preliminary qualitative descriptive research was conducted in a respected undergraduate EFL language education (teacher training) program in Central Java, Indonesia. English was used as the medium for instruction for around 90% of its courses, but students used Indonesian or their local language outside classes. The peer tutoring was carried out as part of two grammar courses to help students improve their grammar competence to the faculty's standards. The grammar courses were prerequisites for academic writing courses so they were high-stake subjects. In order to help students succeed, they had been divided into classes according to their levels of English competence to allow different paces of learning. In addition, one introductory session of the Basic Grammar course was devoted to addressing the importance of grammar to motivate students to learn the language aspect. Teachers were also encouraged to keep motivating their students to learn it. Furthermore, based on a structural syllabus, the grammar courses implemented isolated grammar teaching, which relies heavily on explicit instruction. Here, it is worth noting that grammar was also integrated into skill courses in the EFL program. The isolated and integrative methods were considered to be complementary in order to develop students' grammar competence.

In line with the two grammar courses' objectives, the tutoring program aimed to help the English major students understand the meaning of specific grammatical items, enhance their ability to use them accurately, and improve their fluency in using grammar in communication through more applicative practice. The subjects taught basic linguistic concepts and various grammatical features such as articles, verbs and adjective phrases, imperatives, the passive voice, tenses, clauses, and reduced clauses. Furthermore, the assessment was conducted through written tests focusing on the accuracy and appropriateness of the use of grammatical items both at the sentence and discourse levels. The tutoring was deemed necessary as around 60% of the language program's new students tended to have low grammar competence, which was partly reflected by their low PBT TOEFL scores. Grouping students into different classes based on their English proficiency was considered insufficient as individual students had different problems in their grammar learning.

With the country's EFL setting and limited hours for the English subject at school, grammar had rarely received adequate attention at the previous levels of education. As a result, many students were not able to communicate in English with proper grammar by the time they entered the university. Many were also ignorant of basic English grammatical rules, such as the use of the auxiliary verbs "be", "do", and "have". As grammar competence and explicit grammar knowledge are essential for the program's graduates to be qualified English teachers in the country, students in need were provided with a generous number of hours for tutoring. The tutoring was not compulsory, but each student had access to one tutor that had been assigned to help him/her and was encouraged to have regular meetings. It was conducted on an appointment basis and usually involved two to four students at the most. At the lecturer's request, one-to-one peer teaching was also conducted for students who were less proficient.

Situated in the above context and consideration that research on peer teachers's challenges and the strategies to deal with them is scarce, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What perceived challenges do peer tutors face in peer teaching to assist students of isolated grammar courses?
2. What strategies do they self-reportedly apply in order to deal with the challenges?

It is worth noting that this preliminary research was focused on describing the problems from the viewpoints of the tutors and, therefore, was only based on their narrative reflections from interviews.

Participants

Ten tutors were involved in this study. They were selected out of a total of 12 tutors employed during the study to represent gender and seniority (year of study). To become a tutor, they had to obtain an 'A' in all the grammar courses offered by the EFL program and have a GPA of at least 3.5 (out of 4). They also had to possess relevant soft skills, such as having a strong sense of responsibility, sociability, and ability to communicate. All the tutors received an initial briefing on their administrative duties and how to assist their peers, such as how to be accommodating and encouraging. No specific strategies were given on how to teach their peers.

Table 1
Participants' Background

Tutor	Gender	Age	Length of experience of being a tutor (trimester)
A	F	21	1
B	F	20	2
C	F	21	5
D	F	22	6
E	M	19	2
F	F	21	3
G	M	19	2
H	F	20	2
I	F	21	4
J	F	20	2

Data Collection Instrument and Procedures

In order to obtain more in-depth information from the participants, the data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The main interviews were all administered by one member of the research team. The audio-recorded interviews took around 20-30 minutes for each participant and were conducted in the Indonesian language to help the participants to express themselves more comfortably (see Tsang, 1998). To clarify or confirm the responses obtained in the interviews, another team member contacted several tutors to get more detailed information.

Data Analysis

All the results of the recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis, which is used for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Developing themes through close and frequent reading, this method may generate "a thematic map" (p. 87) and provide a detailed account of the data. Following Braun and Clarke's method, the analysis of the data required several steps, which were: repeated careful reading to identify meaningful data features relevant to the research issues, coding the data, and then collating it to establish the themes. After the classification was conducted by one research team member, it was crosschecked by a second member to ensure the accuracy of the themes. Different perspectives on the data interpretation were resolved through mutual reviews.

Results and Discussion

The data analysis showed some perceived challenges during the peer teaching, which included motivation, getting teaching materials, instructional/knowledge construction issues, and culture-related issues. More concerns were raised on instructional matters. As non-professional teachers, the peer tutors were often faced with teaching problems arising from the various characteristics of students. The peer teachers, however, were shown to be able to find practical strategies to overcome the difficulties mainly by intuition and experience. The results of this study are discussed further below.

Challenges of Grammar Peer Teaching in EFL Learning

Low Motivation to Learn Grammar
The most common problem tutors mentioned in the peer teaching was tutees' "low motivation" to learn grammar, which had adversely affected their attitudes towards the peer tutoring (Tutors A, B, D, E, G, H, I, and J). According to the tutors, this was primarily shown by many tutees' reluctance to review materials and their relatively limited appointments for the non-compulsory peer tutoring program. While the tutoring program was overall relatively successful and improved many students' grades with approximately a doubled number of students passing the courses, tutors reported that the tutees did not have regular sessions as encouraged. They instead tended just to request tutoring to get prepared for a grammar test, which echoes findings in Mynard and Almarzouqi's (2006) and Menezes and Premnath's (2016) research. Tutor G said that concentrated sessions before tests were more challenging as he had to review several topics at once, which could make the meetings less effective. The assessment-oriented behavior was observed by Tutor D, the most senior tutor in the program:

> Students sometimes do not have enough motivation because they see grammar tutoring as being useful only to help them pass the course, whereas it is actually done to help them improve [their grammar] proficiency.

There were several causes that may have contributed to the tutees' reluctance to have more regular sessions. Firstly, many seemed to have low awareness of the essential role of grammar in communication, so they did not prioritize grammar learning in their study. Secondly, as many, if not most, students were not used to studying grammar analytically in school, they may have found dealing with linguistic concepts and focusing on details for accuracy daunting or boring. Thirdly, many also did not seem to understand that they needed regular study and practice to create automaticity in grammar production. With all these possible factors, many tutees seemed to have been driven by a short-term learning goal just to pass the grammar course they were taking.

Furthermore, less engagement was reported to occur among course repeaters, which could be partly expected as low motivation is common among low achievers (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Commenting on such tutees, Tutor I said:

> It is not compulsory for students to join grammar tutoring, but the level of motivation this year is much lower, very different from the previous year. [...] We have many repeater students this year. We must motivate them to join tutoring, but I don't feel comfortable pushing them. We merely suggest that if there are any class materials they haven't understood, there is [tutoring] support available for them.

As an essential determinant of students' learning engagement (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012) and hence academic success (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010; Steinmayr, Weidinger, Schwinger, & Spinath, 2019), motivation is a critical issue to address. To deal with this, tutors applied several strategies and took up the role as motivators, as encouraged by the tutoring program coordinator. Working at the intrinsic and extrinsic levels, they tried to promote awareness of the importance of grammar for their language learning, study, and future careers among their tutees. To increase intrinsic motivation, tutors created a conducive learning atmosphere to make tutees feel comfortable during the learning sessions and develop positive associations with the grammar subject. This was done, for instance, by being friendly and very patient, and pacing the learning sessions according to the tutees' abilities.

On the other hand, in order to develop extrinsic motivation, the tutors, for example, explained to tutees how grammar may assist them in communication, increase their grades, and improve their opportunities for better careers, which the tutors were encouraged to do by the peer teaching program coordinator. Tutors also reported giving extrinsic motivations to their tutees in the form of a lot of encouragement and praise for their efforts during peer teaching sessions. This strategy may create more rewarding learning experiences which may motivate the tutees to learn more of the subject (Opdecam, & Maussen, 2017; Hancock, 2010). Going beyond this, one tutor (Tutor I) motivated her peer students by giving small presents if they obtained a good grade. While extrinsic motivation is not as desirable as intrinsic, they both enhance students' engagement in learning (Everaert et al., 2017; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Thus, the tutors' strategies to deal with both were appropriate. Working at a more personalized level with learners, peer tutors may be able to address motivational issues more deeply through 'mate to mate' talks. This demonstrates how the task of developing students' motivation can be carried out through partnership between teachers and peer tutors, as the work usually takes much effort, especially among low achievers. However, to reap this benefit, it is essential to select tutors with excellent people skills so they can act as good mentors.

Teaching Materials

Obtaining teaching materials was usually not an issue for student-teachers, but several tutors (Tutors G, C, and D) mentioned that finding proper materials was not easy, as the tutees also needed a lot of practice. Although there were faculty resources and the internet also abounded with grammar exercises, materials that could be readily used were limited. In the context of teaching individual tenses before mixing them in exercises, Tutor D pointed out that:

> "[…] the materials on the internet are not the same as the faculty's [courses']. For example, the materials on tenses on the internet are mixed tenses, while those from the faculty's courses are taught one by one in sequence. So, we had to adjust the materials from the internet".

Tutor C added that she needed to find additional materials that were appropriate to her tutees' capacity to understand. She added that:

> The challenges were more on finding exercises that could help the students understand [the course materials] easily, and I had to think very hard to find ways to help students with weak memory to be able to really absorb the materials and always remember them, and I am still struggling with this.

This problem demonstrated the need for the faculty's support to provide exercises that are directly aligned to the course content for students with different levels of proficiency. This will require a significant effort such as hiring professionals or qualified senior students to develop the materials. However, since these types of materials are central for creating a link with the grammar course the peer tutoring supports, the faculty's assistance should be made available.

Instructional/Knowledge Construction Issues

There were several instructional issues identified in this study, which reflected the different characteristics of the tutees they had to assist. Tutees with low language proficiencies were shown to have affected the tutors most during the peer teaching. Here, students' competence was shown to be a significant factor determining the tutors' use of directive or facilitative strategies.

Dealing with Students with Low L2 Proficiency. Seven tutors (Tutors A, C, G, E, F, I, and J) mentioned that they had difficulty explaining the materials to students with low English competence. As around 30% of the

grammar courses' students fell far below the language program's standard of L2 proficiency, they had to work harder to explain things. This shows that while it is assumed there is more cognitive congruence in peer teaching, tutors may still face a significant knowledge gap. Commenting on this, Tutor F said:

> Most of the repeater students lacked basic knowledge of English grammar […]. Rather than teaching the course's materials, we [tutors] had to teach [more basic] materials that should have been taught at school. I asked them about [personal] pronouns, but they had no idea and did not know how to use them […].

Tutors reported having implemented some common strategies, which tended to be very directive, when dealing with less competent students, such as exercising extra patience, explaining things slowly, and frequently checking students' understanding. Another strategy the tutors (Tutors E, F, I, and J) mentioned utilizing when assisting the less proficient tutees was repetition by re-explaining concepts and reviewing them over and over to help them remember the grammatical concepts, many of which were relatively new to them. However, by giving tutees more practice through exercises, the tutors also played a facilitative role.

Another strategy tutors (C, F, and J) mentioned for helping weak students was making notes and summaries for the tutees. As many concepts were relatively complex or new to their tutees, the strategy was helpful. Tutor C said:

> For teaching about tenses, I usually make notes that are easy for them to understand. Sometimes learning about tenses from the [course] book makes students lazy because it is thick, so I make notes to help them understand [the concepts] more easily.

According to Tutor C, finding more creative but simple ways to explain grammatical concepts to students with low English proficiency, especially slow learners, was part of her task as a tutor. This kind of an attitude is essential to the success of a peer tutoring program and the course it supports, as substantial individual knowledge gaps cannot be addressed in the grammar courses' regular meetings. What the tutors did to help the low-level students understand the subject matter represents another essential advantage of peer tutoring. With its focused and personalized attention, peer tutoring can greatly benefit weak learners, which was shown by significantly increased test scores for many of them when they were repeating the course. This finding corroborates Green, Alderman, and Liechty's (2004) research finding on the use of peer teaching for at-risk second grade readers.

Dealing with Critical, Highly Proficient Students. Two tutors (Tutors J and G) who were assigned highly proficient students found it challenging to assist them in learning grammar. Being more critical, these students often raised questions that needed more expertise in order to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the grammatical items taught. This sometimes led to difficult situations as the tutors themselves often still had knowledge gaps about the subject matter.

To overcome this problem, Tutor J did not do any special preparation for a tutoring session with the tutees. However, when she did not know the answer to her tutees' question(s), she would tell them that she needed to find out the answer first and consult a more able tutor or search the internet to help her. This showed that a tutors' network to provide peer support could be very helpful, and, therefore, may be necessary. Unlike Tutor J, Tutor G reported getting himself more prepared by "rereading the materials until [he] fully understood the concepts [he] was going to explain to the tutees". He also prepared more advanced examples for uses of the relevant L2 forms in real contexts. He pointed out how working with the most able tutees had benefited him for his own learning:

> […] these students could help me to reflect on my own grammar knowledge – how much I had understood the concepts and uses of those grammatical items.

Tutors J and G reported having taken a more facilitative role for the proficient tutees as they were actively engaged and took the initiative more often. Tutor G said, "things just flowed as they started asking questions". Despite this, Tutor G said he still prepared a general structure, which he wrote down on a note pad to make his sessions more organized. However, although the tutors tended to act as facilitators for more proficient students, the finding demonstrates that such tutees need tutors with a high level of competence so that they can handle the tutees' questions.

Dependence on Peer Tutors. Tutors E and G, on the other hand, raised the issue of dependence among some lower-level students. According to the tutors, instead of utilizing the peer sessions to support their own studies, they relied on their peer teachers to help them learn the grammar course materials. During the peer tutoring sessions, tutors had to be more directive in helping such tutees. Tutor G pointed out, "[…] they did not want to read the materials themselves," so he had to explain a lot to them. Commenting on this issue, Tutor E said that such students did not seem to be very motivated to study independently because they found learning by themselves challenging. So rather than reading the course materials by themselves, they just relied on the peer teachers to explain everything to them. This nature of reliance is different from what was reported in Mynard and Almarzouqi's (2006) research, where tutees asked for more sessions and assistance to complete their homework. The tutees' reluctance to be engaged more cognitively supports previous findings that learners do not always favor constructivist-oriented ways of learning in which they will take more responsibility (e.g., Struyven, Dochy, Janssens, & Gielen, 2008).

The tutees' 'cognitive dependence' on tutors in the present study highlights a crucial possible downside of peer-assisted learning that is not generally reported in peer teaching programs. Rather than enhancing learners' autonomy among tutees (Bohórquez et al., 2019; Stigmar, 2016), it may also create an easy shortcut for them to fulfill their study tasks. Students' overreliance seemed to have been heightened by the traditional knowledge transmission strategies commonly applied in Indonesia, in which they play a more passive role in learning. Another factor that seemed to have contributed to this issue was the perceived complexity of the subject matter. Involving the discussion of complex grammar forms and linguistic concepts in detail, learning in isolated grammar courses can be complicated and demanding.

To tackle students' overreliance, the tutors who raised the dependence issue devised a strategy to give the tutees exercises in conjunction with their sessions to do at home. In this way, they stimulated the students to collaborate more in the knowledge construction of the tutoring. According to Tutor G, this strategy was helpful because he could not just remind them to study grammar.

Culture-Related Issues

There were two culture-related issues raised in the interviews. The first was concerned with the Indonesian collective culture. Within such a culture, people prefer to work in a group to maintain togetherness and ensure that support is available to all the members. Because of this, while having different levels of competence, some students did not want to be grouped in different sessions because they wanted to do peer tutoring with their close classmates. Working in such a group may lessen one's anxiety, but this may present difficulties when the tutees have different levels of abilities. Tutor F said this was not always easy to deal with but the course's teacher or program coordinator could intervene to assist tutors by establishing more appropriate groupings.

The second problem was concerned with tutor-tutee relations, which may be linked to local (Javanese) cultural values for relating to other people. Tutors E, G, and H reported feeling uncomfortable teaching a fellow student from the same batch or a more senior one. This seemed to stem from the value of respect ('hormat') that entails humility ('andhap asor') and empathy ('tepa selira'). Respect is a crucial for maintaining social harmony, which is a central value in Javanese culture, and it is of great importance especially when one interacts with people with a higher status, including those who are older (Geertz, 1960; Irawanto, Ramsey, & Ryan, 2011). As teaching is usually associated with superiority in knowledge, experience, and/or skills, peer teachers in a cultural context may be concerned that they could make older students or those of the same status feel like they are inferior or that they, as student-teachers, may appear patronizing. Such an issue may present particular challenges in peer tutoring as it may affect the process of knowledge transfer/knowledge construction (see Takeuchi, 2015). Tutor G pointed out that initially he did not find it easy to teach a tutee who happened to be a student from the same year but by using a 'mate-to-mate' approach he believed he could solve the problem. He added:

> I found it a bit awkward to teach my own mate […]. [W]ell, it was my own mate, so I tried to be as natural as possible [just like doing it to a mate when explaining things], while maintaining mutual respect […]. He was also very open and humble [so it was fine].

Tutor H, who was tutoring a more senior student repeating a grammar course, also faced a similar problem. Tutor H felt 'sungkan', an Indonesian word referring to the feeling of awkwardness and reluctance to take actions toward someone due to some reason (such as the person having higher status) when teaching the tutee.

She did not want to sound condescending or show that she was smarter than the senior student. To overcome this problem, she consulted the program coordinator. After receiving some encouragement and advice, she felt more confident. However, her own strategy was to build a cordial rapport with the tutee so she could apply a friend-to-friend method for tutoring her. Based on an equal relation, this strategy allowed her to cooperate in the knowledge construction effectively and help the tutee improve her understanding of the subject matter. Similar to Tutor G, she said, "I explained things to her like talking to a friend." She also reported being not too rigid with the learning agenda, and having small talks during the tutoring session were helpful for creating a more relaxed atmosphere to encourage the senior tutee to ask questions and talk about her problems. The use of social talk and tutees' verbalization of problems confirms Madaio, Ogan, and Casell's (2016) research results on friendship-based tutor-tutee interactions in peer teaching.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify peer teachers' perceived challenges when tutoring their peers and the strategies they self-reportedly applied to overcome them. The difficulties were due to factors such as low motivation, the limited availability of supporting teaching materials, different levels of students' L2 competence, and the tutees' socio-cultural status. However, in general, the problems seem to have mainly stemmed from the dynamics of dealing with the different characteristics of students, which they had yet to learn to manage as non-professional teachers. In spite of this, with the peer teaching program receiving positive assessments from the faculty, the tutors had demonstrated their success as students' partners in grammar learning. Working at a more personalized level, the tutors could address individual problems in different areas, which would not have been able to be sufficiently dealt with in the isolated grammar courses' regular classes. With students' improved grades, this research shows that cross-level peer education may provide essential support to improve students' grammar in EFL contexts where the language element has not received adequate attention.

This study also highlights the importance of employing specific criteria in tutors' recruitment as their success in peer tutoring is inseparable from their expertise and relevant soft skills. However, while the student-teachers were shown to be able to adequately deal with the difficulties they reportedly faced, it was demonstrated that the faculty's support remained crucial for the tutors in the partnership. Working together to develop students' motivation to learn grammar and provide appropriate materials for practice were shown to be two areas the faculty could assist the most. The provision of materials that allows scaffolding could be essential to help those with low language aptitude.

Finally, since this is a small-scale study, the present research is not generalizable. More investigations are necessary to examine grammar tutors' challenges and their strategies to tackle them in other contexts involving more participants, including tutees and faculty members. As this study only relied on limited data from interviews, future research also needs to include data from other sources, such as observations of the peer teaching and examinations of the supplemental materials the tutors use. Despite these limitations, the present study has provided some crucial insights into the issues tutors face in grammar peer-teaching and the strategies they implement to overcome them. Such information is indispensable for providing an effective learning support system for grammar learning through peer tutoring.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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