# Use of Peer Tutoring in Improving the English Speaking Ability of Thai Undergraduate Students

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| Article information | Abstract |
|---|---|
| | *This paper aims to explore how higher proficiency students delivered peer tutoring programs to help improve lower proficiency students' speaking ability and build up their confidence in English speaking due to limited research studies on peer tutoring, especially in Thailand. Three groups of fourth-year undergraduates, each consisting of a high proficiency user of English as a tutor and three lower proficiency users, participated in the study. Video recordings of each tutoring session, the tutors' record forms, semi-structured interviews and speaking tests were implemented as research instruments. All data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively through thematic analysis. The findings showed that a peer tutoring program can enhance the tutees' speaking ability and assist them in gaining more confidence in speaking. Also, the results revealed that the tutees could obtain higher scores in the post-test by applying some of the tutor's techniques. The tutoring sessions helped them learn how to form full sentences and anticipate possible test content, and encouraged them to be willing to speak. This paper suggests that peer tutoring can be promoted either inside or outside the classrooms so as to improve the speaking ability and confidence for low proficiency students.* |

## INTRODUCTION

With regards to the current situation in Thailand, a non-English speaking country in South East Asia, it has traditionally been ranked low for English proficiency and was recently ranked as 'very low' according to the Education First (EF) English Proficiency Index in 2022. It is common that many Thai university students are still unable to communicate in English even though they have been studying English for more than 12 years. In Thailand, speaking in particular is considered to be one of the more difficult English skills to learn and practice. The Ministry of Education has been looking for the most effective way for Thai students to have opportunities to practice pronunciation and apply their knowledge of grammatical structures and vocabulary in a speaking context (Romwapee, 2012).

Previous studies conducted in Thai educational contexts found that there are some key reasons why Thai students cannot speak English accurately and fluently, and lack confidence in speaking.

A recent paper discussing problems faced by Thai students in speaking English by Yusica (2014) found that there are two main factors influencing Thai students' speaking ability and confidence. The first relates to the attitudes demonstrated by Thai English teachers who perceive that they often employ a traditional approach to emphasize translation, reading, and writing. Therefore, students are given less opportunities to practice speaking. The second reason concerns psychological factors that hinder students from speaking, including fear of mistakes, anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence and lack of motivation. In addition, Thai students sometimes cannot speak in English effectively because they encounter linguistic difficulties related to grammatical competency, vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation as well as psychological aspects (such as reduced self-confidence and a fear of speaking). Therefore, speaking as one of the fundamental communication skills, is considered to be severely lacking in Thai students and needs to be improved mandatorily.

In light of the aforementioned reasons, many educators have been trying to look for teaching approaches which can help enhance a student's speaking ability. Peer tutoring is one teaching technique where a higher proficiency student is paired with a student with lower proficiency in a class or outside school. Topping (1996) affirms that peer tutoring has been adopted extensively by many educators, particularly in undergraduate educational institutions since it is an alternative teaching technique that further enhances the skills of active language learners. In addition, many benefits of peer tutoring experienced by teachers, learners and administrators have been identified by various scholars (Beasley, 1997; Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Boudouris, 2005; Eggers, 1995; Najabat et al., 2015; Sadovi, 2008; Tong, 2004). Greenwood et al. (1988) proposed three main components which can positively assist high proficiency students and low proficiency students. Firstly, both tutors and tutees can increase their academic skills through their participation in a peer tutoring program. Secondly, both tutors and tutees can significantly increase their social skills when they have an opportunity to interact with each other. Lastly, peer tutoring provides both tutors and tutees a chance to develop relationships and creates an environment conducive to positive relations among the groups. This approach may enhance Thai students' speaking ability and allow them to gain more confidence in speaking.

Despite its benefits, research studies on peer tutoring are still limited, especially in Thailand, meaning it is difficult to gain an affirmation of the positive results suggested in overcoming difficulties faced when speaking English - both in general situations and for speaking performances undertaken in formal English-speaking tests. To fill this gap, the present study aims at investigating how peer tutoring programs could be used in order to improve the speaking ability of low proficiency students and help them gain more confidence in speaking. In addition, the tutees' opinions will also be investigated as evidence to confirm the results of whether the tutees' improvement and opinions after joining the peer tutoring programs are consistent. Therefore, the current study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do high proficiency students tutor low proficiency students in speaking English?
2. To what extent does the peer tutoring help low proficiency students improve their speaking ability?
3. What are the tutees' opinions with regards to a peer tutoring program?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Peer tutoring

The term 'peer tutoring' has been defined and described in various ways among researchers. For instance, Damon and Phelps (1988) define peer tutoring as an approach in which an expert student, who specializes in academic content, guides a novice student. Similarly, Mickelson et al. (2003) also describe peer tutoring as a teaching approach where a stronger student, who takes the role of a tutor, is paired up with a student who needs tutorial help in order to provide academic assistance. In addition, Mastropieri et al. (2006) defines peer tutoring as situations in which students with lower achievement levels are given help from students with higher achievement levels. Peer tutoring is also described by some researchers as a process where a strong student imparts an academic concept or language skill to a weaker student. According to Gearheart et al. (1992), peer tutoring is defined as a process by which either an individual student or a group of students is taught a concept or skill by a pre-trained successful student under the teacher's supervision. To gain a better understanding of the academic concepts through peer tutoring, Kunsch et al. (2007) adds that peer tutoring can be characterized as learning settings where students with mixed language abilities are collaborating with each other.

From an examination of its various definitions, the present study would define the term 'peer tutoring' as a process or a teaching technique that makes high proficiency students and low proficiency students come together as groups in order to interact with each other, assist in academic content, and improve their language abilities and self-confidence. This study would also focus on same-age peer tutoring in which tutors with higher English ability would assist lower proficiency tutees in the same age group.

### Stages of peer tutoring

To conduct peer tutoring effectively, peer tutoring programs require a clear understanding of expectations (O'Shea & O'Shea, 2010) and well-managed procedures which value teaching practice and facilitate the tutor-tutee interaction (Chen & Liu, 2011). In addition, Eggers (1995) noted that peer tutoring programs are conducted successfully if effective lesson plans are carefully organized and the program with specific objectives are well implemented.

Focusing firstly on an effective plan, a peer tutoring program should be clearly separated into stages in order to organize a series of actions conducted in a certain order. Therefore, the Planning, Experimentation and Reflection (PER) model of change by Taylor et al. (2005) is adapted as a framework to establish the experimental procedures of the present study. This model is suitable for the experimental procedures of the study. That is, a peer tutoring program should appropriately be organized where both tutors and tutees are able to realize their roles and responsibility in each stage. The stages of the PER model of change are indicated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

**Stages of PER model of change**

| Stages | Aims |
|---|---|
| Planning | to identify teaching objectives and prepare teaching sessions |
| Experimentation | to implement the plan in the classroom |
| Reflection | to review and evaluate what has been done in the classroom and plan for future teaching opportunities |

For the Planning stage, it is important that people involved in the program are assigned specific roles and responsibilities clearly. A person who is responsible for teaching is expected to set general objectives and prepare his or her teaching sessions including teaching materials, activities and techniques to use with learners in each session. Possible problems and the expectations of the learners also need to be considered with regards to the design of the teaching sessions. For the Experimentation stage, the plan is then implemented in the classroom. The teacher should follow the plan and fulfill the objectives of the sessions. Teaching materials, activities and techniques should also be adopted effectively in class. For the last stage, the Reflection stage, the actions are reviewed and evaluated. The teacher and learners can take turns reviewing the effectiveness and reflect on their experience of each session and consider the possibility of improving any teaching techniques for future sessions.

**Previous research on peer tutoring**

A number of research studies have suggested that a peer tutoring program provides positive impacts on improving the four English language skills. In terms of the positive impact of peer tutoring on improving reading skills, a study where peer tutoring was used to teach reading comprehension was undertaken by Rahmasari (2017). It focused on a peer tutoring program for third grade students of an academic institute in Indonesia. Findings showed that the students' reading comprehension was improved; they also became more motivated, active and self-assured with decreased instructor control.

Peer tutoring also has a positive influence on the students' writing skills as can be seen from the results of a study by Medcalf et al. (2004). The study involved a group of students aged ten to eleven tutoring writing to six-year-old students, aimed at examining the use of a peer tutoring procedure and its potential in responding to specific and differing learning needs and behaviors. It was found that both tutors and tutees made significant progress in their writing rate, accuracy, and general enjoyment of writing.

Wilde et al. (2006) conducted a study with forty-six staff members at The University Speaking Center at the University of North Carolina to investigate how peer tutoring might promote empathetic listening to build long-term relationships between peers - particularly between the center staff and their speaking-clients. The study revealed that using empathetic listening as a peer-to-peer tutoring technique could help develop favorable relationships between the center staff and the speakers and create a positive environment allowing the speakers to express their fears and frustrations regarding oral communication competencies.

A research study of peer tutoring in speaking was conducted by Chiu and Wong (2011) to help secondary students overcome difficulties in oral English and to assess their improvement through Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) at Hon Wah College, Hong Kong which also revealed some benefits of a peer-tutoring program. The study confirmed that both tutors and tutees were able to communicate in English accurately and fluently, and learn new vocabulary and sentence structures in order to boost their confidence and be prepared for effective communication in their examinations, as well as in daily life.

Based on previous research studies, peer tutoring could be used with any language skills and has had a positive impact on developing students' overall language skills. Peer tutoring also enables students to gain more benefits such as improving their understanding of the lesson, gaining self-confidence and communicating in English accurately and fluently. With specific regards to speaking skills, Aktas and Yurt (2016) asserted that peer tutoring is a crucial technique that builds students' self-confidence, develops their basic language skills, and encourages them to interact with each other with greater ease. To help the students share their feelings, thoughts and opinions openly, Temizkan (2009) also asserted that peer tutoring is an appropriate technique for providing suitable speaking tasks and creating a comfortable speaking atmosphere.

**Difficulties in speaking**

Central to this study, speaking is a challenging skill for many students learning English worldwide. EFL students usually have limited opportunities to speak the language outside the classroom (Zhang, 2009). Students can encounter speaking difficulties if they lack grammatical awareness, a well-developed bank of vocabulary, and pronunciation background knowledge. Those can be categorized as linguistic problems. In terms of grammar, students cannot speak English effectively if they do not know the grammatical rules. With regards to vocabulary, some students struggle with using vocabulary in spoken English since they lack sufficient vocabulary to speak and interact with others or do not know how to incorporate their vocabulary knowledge into cohesive sentences in order to successfully communicate their ideas. For pronunciation, it is crucial that students should pronounce words correctly. Students who mispronounce the English words, use the wrong intonation or stress words incorrectly might not be able to express their ideas meaningfully and with clarity.

In addition, Xinghua (2007) stated that psychological stresses can negatively influence the students' emotional and physical health, relationships, work productivity, self-confidence and repeatedly result in students being afraid to speak. Particularly, self-confidence is an issue that strongly impacts students' speaking ability. Students may lack self-confidence for a variety of reasons such as embarrassment over their lack of ability, shyness, unrealistic expectations of reaching perfection, a false sense of humility, fear of change or of making mistakes, underlying depression, among others. Collectively, these deficiencies may impede their chances of enhancing and improving their speaking ability in general and will in turn, influence the way they perform in speaking tests as well.

Based on the broad review of literature regarding peer tutoring utilized for the improvement of English language skills, it can be seen that previous research has been undertaken for a

variety of purposes, among a variety of participants, and conducted under various data collection methods. The current study focuses on speaking and its significant role in both the learning and teaching of the English language. Specifically, the study intends to explore how high proficiency students delivered peer tutoring programs to help improve low proficiency students' speaking ability and build up their confidence in speaking.

## METHODOLOGY

### Setting

The research was conducted at a well-established engineering, science, and technology university in Bangkok, Thailand where all fourth-year students are required to take a computer-based standardized test called 'Test of English for Thai Engineers and Technologist (TETET) in order to measure their English language proficiency before their graduation. According to Jaturapitakkul and Watson Todd (2018), TETET is specifically designed to assess the English proficiency of those who intend to use English related to engineering, science and technology - in workplace contexts. TETET covers four language skills in English: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The test consists of 12 sections with a variety of item test types. In addition, the levels of TETET overall proficiency have been aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2**
**The comparison between TETET levels and CEFR levels**

| TETET Level | CEFR Level |
|---|---|
| 0, 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5 | A1 |
| 3 | A2 |
| 3.5, 4 | B1 |
| 4.5, 5, 5.5 | B2 |
| 6, 6.5, 7 | C1 |

The speaking component of TETET, is comprised of two sections that aim to measure test-takers' speaking proficiency. Table 3 briefly shows the specification of TETET's speaking test.

**Table 3**
**Specification of TETET's speaking test**

| Skill | Section | Item Type |
|---|---|---|
| **Speaking** | 1. Speaking in short question-and-answer format | Short answer (Voice-recording) |
| | 2. Speaking in longer business communication | Leaving a message (Voice-recording) |

Section 1 of the TETET speaking sub-test emphasizes interactive speaking. It is similar to an interview focusing on personal background. The students hear pre-recorded questions from

an interviewer and answer by recording their voice after hearing a computerized beep sound. Section 2 of the TETET speaking sub-test requires the test-taker to produce an extended sample of comprehensible discourse in the manner of leaving a telephone message. The students can make use of information given in the instructions to create the message and record their message after hearing the beep sound.

It should be noted that the test results are used as information in support of job applications in companies in Thailand as well as part of required documentation for applying for graduate level admission at the university where this research study was conducted. So, the researchers assumed that those who took the TETET are highly motivated to perform well in the test.

**Participants**

The present study was conducted among thirteen participants who were fourth year undergraduate students. They comprised students from three different faculties namely; the Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology, the Faculty of Science and the School of Information Technology. All participants were willing to participate in the study on a voluntary basis and were asked to sign research consent forms confirming their participation in the study.

To select the participants for the study using a purposive sampling technique, pre-test scores from the aforementioned TETET ranging from Level 0 (no evidence of English proficiency) to Level 7 (near-native speaker like English proficiency) were utilized as criteria in order to categorize participants into two main groups according to roles as either a tutor or a tutee. As the key participants of this study were science and technology students, TETET is deemed to be valid and can claim to be a suitable test for measuring their English proficiency. Finally, on the basis of TETET scores, the participants were divided into three tutoring groups. Each group consisted of one higher proficiency student acting as a tutor and three or four lower proficiency students acting as tutees.

Based on the pre-test scores, 3 undergraduate students who obtained both overall proficiency and speaking test scores more than or equal to level 5 (out of 7), which is equivalent to B2 CEFR level, were selected to act as tutors. On the other hand, 10 undergraduate students who obtained both overall proficiency and speaking test scores lower than or equal to level 3 (out of 7), which is equivalent to A2 CEFR level, were selected to act as tutees. Finally, the participants were divided into three tutoring groups. Each group consisted of one high proficiency student acting as a tutor and three low proficiency students acting as tutees. However, the second group differed slightly in that it consisted of one tutor and four tutees. Figure 1 further illustrates how the participants were divided into groups.
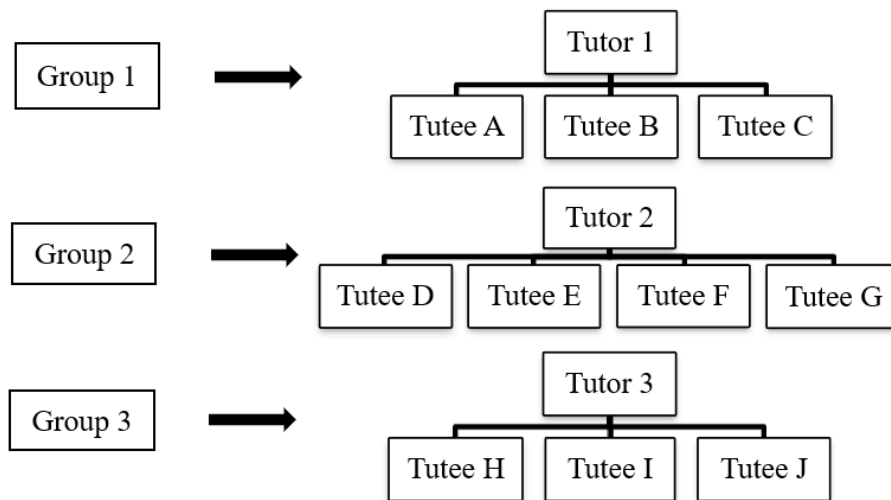
**Figure 1** The structure of the three tutoring groups

**Research instruments**

***Video recordings***

To answer Research Question one, video recordings were used to record each session of three peer-tutoring groups in order to investigate the differences among the groups concerning the content of the lessons, teaching styles and strategies, learning activities, interaction, teaching material and confidence of using language skills. Each video was two hours long. The data derived from the videos was used to triangulate with the data obtained from the semi-structured interview and the record forms.

***Record forms***

The record forms were constructed in order to obtain the tutors' justification and rationale behind the tutoring sessions. The forms included questions about tutor's ideas on teaching objectives, lesson content, teaching techniques and teaching materials. The record forms were produced in Thai in order to enable the tutors to understand and answer the questions easily. It is noted that the record forms were merely used to cross-check with the data obtained from video recordings.

***Speaking scores of TETET***

To answer Research Question two, the speaking test scores for this study were drawn from the speaking section of TETET. The scores were used for two purposes; selecting participants and measuring the improvement of tutees' speaking performance after joining the peer tutoring program. The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores (the same set of test) was used to reveal how much the peer-tutoring program helped the low proficiency students

improve their speaking ability. The length of time between the participant's pre-test and post-test scores was over three months, a commonly stipulated period of time deemed as appropriate between test sittings as noted by Pearson Education (2018). In addition, the tutees were not informed about retaking the same test tasks so as to avoid the issue of potential memorization of test content.

### Interviews

To answer Research Question three, semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from the tutees both before and after the tutoring sessions. Prior to the tutoring sessions, a preliminary interview for each group of tutees was conducted in order to have them share their opinions about their speaking difficulties and to add more comments and requests concerning the upcoming tutoring sessions as a planning stage for the tutoring sessions. The group interviews were conducted in Thai in order to facilitate ease of understanding and to ensure the questions were clearly answered.

After the tutoring sessions, semi-structured interviews were conducted among the tutees by way of follow-up, for the purpose of collecting their opinions about the tutors' pedagogical approaches that might have influenced their speaking performance while taking the post-test and to provide feedback on the overall peer-tutoring program. With the post-test scores taken into consideration, guided questions were prepared based on the scores and whether they were higher or lower after the tutees participated in the program. All the questions were validated by an expert in English Language Teaching (ELT) and an experienced teacher in translation. The semi-structured interviews were also conducted in Thai for the same reasons of clarity and accuracy as for the group interviews.

### Procedures

Due to practicality issue, this experiment was conducted over a period of 12 weeks. By adapting the Planning, Experimentation and Reflection (PER) model of change by Taylor et al. (2005), the experimental procedures of the present study were divided into three stages; planning, experimentation and reflection.

For the planning stage in the first eight weeks, pre-test scores were collected and were used to categorize the participants into two main roles for the present study: that of a tutor and a tutee. Then, the researcher prepared a consent form for the participants to sign and conducted a set of guiding questions for a preliminary interview. After that, one of the researchers conducted the preliminary interview with the ten tutees in order to investigate the difficulties they experienced when speaking in general situations and while taking TETET and their expectations of participation in the peer-tutoring program. These sets of data were then summarized and sent to the tutors in order to assist them in preparing their tutoring sessions. In terms of the tutor's preparation, each tutor was asked to be responsible for initiating teaching material, techniques, and activities to help improve the tutees' speaking ability and to boost their confidence in speaking. Before conducting their tutoring sessions, the tutors were also asked to submit their own lesson plan as well as their teaching material to the researchers before implementing peer-tutoring sessions.

In the experimentation stage from Week 8 to 9, the three tutors conducted two tutoring sessions for two hours each separately. The first and the second sessions occurred only two to three days apart. All sessions were video recorded for the researchers to investigate the differences between each tutoring group in relation to the content of the lessons, teaching styles and strategies, learning activities, interactional models, teaching materials and observed confidence tutees had with using language skills from their gestures, facial expression, and the number of interactions with a tutor and among themselves. One of the researchers took on merely the role of an observer without interfering with the tutors or providing additional assistance or commentary.

In the reflection stage from Week 10 to 12, each tutor was asked to complete a given form within two days after the second session was done and provide their comments concerning their teaching in the two tutoring sessions. Conversely, the tutees were asked to review what they had learned from two tutoring sessions and prepare themselves for the TETET post-test sitting. After one-week of the peer tutoring sessions, the tutees were asked to take the speaking part of TETET again. Then the scores were collected and compared the tutees' pre-test scores to their post-test scores. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to follow-up on the tutees' opinions about techniques and strategies they had used while taking the post-test and to provide feedback for the peer-tutoring program. The duration of the interviews varied from ten minutes to more than twenty minutes, depending on the length of their comments.

**Data analysis**

The data from the video recordings and the record forms regarding the tutors' preparation and conduct of their tutoring sessions were analyzed and coded into themes based on the aspects of organization noted by Topping (2001) namely; teaching objectives, classroom activities, teaching materials, and teaching techniques. Then, the data derived from the video recordings and the record forms were cross-checked by an expert in ELT with over 23 years of teaching experience. The cross-check process was done by both the researcher and the expert sitting together, sharing ideas and arguing on the point that they disagree with until mutual agreement was reached. The present study incorporated these aspects for the purpose of examining similarities and differences in how the tutors designed and conducted their peer tutoring sessions and to explore differences between each of the tutors' characteristics.

Speaking scores from TETET, gathered from before and after the current study were used to examine whether and to what extent the peer-tutoring program assisted the low proficiency students to improve their speaking ability. To analyze the data, the tutees' pre-test raw scores were calculated and then compared to the post-test scores to indicate their improvement in percentage form as the data set was relatively small.

For the interviews, they were recorded, transcribed, and then translated from Thai to English. After that, all data was analyzed and interpreted. Then, the data set was validated by the same expert who did the analysis on the video recordings and the record forms, and an experienced teacher in translation to cross-check the correctness of the coding and the interview questions. Additionally, the data derived from the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews regarding

the tutees' opinions and feedback after joining the peer tutoring program and after taking the post-test were collected through the semi-structured interviews and was analyzed using salient themes.


## RESULTS

To answer the three research questions, findings are allocated into three categories: procedures of the peer tutoring program, the tutees' speaking test scores, and the tutees' opinions towards the peer tutoring program.

### Procedures of the peer tutoring program

The description of three tutoring groups was summarized from the video recordings and the tutors' record forms. The teaching objectives, classroom activities, teaching materials, and teaching techniques were covered based on Topping (2001).

With regard to teaching objectives, it can be seen that all three tutoring groups took tutees' needs and comments from the group interviews into consideration for setting their teaching objectives and designing the two lessons. All tutors focused on improving their tutees' speaking ability through the provision of opportunities for the tutees to practice speaking in class, and the provision of tutor feedback for the tutees' errors and the suggestions as to possible English usages and samples of discourse suited to various different real-life scenarios. The evidence from all three tutors' record forms can be shown from the following extracts:

> *I think the tutees need to practice speaking more often. If I would like them to speak better but I let them practice writing or listening, it does not help them to speak better.*
>
> Tutor 1

> *I think some students normally feel not comfortable when studying in classroom because there are too many people. I think the students need private zone to talk with their teacher. So, I tried to make them speak to each other because I think they don't have many chances to speak in English.*
>
> Tutor 3

Apart from giving the tutees more chances to speak English in class, the tutors also directed their tutees to practice answering questions that might be encountered when taking any standardized speaking test as shown in the following extract:

> *"Since the time is limited for only 2 classes (2 hours each), I think that won't be enough to teach how to get better in English speaking. So, I have to focus the lesson on what are really relevant to this TETET exam to prepare learners to know and get ready what they are going to face in the exam."*
>
> Tutor 2

For classroom activities, the tutors led the activities in the first session with the objective to allow tutees to get to know each other and to provide chances to practice speaking mainly in situations of general everyday English use. For example, a Q&A or Introduction activity was utilized to allow tutees to share personal information, as an ice-breaker intended to create a positive learning atmosphere along with reviewing the structure of the TETET speaking sub-test. In the second session, tutors for all groups adapted their activities to be more suited to the tutees' needs so that most activities were designed to prepare the tutees for taking the test in terms of how to form sentences using tenses suited to various scenarios and providing specific techniques to assist with preparation of appropriate test responses. This included a role-play activity for practicing speaking and getting tutors' feedback and suggestions to improve the tutees' speaking skills.

In terms of teaching materials, all three tutors made use of the material they had already planned for their tutees, in addition to supporting content in the form of supplementary teaching materials delivered via PowerPoint, as well as handouts, and videos made from adapting ready-made content from online sources. All tutors also utilized PowerPoint slides and video clips to facilitate lessons as well as to display answer keys or examples of useful vocabulary and expressions when speaking in English. In addition, Tutor 1 used a video clip on the YouTube website and his own recordings to provide tutees with opportunities for pronunciation practice and to encourage them to pronounce English words correctly.

Lastly, regarding teaching techniques, all three tutors similarly focused on eliciting ideas from their tutees and providing practice tasks involving asking and answering questions. The tutors also asked concept-checking questions related to the lesson and monitored the tutees while they were preparing their answers in order to check the tutees' understanding. Particular attention was paid to correcting tutees' language errors while they were practicing speaking with the tutors as well as when practising among their peer groups. The following extracts from the record form help support the above finding.

> *I gave learners a suggestion how they can improve their answer such as correcting a sentence structure, adding more details to their answer and providing them some useful expressions and frequently used words. I aimed that my tutees can apply these to create an answer for other questions in the other context as well.*
>
> Tutor 2

> *I let them talk by themselves and then checked the accuracy of what they said.*
>
> Tutor 3

This, along with providing feedback after the tutees answered the questions in class, or in instances when they were unable to answer questions effectively, tutors demonstrated the correct use of grammar, and how to apply appropriate words at the sentence level. Moreover, one of the tutors attempted to make his tutees feel more relaxed when they were participating in the activities. To reduce his tutees' anxiety, the tutor also expressed willingness to teach his tutees in the manner of a friend teaching another friend in class, as shown in the following extract:

*I encouraged the tutees to talk more in class and provided activities that make them feel not bored or not stressed when speaking.*

<div align="right">Tutor 1</div>

The procedures of all three tutoring groups can be summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4**
**The summary of procedures of the peer-tutoring program**

| Aspects | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching objective | - To help the tutees speak English more fluently and naturally without first thinking of Thai words and then translating them into English.<br>- To provide tutees chances to practice speaking in his sessions for real-life situations more often. | To help tutees understand more about the speaking test and how to apply the lesson learned in real-life situations plus any standardized speaking tests | To discuss about the tutees' speaking problem and provide more chances for the tutees to speak in class as well as adding some techniques to better speak in real situations and to take any English-speaking test. |
| Classroom activities | **First Session**<br>Activity 1: Q&A<br>Activity 2: Movie Guessing Game<br>Activity 3: Pronouncing Words<br>Activity 4: Q&A (Past Simple Tense)<br>**Second Session**<br>Activity 1: Desert Island Game<br>Activity 2: Q&A (Present Perfect Tense)<br>Activity 3: Ordering a Product<br>Activity 4: Running Dictation | **First Session**<br>Activity 1: Introduction<br>Activity 2: FAQ Questions Set<br>Activity 3: Chatterbox Game<br>Activity 4: Q&A / Retrospective<br>**Second Session**<br>Activity 1: Review the Last Lesson<br>Activity 2: Business Communication<br>Activity 3: Speaking Workshop<br>Activity 4: Pictionary | **First Session**<br>Activity 1: Warm Up<br>Activity 2: Q&A – Problems<br>Activity 3: Giving Techniques<br>Activity 4: Listening<br>Activity 5: A Guessing Game<br>Activity 6: Telling Stories<br>Activity 7: Tutees' Feedbacks<br>Activity 8: A Guessing Game (an extra activity)<br>**Second Session**<br>Activity 1: Guess What It Is?<br>Activity 2: Situations<br>Activity 3: Role Play |
| Teaching material | - A video clip on the YouTube website<br>- The PowerPoint slides<br>- Small word cards<br>- The tutor's video recordings | - The PowerPoint slides<br>- A copy of handout containing the same content as the slide without any answer keys provided | The PowerPoint slides |
| Teaching techniques | - Took part in all activities together with his tutees and always spoke in English when doing the tasks<br>- Acted as another tutee while doing pair work, asked questions, and encourage the tutees to participate in friendly atmosphere.<br>- Asked some questions to each tutee directly to check their background knowledge of English vocabulary and their understanding of the lesson learned.<br>- Provided feedback and sentence correction to the tutees ensuring that ideas were shared throughout the session. | - The interactions between the tutor and his tutees occurred frequently together with giving feedback and providing suggestions.<br>- Asked the tutees concept checking questions and often approached each tutee individually to close attention their ideas and answers<br>- Demonstrated the correct use of grammar, and how to apply appropriate words at the sentence level.<br>- Expressed willingness to teach his tutees in the manner of a friend teaching another friend in class. | - Took a leading role in guiding his tutees throughout the discussions.<br>- Started with an explanation of the instruction for the activities suggested techniques, and translated words or sentences form English into Thai.<br>- Provided the tutees chances to ask for some suggestions while doing the activities.<br>- Mainly checked the appropriateness and correctness of vocabulary choices made when the tutees were attempting to answer the questions. |

### The tutees' speaking scores

The speaking test scores of the tutees' pre-test and post-test were compared to examine their improvement after joining the peer tutoring program. Based on the comparison, it can be seen that most tutees' scores in the speaking test increased after joining the program. This is in line with the tutees' opinions about the peer tutoring program and the way it improved their speaking confidence and fluency. In particular, the tutees in the second group showed a marked increase in their scores compared with those from the other two groups. Table 5 shows the percentage increase in the tutees' improvement after joining the peer-tutoring program.

**Table 5**

**The comparison of the tutees' TETET scores**

| Participant | Pre-test | | | | Post-test | | | | Improvement Percentage | Average Improvement Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Section 1 | Section 2 | Percentage | Level | Section 1 | Section 2 | Percentage | Level | | |
| A | 6 | 0 | 18.75 % | 1 | 11 | 0 | 34.38 % | 2 | 15.63 % | 9.38 % |
| B | 12 | 0 | 37.50 % | 2 | 10 | 0 | 31.25 % | 2 | -6.25 % | |
| C | 8 | 2 | 31.25 % | 2 | 11 | 5 | 50 % | 3 | 18.75 % | |
| D | 5 | 0 | 15.63 % | 1 | 8 | 6 | 43.75 % | 3 | 28.12 % | 26.56 % |
| E | 5 | 0 | 15.63 % | 1 | 9 | 10 | 59.38 % | 4 | 43.75 % | |
| F | 13 | 5 | 56.25 % | 3 | 14 | 12 | 81.25 % | 5 | 25.00 % | |
| G | 7 | 0 | 21.88 % | 1 | 8 | 2 | 31.25 % | 2 | 9.37 % | |
| H | 0 | 0 | 0 % | 0 | 7 | 0 | 21.88 % | 1 | 21.88 % | 10.33 % |
| I | 16 | 2 | 56.25 % | 3 | 14 | 6 | 62.50 % | 4 | 5.98 % | |
| J | 8 | 0 | 25.00 % | 1 | 8 | 1 | 28.13 % | 2 | 3.13 % | |

**Tutees' opinion towards the peer tutoring program**

This section reports on the tutees' views on how the peer-tutoring program may have helped improve their speaking ability and their speaking confidence. Most tutees thought they were better prepared to take the post-test and felt more confident in speaking after the tutoring sessions. The following data from the semi-structured interviews provide insight into the tutees' opinions towards various tutors' pedagogical approaches and other comments:

**Pedagogical approaches**

***Giving suggestions and examples***

The tutees mentioned that the tutors used techniques designed to model and practice producing accurate sentence structures when answering questions, both in everyday contexts and in taking any standardized speaking tests. The tutors also encouraged the tutees to practice making grammatically correct full sentences and using appropriate vocabulary suitable for different communicative settings. This is a supporting extract.

> *When I understood a question but I didn't know how to answer the question in English, I would ask him (Tutor 2). Then, he would suggest me how to make a complete sentence, add more words or change some words in a sentence.*

> Tutee G

Moreover, it was noted that the tutors helped the tutees to correct their errors and gave useful explanations when the tutees did not appear to understand the lesson learned in class or could not speak with any fluency or confidence. The tutors also gave positive support and demonstrated correct models to the tutees. The evidence can be illustrated as follows:

> *When I couldn't speak clearly, he would say "one more time". Or if I couldn't really speak, he (Tutor 1) would then show me the vocabulary and asked me to listen to its correct pronunciation.*

> Tutee C

### Providing room for practice

All the tutees confirmed that the tutors gave them a lot of opportunities to practice speaking. Additionally, the tutors also encouraged sentence production and demonstrated models and techniques by which the tutees could answer questions using full sentences. As a result, the tutees felt that they liked the sessions and were confident to practice speaking English inside and outside classroom settings. This can be illustrated as follows:

> *He (Tutor 1) tried to ask me to speak more with him and speak less in Thai. But he used either English or Thai for giving explanation. Mostly, he asked me to speak English more in class.*
>
> Tutee A

> *He (Tutor 2) tried to train me to speak out. Whether the answers were correct or wrong, this made me dare to speak.*
>
> Tutee E

He (Tutor 3) asked us to practice making a sentence and then speak out. I had to see a picture and tried to describe it in English. It is like I had to try thinking about words to be able to make a sentence. This helps me to be confident to speak English more often.
Tutee J

### Utilizing useful activities

The tutees reported getting benefits from doing the activities facilitated by the tutors. The tutees stated that the activities which allowed them to practice answering general questions and to get tutor feedback could help them improve their speaking ability and confidently answer questions using extended sentences. This can be illustrated as follows:

> *It is an activity (FAQ Question Set) that he (Tutor 2) asked me to answer general questions. I like the way that he used this activity as a way to help me correct the sentences when I couldn't answer. He also added more answers that I thought it might be appropriate to answer a question.*
>
> Tutee F

> *There is a role-play to organize a party. That one is helpful. It helps us to dare to speak more. It helps us to be able to make a sentence.*
>
> Tutee I

### Using teaching tools and online resources

The tutees considered that the PowerPoint slides together with handouts were useful materials that enabled them to clearly follow the lessons with the tutor in class, as well as by themselves after the class. The slides were also seen as an indicator of how well the tutor had prepared the lessons. Additionally, the tutees provided comments that they could make use of the video

clips from the YouTube website to practice listening and speaking in their own time. The tutor's video blogs were reported as being helpful in suggesting what strategies high proficiency students normally employ to improve their speaking ability. The supporting evidence is presented below.

> *It would be his PowerPoint slides because it shows that he (Tutor 2) prepared well to be ready to teach. In the slides, he had some suggested techniques. In the second time, he reviewed the last lesson as well.*
>
> Tutee D

> *I think it would be the video clips from the YouTube site because I could watch and practice from the clips anytime. I could access the clips easily.*
>
> Tutee A

### Learning with a peer in a friendly atmosphere

Finally, most tutees expressed the view that they preferred to learn with a person whose age was the same as theirs and with whom they felt comfortable to study with. The tutees expanded on their positive perceptions about learning with a peer of the same age group by reporting that they experienced reduced anxiety when studying in a friendly atmosphere and did not feel reluctant to ask for advice from such a person. The tutees were willing to speak more openly in class as well when the tutor shared the same age; as seen in the following extract.

> *I think learning with a friend is OK. It is sometimes better. If I study with a teacher, there might be a wall between the teacher and I. Suppose a teacher did activities like the tutor, I couldn't speak because I would be nervous. But if the tutor teaches me, it is like we are friends and can help each other.*
>
> Tutee G

However, a few tutees still believed that they could gain more insight or receive useful techniques from a teacher or a person who is older, in light of the older teacher's ability to recognize the tutees' strengths and weaknesses in language proficiency and to teach more specific content that the tutees can apply when taking the test. The following extract illustrates this idea.

> *A teacher or a person who is older than me has some techniques to help us to be able to take the test. This can help us to be able to apply. They (a teacher or an older person) will know what should be taught. They will know which parts we often do wrongly so that they will know what should be taught to us. Also, they might be able to teach more specifically.*
>
> Tutee I

### Other comments

Apart from opinions on tutors' pedagogical approaches, other comments about the peer tutoring program were also reported. These included tutees' gaining more confidence in speaking, difficulties in speaking, and the inadequate duration of the program.

### Confidence in speaking

Most tutees noted that they had gained more confidence in speaking after attending the tutoring program. The tutees revealed that their tutor was able to encourage them to have more confidence to speak fluently in order to answer the questions in the test. The tutoring program also allowed chances for them to practice speaking with their tutor and friends in class. Below are some supporting extracts:

*I gain more confidence. I could speak more than the first time. I also practiced more speaking. After I got familiar with the tutor (Tutor 2), I feel I could practice speaking and could speak more fluently.*

Tutee F

*I think that I gain more confidence. It might be because there were a few people so that I dare to speak.*

Tutee I

### Difficulties in speaking

On the other hand, some tutees stated that they still had some difficulties when speaking in English including, for example, an inability to apply correct grammatical structures and recall vocabulary items. Although the tutors provided a considerable amount of vocabulary input during the tutoring sessions, the tutees reflected that they may have difficulty recalling vocabulary when used in other general contexts. The following excerpt illustrates some of those difficulties.

*Certainly, I still have some difficulties like grammar and I still cannot use every word or every sentence correctly. As my friend said, a difficulty which is about vocabulary, I still cannot recall some vocabulary.*

Tutee C

### Duration of the program

All of the tutees gave the same opinion that the duration of the classes provided for them was too limited to allow them to fully address their speaking difficulties. The tutees suggested that for the overall tutoring program, three sessions of two hours duration would not only be better for the program but the tutees could also benefit from a third session. Therefore, they would have more time to learn and practice speaking in class.

## DISCUSSION

The present study results are in line with previous research that has explored peer tutoring in improving the tutees' language ability borne out of higher scores attained among tutees. Aktas and Yurt (2016) found the success, perception of speech self-efficacy and speaking skills of

students attending the Effective and Good Speech Course all had better outcomes and led to positive attitudes towards a peer tutoring approach. Chiu and Wong (2011) also found that peer tutoring help students overcome many difficulties in speaking. Tutees in their study were able to communicate in English more accurately and fluently, and were considerably more aware of new vocabulary and expanded sentence structures. Moreover, Clarkson and Luca (2002) also found that peer tutoring helps both tutors and tutees learn the content and develop better communication and interpersonal skills.

With regards to the results of the present study, it is interesting to further consider how the high proficiency students, acting as tutors, designed and conducted the tutoring sessions for their lower proficiency peers. Therefore, the discussion will highlight significant pedagogical features in conducting peer tutoring sessions, as well as characteristics of a good tutor that make peer tutoring programs successful in improving the tutees' speaking ability and building up their confidence in speaking.

The first feature which makes peer tutoring programs successful is designing lessons related to the tutees' needs. The tutors devoted a lot of attention to the preliminary interview data regarding the tutees' difficulties in speaking English and their expectations prior to their participation in the peer tutoring program. All three tutees' teaching objectives reflect the tutees' needs in that both sessions were aimed to provide chances for speaking practice for the tutees' real-life situations (Group 1), to understand more about the standardized speaking tests (Group 2), and to add some techniques to better speak in real-situations and to take any English-speaking test (Group 3). Consequently, the tutees reflected that those two sessions met their needs as they could take the test with greater confidence and could apply the language knowledge and skills learnt in future situations. Therefore, the teacher should actively prepare lessons and the curriculum in order to satisfy the students' needs as suggested by Ponniah et al. 2019. In addition, Nunan (1988) suggested that courses or lessons which are relevant to the learners' needs can produce more productive and meaningful learning experiences. Riddell (1991) also emphasizes the benefit of consideration of the learner's needs in that designing lesson and materials based on the expectations of the learners increases the learners' interest and motivation while they are learning in class.

Another feature is to design classroom activities to provide tutees' chances to practice speaking. Most activities developed by the three tutors such as Ordering a Product (Group 1), Speaking Workshop (Group 2) or Role Play (Group 3) were thoroughly prepared and designed to provide the tutees with opportunities to practice their communication skills by adding lesson content related to their real-life communications and applicable to standardized speaking tests. The tutees could gain significant benefits through having sufficient opportunities to speak. This is supported by Richards and Renandya (2003) who assert that giving language learners plenty of exposure to real-world situations where they can use the language might encourage them to speak. Achmad and Yusuf (2014) also suggested that teachers should design communicative and engaging speaking activities in speaking classes that provide learners opportunity to practice the target language. By having more exposure to the target language as well as providing a variety of situations and frequent speaking tasks, improvement of students' speaking ability is maximised (Tam, 1997).

The third feature is elicitation as part of the teaching techniques used. The tutors tried to encourage the tutees to engage with the class by eliciting the tutees' prior language knowledge and ideas relevant to the lesson. For example, Tutor 1 used this technique by asking the tutees some questions directly to check their background knowledge of English vocabulary and their understanding of the lesson learned. Whether their ideas or answers were correct or not, the tutor then either showed examples of good responses with explanations or encouraged the tutees to notice and correct any errors by themselves which is in line with a study by Ou et al. (2019). Furthermore, elicitation also allows the tutor to hear and evaluate the students' speaking ability before conducting classroom activities so that the tutor can recognize a weaker student and provide more assistance. Similarly, elicitation enables the tutees to engage with the lesson more deeply and build up their participation in the speaking activities. Nathan and Kim (2007) support the notion that elicitation benefits the tutor by allowing the gathering of students' background knowledge and having the tutees participate more in class as well as enabling them to monitor their own improvement.

Another feature is positive feedback. The benefits of positive feedback also included - for the low proficiency students - immediately observable improvement in their speaking ability, a helpful tool for overcoming difficulties in speaking, and opportunities for gaining confidence and fluency in speaking. An example of positive feedback can be seen from Tutor 2 that the interactions occurred frequently together with giving feedback and providing suggestions. Wang (2015) stated the benefits of giving feedback for both teachers and learners are that it can importantly improve their performance as well as allow students to recognize their own potential weaknesses which might need to be improved in the future on the basis of the feedback. Similarly, Fiorella and Mayer (2018) mentioned that practice without feedback does not aid learning. Moreover, this feature contributed considerably to establishing a successful tutoring session. In terms of the tutor, the tutees' opinions on their lessons in general and their teaching techniques more specifically would be beneficial for tutors in helping formulate and prepare future lessons and teaching materials matched more directly to the tutee's expectations. Supported by Udvari-Solner et al. (2005), teaching lesson content and providing feedback related to the students' real-life experiences enable the learners to be strongly engaged and involved in the classroom.

Apart from the aforementioned key features, characteristics of a good tutor should also be considered when recruiting or selecting high proficiency students to act as tutors. In addition to higher level English proficiency, the following characteristics will enhance the tutor in designing and conducting peer tutoring sessions for lower proficiency peers more successfully.

Firstly, the most important characteristic of a good tutor is having a good understanding of the subject matter. Since one function of a tutor is to act as the content provider in the classroom, the tutor must be knowledgeable and confident in their knowledge of the subject. Buchmann (1984) pointed out that having sufficient subject knowledge enables the preparation of effective lesson plans as well as the design of lesson activities, tasks and materials that are appropriate to the students' proficiency levels. This will include knowing where to start, being able to pace the work correctly, always checking that the tutee understands, being interactive, and simplifying difficult topics if needed.

Another good characteristic of a tutor is being friendly and easy to approach. The tutees viewed this as important and expected their tutor whose age is the same to be friendly while they were learning in the tutoring sessions. In turns, the tutors demonstrated friendliness through approaching each tutee individually and patiently imparting useful information along with giving feedback when the tutees' language mistakes were observed. This characteristic of rapport as a friend enables the tutees to feel comfortable in learning and practicing speaking with their tutor. Supported by Beasley (1997), this teaching approach allows both tutors and tutees to utilize their friendship, resulting in a reduction of learning anxiety or fear of making mistakes among tutees during the sessions. Additionally, a friendly atmosphere that is created in class positively plays a significant role in making the peer tutoring program successful. Data derived from semi-structured interviews, also suggests that most tutees preferred to learn with a person of the same age with whom they are comfortable to study, again, for the reason that students enjoy studying in a friendly atmosphere. The tutees did not have to be concerned about making mistakes or to be afraid of asking for more suggestions from such a person. This phenomenon seems to concur with what Outhred and Chester (2010) asserted that in situations where tutees are the same age as their tutor can have positive relationships in a way that students interacting with older teachers perhaps cannot.

Flexibility is another characteristic of a good tutor. A tutor should be flexible in terms of modifying lessons, teaching techniques and roles. Hoover and Patton (2004) suggested that a tutor should teach flexibly and find alternative ways to adapt lesson content, teaching techniques and roles to reach and maintain appropriate tutoring session for all tutors. In addition, the tutor should be able to adapt roles for different settings in order to enhance the tutees' learning opportunities. Archana and Rani (2017) support the notion that it is not just enough to merely teach the lessons, but it is also important to perform other roles to deal with the students' learning needs such as being a partner, a facilitator, a mentor or an assessor.

**PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Regardless of the extent of improved scores, it can be suggested that learning from peers can possibly be adopted more broadly as another alternative approach to language learning and language teaching. Therefore, a strong case emerges for the consideration of the promotion of peer tutoring both in classroom contexts and collaborative activities outside the classroom to help improve low proficiency students' speaking ability as well as their confidence in speaking.

In terms of classroom activities, a school or an English teacher can incorporate peer tutoring into the lessons by, for instance, giving opportunities for a high proficiency student to be responsible for some activities in front of the class, together with giving advice and monitoring their teaching performance in the classroom. A high proficiency student can also be assigned to take charge of leading lessons, giving examples, or being a good model in terms of speaking English accurately and fluently as an example to others. These enable both high and low proficiency students to improve their speaking ability and gain more confidence in speaking. In addition, apart from classes being conducted by experienced English language teachers, they can make use of the peer tutoring approach to support their own classes through extra-

curricular activities, helping a student tutor to define clear objectives and giving advice on how classes should be conducted via the use of various types of classroom activities.

Furthermore, Zhang (2009) asserts that students who study English as a foreign language (EFL) usually have limited opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. Therefore, the peer tutoring approach can also be implemented to expand the students' opportunities to practice speaking in an environment outside the classroom comfortably. To apply a peer tutoring approach, a school or an English teacher may organize an education zone or a learning resource center as a learning space where low proficiency students are welcome to be exposed to academic content knowledge and practice communication skills as well as to gain more confidence in speaking in a comfortable environment with a friendly partner. To facilitate the students, an English teacher or other staff members can take part in recruiting high proficiency students who are willing to be peer tutors and invite low proficiency students who require more assistance and need positive encouragement to motivate their learning, to participate in the same setting. The learning space may offer ready-made games, speaking tasks, or stock collaborative activities for the students to make their own learning choices. Then the tutor can act in different roles such as a partner, a facilitator or a peer advisor to provide the tutees with assistance to achieve goals. As a result, the low-level students can build good relationships with their partner tutors as well as become more proficient and active learners.

To conduct a successful peer tutoring program, Goodlad (1999) and Topping (2001) also recommended that a student tutor should be trained before conducting their own tutoring sessions in fundamental teaching skills and techniques, the application of teaching materials and media, and in classroom management. Therefore, providing a train-the-trainer training course or workshop is strongly desirable. An English teacher is advised to train a student tutor to be able to clearly define the aims of the tutoring program by writing a statement of intent which shows 'who is teaching what to whom and for what purpose'. Also, a student tutor should be able to structure the content to allow for maximum participation and reinforcement, create their own teaching materials and design various types of tasks in order to meet the tutees' expectations and improve the tutees' speaking ability successfully.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Due to limited time allocation, this study included only two tutoring sessions, with a duration of only two hours for each. More sessions should be included to expand future studies in order to provide more adequate practice for tutees and more insightful data. In addition, the availability of the participants needs to be carefully considered since the time allocated to conduct the study could only be conducted outside regular study hours. Therefore, future studies will need to be designed carefully to ensure that all participants have enough time to participate and practice in the study throughout all of its stages. More insightful data on the process of tutors from planning, experimentation and reflection can be investigated as well. Moreover, a longitudinal study of tutees after the peer tutoring sessions is also recommended.

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