

PEER-TO-PEER TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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The roots of peer support go back to the time when there appeared public schools. It was a teacher's instrument in helping pupils of lower capacities understand solution to a certain type of mathematical problems or write dictations by nominating well coping peers to provide assistance to them without hindering the lesson pacing. With the contours of this process changing over time due to new approaches in teaching and technological advancements, its essence has remained unchangeable nonetheless – sharing knowledge and experience.

Implementation of student-centred practices in higher education is recognized as an efficient mechanism for acquiring knowledge and skills. Instead of passively receiving knowledge from their teachers, students should be actively involved in their learning at the lessons or lectures, as well as in their independent work. Peer teaching as a promising method paves way for a variety of patterns which are presented in scientific publications vastly enough. Covering different spheres of knowledge transfer, among which medicine, businesses, science and more, researchers pay sufficient attention to the issues of utilizing students' strength in the education sphere, with the peer-to-peer teaching and learning method being no exception. The participating students are primarily divided into learning students who act as they usually do at the lessons and teaching students or tutors who take on the role of their teachers.

Researches and publications on peer-to-peer teaching at higher education institutions have been on an upward trajectory for a couple of decades by now (Gal, A., Fallik, O., 2021, Tullis, J., Goldstone, R., 2020). Developed in different setting and formats, peer teaching refers mostly to the science field; its pertinence to teaching English for Special Purposes, including Maritime English, hasn't been adequately mapped out. A limited number of articles on peer teaching at the lessons of English can be found for getting familiarized with the available experience.

A collaborative peer teaching experiment, opted for a small group of English language students in a single writing class, involved three to four students working together to deliver a twenty-minute lesson on an essay topic for their peers. At their lesson, peer tutors had to provide the contextual knowledge and language necessary to respond to the selected essay task. Furthermore, the peer tutors were encouraged to incorporate activities that would stimulate discussion in the class and address any questions or uncertainties raised by peer learners. As the author concludes "peer teaching has a positive impact, particularly in terms of enhancing communication skills, improving understanding of content, providing opportunities to use technology, and motivating further learning", though "self- and peer-critique mechanisms to be introduced for enabling students to reflect and grow as peer teachers". (Shaikh, S., 2024).

Another research was aimed at examining the effectiveness of reciprocal peer teaching in a fifty-minute lesson of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to twenty one undergraduate students, with a collaborative planning and preparation session for the student tutors. The retention quiz results, obtained two weeks later, showed that the retention rate of student tutors was strikingly higher than those either taught by their peers or by the teacher. The final conclusion pertained to the necessity of carrying out a further research on how to better equip student tutors both on their knowledge of the subject materials and teaching skills so as to enhance confidence and ensure the teaching quality of reciprocal peer teaching (Zhang, J., 2024).

A qualitative research was focused on recollection of the perceptions of the peer teaching strategy by the participants in the English major (the English teacher, peer teachers and peer learners) at a public university. Though positive about their new experience, peer teachers had to overcome some barriers, such as feeling afraid, worried, or nervous. The short-term project led to the conclusion that students need to be trained in this methodology: how to manage the class, how

to assess, what materials to bring to class, etc. Furthermore, peer-teaching needs continuous monitoring and oversight by the main tutor or teacher in charge of the implementation of the strategy (2023).

In the article on peer teaching in the second language acquisition (Ardin, H., Nurwahida, N., Rahmiati and Anugrah, W., 2024), this method is characterized as the one that promotes collaboration, communication, and reflective learning among students, offering leadership opportunities despite initial concerns about peer teachers' expertise and authority. The study elaborates on the key aspects of peer teaching, including structured training provided to student tutors, clear definitions of roles, and continuous evaluation to optimize learning outcomes.

A study aimed to explore English language learners' attitudes towards peer teaching reveals positive evaluation by most students and is perceived as an effective teaching method (Lim, L.L., 2014). The statements with the highest levels of agreement are related to a better understanding of the content taught and a chance to use educational technology.

The paper is aimed at outlining some key points of developing peer-to-peer teaching and learning environment with Maritime English undergraduates.

Teaching and learning fully online requires organizing the interaction of students as functional responsibilities when they feel dependence on each other, support for each other, and the possibility to have the impact on the content studied. This approach is most effective with undergraduates as they have had their shipboard practice and studied various professional subjects. The instructor's role tends to be that of a consultant, counsellor, and assistant for students whenever they need help.

The peer-to-peer teaching and learning environment is created owing to the roles initially suggested to the student group, discussed and approved by them to be later delegated to certain students before any further lesson. The specific roles performed by periodically substituting students may fall into the following categories: manager, instructor, facilitator of discussions, grammar expert, content supplier and any other on demand. At well-structured lessons within an electronic student book, systematically divided into modules, lessons, and activities or exercises as in our case, and available to students at any time, peer teaching may be organized at any lesson stage with the roles specified in advance. This pattern of interactivity makes students more accountable for achieving learning outcomes by learning from one another, sharing their knowledge, skills, and experiences.

The **manager** deals with miscellaneous organizational issues that come regularly or unexpectedly, those of organizing, directing, and controlling. The role may be granted to a certain student by group decision or voting. The manager's responsibilities as the group leader may include monitoring the students' attendance and involvement into interactive communication, providing feedback on their performance, assisting the students or the teacher with emailing supplementary materials to the group and the like.

The **instructor**, who actually replaces the teacher at a certain stage/stages of a lesson, should be well familiarized with the topic either by having relevant experience or by self-learning it. In turn, each student becomes an expert on a certain piece of content and then works on that part with the peers. This may be done in various combinations of students, from pair or small group activities in Zoom break rooms to the whole group work. Students as teachers may take responsibility for an activity, a few exercises, a video analysis and so forth depending on the material to be learnt and the teacher's preliminary consent. Instructors have the right to organize the teaching and learning process in their own way after negotiating with the teacher.

The **facilitator** of discussions should encourage broad participation, keep the conversation on track, manage time effectively, and promote respectful discussion. This role is a particularly good match for analyzing cases, maritime accident reports or a set of questions on a certain topic where a variety of options is possible. Regarding a lesson long case study, several students can come up as facilitators of separate issues as it regularly happens in our practice. Those subsequent

issues are critical understanding of facts / determining the chain of misdoings; identifying the crewmembers' plausible goals for having taken the actions that led to the accident/casualty; conducting analysis based on theoretical readings; stating the basic problem in the crew management; analyzing case data; generating and evaluating appropriate alternatives for the crew actions described; developing a correct action plan. Detailed discussions lead students to deeper understanding of the accident root causes as well as to profound conclusions to be then compared with those delivered by maritime accident investigators.

The **grammar consultant** may work with the group on presentation of new grammar structures, revision of previously learnt structures that are required for a specific lesson, and correction of the mistakes made by students. Presentation may be well done by students in case the electronic textbook provides well-structured exercises that match a grammar rule to a lesson topic. In the electronic course books developed by our English language department, each thematic module contains a few grammar spots with a rule and some examples, followed by several controlled / semi-controlled exercises and a discussion based on a set of questions.

As for correction of student-made mistakes, it depends on the students' preferences: immediate correction or correction postponed to the end of the lesson, correction by teacher or by students, or individual messaging on the mistakes made with the student's response containing correct versions.

The content supplier assists in finding videos, images, extracts from conventions, codes, etc. well in advance. The student in this role has to meet with the teacher before the start of every module which normally lasts for three to four weeks to discuss some probable needs and then provide the teacher with the materials found. The responsible student should be consulted on the content and procedures by the teacher at the start of each term.

The group size and the students' level of English have a decisive role for implementing peer-to-peer teaching and learning. Our experience reveals that students react positively to their added functions if:

- 1) the number of students doesn't exceed twelve;
- 2) the purpose of peer-to-peer teaching and learning is clearly explained to them;
- 3) there is a well-structured electronic student book;
- 4) the teacher's support and monitoring are available;
- 5) the students' roles are not permanent during the semester but interchangeable;
- 6) the students' level of English allows for fluent conversing.

The qualitative analysis of the students' attitude to the peer-to-peer teaching and learning environment they were creating was conducted at the end-of-semester lesson by way of discussions in groups of three students on whatever they liked or disliked to do and then, as a conclusion, their presentations. High appreciation was attributed to improvements in the peer teachers' assertiveness as they were able to express their thoughts, feelings, comments in a respectful and honest manner, as well as to use their own approaches in delivering lesson materials. Another positive comment was rendered to the positive learning environment fostering confidence, improving personal relationships, and sparking interest. Certain overload with the new tasks, time constraints in comparison with the fully teacher's instruction, a lack of expertise from the peer teachers, and less effective process for complex topics were mentioned as unfavourable factors.

The strategy of involving students into peer teaching and learning proves to be a valuable approach to conducting interactive online lessons. It promotes a dynamic and effective learning environment, allowing students to learn from one another and fostering teamwork. In a peer-to-peer teaching and learning environment, each student's strengths can serve to complement the group and enhance learning. They feel more confident in decision-making and in approaching educational challenges as opportunities to learn. Peer teaching provides students with valuable experiences that prepare them for real-world situations. The research model of peer-to-peer teaching and learning environment presented here requires further exploration of the required

roles, frequency and justification of peer teaching, types of exercises and activities for letting students teach.

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