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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER-TUTORING PROGRAM IN IMPROVING “FRIEND OF ENGLISH” MENTEES’ COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN UTM

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This thesis is submitted as a fulfilment for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Science & Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education
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JULY 2011
I hereby declare that this thesis entitled “THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER-TUTORING PROGRAM IN IMPROVING “FRIEND OF ENGLISH” MENTEES’ COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN UTM” is my own work except as cited in the references. This thesis has not been accepted for any degree and not in sync submitted in submission of any other degree.

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Name : NurHidayah Bt Mohd Sharif
Date : 5 July 2011
“Once you fall on your knees, never hesitate to get back on your feet”

Personally dedicated to my dearly loved mom and dad
(SABEHA ABU BAKAR & MOHD SHARIF ALI)
“With your kisses I am who I am today. It is all because of your unconditionally love”

Also will never be forgotten, my supervisor
(HEMA ROSHENY MUSTAFA)
The one responsible in guiding me throughout this project and allow me to finish this thesis
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This study is about the peer support program in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) or known as Friend of English (FoE) program under Centre of Teaching and Learning (CTL) in developing students’ communication skills in English. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the FoE program is effective in building the mentees’ oral fluency. The centre of this study consists of the investigation of the improvement on the mentees’ language proficiency after enrolling in the FoE program, to what extent does this program help mentees in developing their communication skills and whether the tutoring experience affect mentees’ attitudes to communicate in English. Data from this study was attained from mentees’ speaking tests scores, data transcription of the recorded speaking tests, and mentees’ responses in their questionnaires. Thus, the data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The result of this study showed that all mentees have improved in their communication skills after taking part in the FoE program. In conclusion, the mentees proved that peer-tutoring program is an effective tool in helping an individual to improve their English communication skills.
ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini adalah tentang program sokongan sebaya di Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) atau dikenali sebagai Teman Berbahasa Inggeris (FoE) program di bawah Pusat Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran (CTL) dalam mengembangkan kemampuan pelajar untuk berkomunikasi dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui adakah program FoE berkesan dalam membina kefasihan lisan mentee. Fokus kajian ini terdiri daripada penyiasatan dalam penambakan dalam kemampuan mentee untuk berbahasa Inggeris setelah mendaftarkan diri dalam program FoE, sejauh manakah program ini dapat membantu mentee mengembangkan kemahiran berkomunikasi mereka dan adakah pengalaman mereka di dalam program FoE dapat mempengaruhi sikap mereka untuk berkomunikasi dalam Bahasa Inggeris secara positif. Data dari kajian ini diambil daripada skor ujian lisan ujian, transkripsi data dari ujian lisan yang telah dirakam dan respons mentee di dalam kuesioner mereka. Data tersebut kemudiannya dianalisis secara kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kemahiran komunikasi semua mentee meningkat setelah mengambil bahagian dalam program FoE. Secara kesimpulannya, mentee telah membuktikan bahawa program pembimbing rakan sebaya adalah satu medium yang berkesan dalam membantu seseorang individu untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berkomunikasi mereka dalam Bahasa Inggeris.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In general, this study intends to illustrate how effective the peer support program in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) or known as Friend of English (FoE) program which is under the Centre of Teaching and Learning (CTL) in developing students’ communication skills in English. This is because this program is believed to be the stepping stone in building the mentees’ oral fluency. From this research, the improvement of the mentees’ language proficiency after enrolled in the FoE program will be exposed. Besides that, to what extent does this program help mentees in developing their communication skills will also be taken into account. This research paper will also draw attention to how peer tutoring experience could positively affect students’ attitudes to communicate in English. It is necessary to know how that experience can change their attitudes towards the language use.

Peer-tutoring is a program which is at the beginning is designed exclusively in the academic field to improve the performance of individuals with the help from the person who are in the same age range with them but have a higher capability academically compare to them. At first, it is done with one–to–one basis and now, it is conducted mostly in small groups. This program is believed to be effective because of
the high attention paid to the person who needs help since the learning occurred in small groups unlike the classroom. Besides that, the environment of the learning is also unthreatened which likely make the process of receiving the input is easier. However, because of the effectiveness of this program, it has been applied to the other fields like in the working place. This reason has injected many education institutions to adopt this kind of approach including Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

A peer support programme or known as a mentor-mentee programme which is based on the peer-tutoring foundation, has been introduced in UTM by the name of Friend of English (FoE). This program is operated under UTM Centre of Teaching and Learning (CTL) with the main purpose is to enhance the undergraduates’ proficiency in English. There would be appointed mentors who are in charged in assisting students who have enrolled themselves in the program. In every FoE session, there would be maximum five mentees in a group with only one mentor. The mentors are the undergraduates who taking the Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESL) course which have been experiencing lots of education training. There was no syllabus set up for this programme but, there are still several rules that need to be followed by the mentors. All these rules intended to make sure that the mentor are doing their job and trying their best to help their mentees in using the language proficiently.

In order to be able to communicate well in English, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) students must consider taking this golden opportunity to enrol themselves in the FoE program. This is due to the awareness of the importance of having an ability to speak English fluently as an advantage for their future employment. This is because being able to converse confidently in this world-demand language can be a very opportune criterion to be qualified in the job applications later. However, an individual’s communication ability is incredibly related to his or her self-concept. This view is supported by Verderber (1975), our communication ability is mostly depended on individuals’ knowledge of himself or herself. Consequently, self-concept is believed to be a measurement tool to see how excellent individuals could perform in communicating with the people around them. However, Wahlstrom (1992:46) points out that, “self-
concepts are developed through communication.” According to him, we are not automatically born with the knowledge of ourselves but we need to gain it by observing ourselves and others’ manners. As we interact, we actually present ourselves to the others and later, there would be responses from them either to support or conflict with the way we presented ourselves to them. Therefore, through the process of communicating, we will develop the idea of understanding ourselves or known as self-concept.

From the above explanations, we could simply conclude that the relationship between self-concept and communication is interrelated. As we experience the process of communicating with others, unconsciously, we would gain definite self-concept which later will give a different impact towards the way we interact with the people around us. Therefore, by participating in the peer-tutoring programme, the mentees could improve their self-concept and proficiency in English simultaneously.

1.1 Background of Study

In this globalization era, all university graduates should be instilled with good communication skills in English which is considered as world class language in order to fight for a desired job in this competitive world. Even though they had performed well in their perspective fields, they are yet guaranteed to be able to get a job due to their deficiency in this global language. That is why they have a hard time marketing themselves as employees. Phang (2006) in Kassim and Ali (2009) draws our attention, by revealing the fact from the Malaysian government that in 2006 there were 45,000 college graduates that were unemployed, and this was mainly caused by their poor command of the English language. Another evident is from an investigation done by The Nation College Language Direction Council in 2001, it is clearly shown how some
business companies are unsatisfied with fresh college graduates because of their lack of fluency has been exposed by Heyun. The lack of skills in English communication make them appear valueless in the job market since fluency is a must for them to do their job not only locally but even globally as to give a positive impression towards the association that they represent and the people that they are dealing with.

In UTM, the same situation seems to occur as claimed by a research done by Wan Mansor, Zakaria and Mustaffa (1994) who are the English lecturers in UTM that had experienced in teaching first and second year students that there is a serious lack of oral communication skills in English among UTM students. In many cases, there are graduates who score a very good grade in their Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) but they are still unemployed. This is due to the lack of skills in English communication which kill most of the job opportunities offered. This inspection is positively supported by Kassim and Ali (2009) who said that many employers were hesitant to hire these graduates due to their poor proficiency in the language, although they were highly qualified academically. Undoubtedly, having a high proficiency in English is the reason why some graduates are more marketable than others. (Chang, M 2004)

The rarely use of English amongst most of university students make them feel awkward to sound in that language. From my own experience, sometimes students can understand well the language but in terms of speaking they fail as they lack of confidence to communicate using English. This is because, English seems very foreign to them and they are afraid of their grammar the most which they believe can lead to others’ misunderstanding. They are too self conscious when it comes to use the language. This situation is pictured as speech anxiety as suggested by Rosenfeld and Berko (1990). In point of fact, the feedback that we receive from others would determine our self-concept as affirmed by Seiler that our self-image and self-esteem will develop according to the way we interact with other people and also the reactions that we have gained which afterward will compose our self-concept. Therefore, it could be said that, low self-concept is the factor why people are facing speech anxiety.
As what we are all concerned, the key to do well in English communication is to use it. The more people use the language the more they will get used to the language. However, in students’ context specifically in Malaysia, they are not given much chance to use English since they do not have someone who they can practice the language with which result in using their first language to converse with their friends all the time. Thus, if there is a time where they can put the language into practice in a comfortable and unthreatening setting, perhaps their communication skills in English could be polished. Friend of English program is a very helpful medium to make this wish come true as the students can use the language with their own peers where the environment will be less stressful and more comfortable for them unlike the classroom situation. Their anxiety to converse in English will be reduced and at the same time their confidence of using the language will be boosted.

In the previous study done by Alice and Filomena (2005) which involved the undergraduate nursing students who joined a peer-tutoring scheme, the third year students were recruited as the tutors while the second year students were the tutees. There were total ten weeks of tutoring sessions that followed the one-to-one basis. The result of the program has provided students with the opportunity to develop their ‘transferable’ personal skills, such as communication, interpersonal, and time management skills. Students also have developed their personal growth, such as increased confidence, and becoming more active and responsible for their own learning. Besides that, they also achieved a deeper understanding of the subject matter by reorganizing existing knowledge, clarifying and exemplifying the knowledge, and applying the knowledge in practice. Apart from learning skills and cooperative learning, they also claimed that their participation in the peer-tutoring scheme has enhanced their personal growth, which would be very useful in their subsequent study and work lives.

From the earlier study as explained above, we can see that peer tutoring has a great potential to build students’ communication skills in the means of interaction between peers in an unthreatening environment which will indirectly create positive
attitudes towards English language. Thus, it is believed that peer tutoring program can be a good medium to enhance communication skills in English among university students.

### 1.2 Statement of Problem

Being university graduates with good grades do not determine their successfulness in getting the jobs that they dream of. This is because the grade does not determine that they would secure a job unlike proficiency in English which can give them a free ticket to grab any job opportunities offered. So do UTM's graduates who cannot walk away from this serious problem as well. For that reason, they must have good communication skills in English to interact and mix with working people in their perspective fields either locally or internationally.

The deficiency in oral communication skills makes students hard to express themselves and it will decrease their confidence to use the language. This speech anxiety makes them wonder if their utterances can be understood by other people and does not cause any misunderstanding or misinterpretation. The biggest factor is that there is no room that the students think could help them in practicing the language. With lack practices, they end up having little confident in using the language. As a result, they might turn up unemployed due to the lack of English communication skills.

Thus, a program like FoE is a big step in helping UTM students to perform well in their English communication. This program is believed to give a big contribution to students to develop their skills in communication and also their positive attitudes towards the language itself. In view of that, this study will take a closer look of the
effectiveness of FoE program in helping UTM students to increase their communication skills in English.

1.3 **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to illustrate the effectiveness of peer tutoring program in developing participants’ oral communication. Therefore, the study has been carried out with the following objectives:

1. To identify the level of mentees’ proficiency in communicating in English through speaking test scores.
2. To determine the effectiveness of peer tutoring program in promoting mentees’ communication skills in English.
3. To investigate whether peer tutoring program has positive effect on mentees’ attitudes to communicate in English.