PEER TUTORING IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract

The Coronavirus pandemic's extensive effects have led to more and more educational institutions offering training and instruction online. Most schools and higher institutions in West Kalimantan use digital technology in their instructional program. However, because online sessions are usually held in big groups and have internet limitations, it might be difficult for the lecturer to keep track of all of their students. Incorporating peer tutoring via digital means can be an alternative to meet the student's needs in online learning. Therefore, to help each student with their particular writing issues, peer tutoring is necessary as an alternative to offering extra lessons. A qualitative and quantitative examination of the process of implementing digitally-mediated peer tutoring in a classroom context was provided through classroom action research. This study involved 20 third-semester students from a university in West Kalimantan. Consequently, it was discovered that the pupils' writing had improved throughout the cycle. As a result, including peer tutoring can be a viable option for meeting students' needs in online learning.

Keywords: Peer tutoring, academic writing, collaborative learning, digital technology.

INTRODUCTION

Students often struggle with writing as they are unaware of the writing process and the strategies and skills to help them write well` (O'Sullivan & Cleary, 2014). Constructing writing is quite a complex and challenging skill, as it deals with the coordination of cognitive, social, physical, motoric, and cultural dimensions (Daffern et al., 2017). Among these five dimensions, the cognitive and physical or motoric aspects dominate the reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making processes, which reflect learning and understanding (Taylor, 2009). That reason might be enough to daunt a writing instructor. As for the EFL students at a higher level of education, they are expected to be able to construct higher-quality writing by wrapping their viewpoints along with the logical reasons that support their ideas (Rashtchi, 2019). Thus, writing might be the most challenging skill for EFL learners.

Writing does not come naturally. Writing practice is required to improve one's writing ability.

However, according to the preliminary research survey, only eight out of twenty students write in their leisure time to develop their writing, indicating that they need adequate writing practice. Moreover, writing may be more difficult if students are obliged to participate in activities in which they are uninterested (Octaviana, 2016). Some factors that need to be considered are low motivation, writing apprehension, and writing anxiety, potentially affecting students' writing skills (Alluhaybi, 2015; Ip & Lee, 2015; Toba et al., 2019).

Based on the explanation above, a solution must be discovered to help students retain an excellent psychological outlook and improve their cognitive ability so that they can finally obtain exceptional English writing skills. Furthermore, face-to-face meetings are becoming increasingly rare due to the global pandemic. As a result, students are encouraged to have more exposure to the applications of digital technology. Using digital technology in the teaching and learning process is a regular practice at one of West Kalimantan's Universities.

Nonetheless, assessing classes through digital technology can be difficult, especially for educators supervising large numbers of students, as some may miss the instruction during EFL writing meetings (Wahyudin, 2018). Furthermore, due to the adaptation to online learning at a University in West Kalimantan, some concerns, such as students' weariness, dispersed minds during the learning process, and a lack of enthusiasm, may significantly impact their writing. Toba, Noor, and Sanu (2019) highlight several psychological problems associated with writing, specifically for EFL learners in Indonesia, such as low writing motivation and writing anxiety, which can influence students' writing skills. In this case, the researcher aimed to facilitate the creation of a solution by allowing students to play the role of the instructor to observe and support one another during the extension of the English lesson. Peer-assisted learning through digital technology may solve both the writing challenges and the limitations of online class management.

Two notable studies have been conducted on using students' friends as tutors in writing classes. Chen (2014) researched twenty articles that looked into the use of peer feedback in technology-facilitated writing programs. Zou and Xie (2018) employed a technology-enhanced just-in-time teaching (JIIT) strategy combined with peer instruction to flip an English writing class (PI). These researches provided exciting viewpoints on using peer-assisted learning with various tools, platforms, and forums, allowing students to be more actively engaged in online writing,

thereby improving their skills and methods. Furthermore, the findings of those studies show that technology can help pupils grasp and apply what they have learned. However, the use of technology is expected to be optimized not just for instructing or providing feedback to one another but also for assisting one another in learning.

Researchers need to find a solution to fill the gap. This study is projected to resolve the writing challenges at a university in West Kalimantan. Digitally mediated peer tutoring in writing classes should be promoted because tutors and tutees are expected to increase their writing ability while engaging in an online learning environment. As a result, it may be appropriate to perform this study since peer tutoring offers the ability to participate in digitally-mediated peer tutoring in an environment that is both highly engaging and cooperative, and it does so without any limits on time or location.

Based on the background elaborated, the study intended to answer the question, "How was peer tutoring implemented in academic writing?"

Peer tutoring is a learning model that allows students to collaborate in pairs and groups to exchange opinions and share work as in writing. This learning method can improve student achievement, strengthen group relationships, and increase self-esteem. Peer tutoring is a well-known type of peer-assisted learning (Song et al., 2018). This idea of student-teaching students aims to create a student-centered environment by allowing students to take the role of a teacher. Moreover, peer tutoring programs have been applied at a higher level of education. The concept of peer tutoring first emerged when children acted as surrogate teachers to transfer their knowledge (Falchikov, 2001). Later on, peer tutoring is defined as people in similar social groupings who need to be more professionally qualified as teachers supporting each other in the role of tutor and tutee (Topping & Ehly, 1998).

Peer tutoring promotes the view of 'learning by teaching' since, by teaching, the tutors have to learn twice (Topping & Ehly, 1998). However, to play the tutors` role, the students are expected to complete the selection process and rigorous training before working with other students since the tutors hold the tasks of interacting with the students and become the models and sources of information (Gaies, 1985; Snyder et al., 2016). Therefore, the differences in the ability of tutors and tutees are expected (Forman & Cazden in Falchikov, 2001) that the former should have

better competence and experience than the latter. The teacher may select the tutors based on academic considerations. Then, within the instructions or tasks assigned by the teacher, tutors may support other students in the learning process.

1. Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring is organized in various ways. Peer tutoring can be divided into same-level peer tutoring and cross-level peer tutoring. Those varieties of peer tutoring can be organized based on the location of the activity and the participant's status. The location of the activity can be distinguished within the institution where the peer tutoring takes place. It may involve people in the same institution (same-institutional), different institutions (cross-institutional), or even both (Falchikov, 2001).

On the other hand, the participants' status can differ in terms of age, experience, and skill. The tutor may appear older to the younger tutee (cross-level), with more skill and experience, such as senior students who have completed the course before (Iwata & Furmedge, 2016). However, peer tutoring may involve same-age peers (same level) who share similar experiences, knowledge, and achievements within the same class (Falchikov, 2001; Fisher & Frey, 2019).

There are several characteristics of peer tutoring as an appropriate pedagogical strategy for writing instruction. The most apparent aspect of appropriateness is the students' differing levels of writing competence. In higher education, students must focus on the form of writing since they might not need to be fluent linguistically, so they might not be able to express what they are trying to say in their first language. However, some students may express what they are thinking well in English.

Regarding those distinctions in the status of peers, the tutors are paired to support and assist the tutees. A peer tutor can form examples and relate to a tutee on an entirely different level than an adult educator (Jordan, 2014). Assigning these students as tutors and tutees based on their competencies can improve individual students' progression. Therefore, the difference in skill level is needed in which same-level peer tutoring but with different writing skill levels will be the focus of this study. Typically, the arrangement of tutors and tutees can be unidirectional (fixed roles) or reciprocal (It will change regularly) (Falchikov, 2001; Fisher & Frey, 2019). In this case, the roles of the participants are fixed since the group has been divided regarding the

students' placement test.

The implementation of the peer tutoring program in academic writing has been done during the past decades to promote student-centered learning (Cheng & Liu, 2011). Lassegard (2008) mentions that the tutoring program is beneficial for tutees and the tutors themselves. However, to create an effective peer tutoring program in academic writing, some essential roles are discussed to be considered. Hence, the roles of an instructor, the roles of tutors, and the roles of the tutees are mentioned in the following points.

a. The roles of the instructor

Even though the students will mainly take the teaching role, the teacher as the instructor plays a significant role during the program. Since the most essential part of peer tutoring is the tutor, the writing instructor has to find and select qualified tutors. The program must be organized and appropriately coordinated, which involves planning, scheduling, and implementing tutor training activities (Cheng & Liu, 2011). Then, to ensure the program's effectiveness, tutors must be supported by resource materials and guidelines from the teacher. The resource materials and guidelines aim to ensure that what is being taught by the tutors is aligned with the instructional objective (Furmedge et al., 2014). Furthermore, the teacher has to monitor the tutoring process to ensure the learning experiences are not compromised (Iwata & Furmedge, 2016). In addition, writing instructors also have to manage the tutoring schedule, address the learning goals, and select the most suitable group for tutor-tutee (Cheng & Liu, 2011).

b. The roles of the tutors

The activities of tutor training targeted how tutors can foster other students accurately and independently (Cheng & Liu, 2011). However, besides being the tutor, they also have to be a friend for tutees (Falchikov, 2001). These dual roles of tutors might be problematic for them since they have to maintain the balance between the "peer" element and the "tutor" element (Garrett in Falchikov, 2001). Moreover, these are five significant categories tutors have to deal with mentioned by Cheng and Liu (2011): (1) communication and relationship issues; (2) value and purpose of the program; (3) system administration; (4) problems need to be solved; and (5) their ability and confidence. Despite these issues, the tutor may develop communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and leadership (Cheng & Liu, 2011). Such categories above also happen in academic writing programs in that the instructors, student-tutors, and tutees together take roles to be communicative for the writing techniques, skills, feedback, and evaluation.

c. The roles of the tutees

In the peer tutoring program, tutees play the role of 'being supported.' They were students with writing issues that might require their tutor's significant assistance. Cheng and Liu (2011) argue that this program will help the tutee become more accountable, more motivated to learn, and more creative to promote problem-solving and improve their self-efficacy.

The tutees were divided into five groups, with one tutor assigned to each group of three students. The writing instructors identified the students' writing problems by scoring that pre-test. The pre-test was the placement test to identify students' writing proficiency level, which was categorized into five levels. The positions of tutors and tutees were then mapped using proper arrangement.

2. Writing Process and Stages in Peer Tutoring

Writing is a recursive process that takes place again and again. In its process, the students write more than once, and the writing is made according to its steps. The first time they write, students need the references so that the result is expected to be good later. The writing process as a private or personal activity must be broadly seen as comprising four main stages: planning, Drafting, revising, and Editing. As depicted in Figure 1, the stages could be more sequential and orderly. Research has suggested that 'many good writers employ a recursive, non-linear approach—writing a draft can be interrupted by more planning and revision may lead to reformulation, with a great deal of recycling to an earlier stage. (Krashen, 1984, p. 17 in Seow, 2003, p. 315).
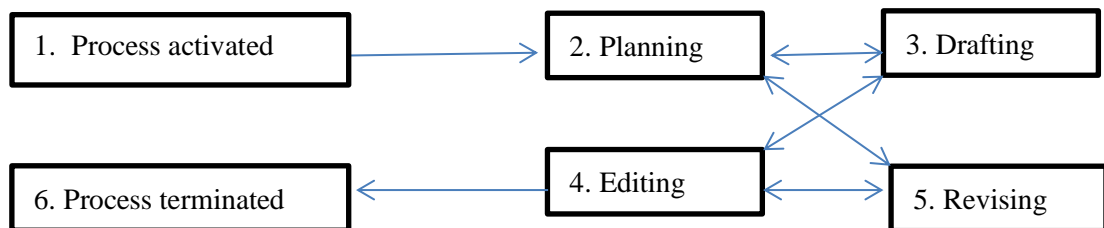
Figure 1: The Recursive Writing Process (Cf. Seow, 2003, p. 315)

Following Figure 1 above, it is helpful for the students first to understand the process that takes place, which requires time exploitation and consumption to write in an interrupting and recursive process of planning, Drafting, Editing, and revising. For this purpose, the students should be patient enough to be in the habit of the repeated cycles of the process. To write with such a process, the students will stay in at least two cycles of the recursive process until they are sure to find their writing is complete. The writing recursive process below is a helpful

instance. For more convenient writing steps, the video below is helpful to watch and to learn.

3. Peer-tutoring Stages

Moreover, setting up and following the writing stages in administering the peer tutoring process is helpful. The following strategies by Toppings, Nixon, Sutherland, and Yarrow (2000) can be commonly taken as a guideline.

a. Generating Ideas

The tutor assists the tutees in generating their ideas of the topics by asking them questions via Google Meet. The tutor then creates one-word rough notes on Google Docs about the answer given by the tutee. The tutor uses some stimulating words to help tutees generate connected ideas.

b. Drafting

The rough notes are processed and linked during the drafting phase. The tutor helps the tutees write basic sentences relating to the notes and arrange their arguments without regard for grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

c. Reading

The tutor and the tutee read the draft together. They try to make sense of the arguments' flow and find more evidence or theories to support their ideas. This step might be repeated after the editing process.

d. Editing

The editing process relates to areas where the tutee believes they must improve. Organization, topic, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary are among the areas that will be addressed. Aspects that the tutee believes require further work will be emphasized in the Google Doc. Furthermore, the tutor makes a suggestion and then asks the tutee to alter the highlighted words or sentences. They would discuss the issue until both parties were satisfied with the outcome.

e. Choosing the best copy

The best copy indicates the tutee's final writing. The tutee produces the best draft version based on the discussions during the editing process and then builds it into a complete essay.

f. Evaluating

The group inspects and evaluates the best copy written by the tutee with the assistance of the writing instructor. Based on the components of writing covered in the editing process, the writing instructor directs the tutor and other tutees in the group in evaluating the work.

4. Benefits of Integrating Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring has been introduced and applied for decades in many different contexts to support teachers in monitoring each student with the help of tutors. Peer tutoring programs cover a wide range of activities that are applied according to the needs of the students (Ali et al., 2015). Some relevant studies are used as guidelines to support this study.

Dekhinet, Topping, Duran, and Blanch (2008) conducted a pilot study to enhance the chance for foreign language learners to engage in authentic, meaningful conversations with native speakers of their target language. Then, Evans and Moore (2012) created Online Peer-Assisted Learning (Opal), a web-based peer tutoring system designed to promote problem-based undergraduate courses that use problems as contexts for tutoring interactions. Meanwhile, Sansonea, Ligorio, and Buglass (2016) encourage active engagement in group activities by serving as e-tutors for other students in online courses. Accordingly, the benefits are summarized in the following points.

a. Academic

Academically, peer tutoring in writing may improve students' grades and performance. Academic impact on learners' worries on topic mastery, including improving problem formulation, conceptual understanding, and memorizing. Meanwhile, tutoring requires tutors to learn twice by revising and reinforcing prior knowledge (Ali et al., 2015). Thus, the instructor may have a more substantial academic effect.

b. Metacognitive

Then, metacognitively, students may improve their comprehension, error-correcting, and evaluation skills. Moreover, elaborative activities such as analogy or imagery can be improved. This improvement of metacognitive skills can enhance understanding at a higher material level.

c. Skills

Additional benefits like reading and writing development may impact students' academic skills. Dekhinet, Topping, Duran, and Blanch (2008) mentioned that peer tutoring interaction occurs across the country through video conferences, online chats, or discussion boards. By collaborating with other students, the tutors may improve their communication skills. Furthermore, the tutors may encounter challenges during the peer tutoring program, strengthening their practical problem-solving skills. Furthermore, developing their organization may improve their sense of leadership. Also, a set of collaborative writing procedures must be designed so students become accustomed to following proper and appropriate guidelines for good writing.

d. Non-academic

Peer tutoring can be beneficial in non-academic settings. First, peer tutoring reduced failure rates. Peer tutoring may be a second chance for students with low academic performance. Individual attention for each student may be complex for the teacher to deliver. Thus, peer tutoring may be a solution. Second, peer tutoring can improve students' motivation and attitude toward learning. The learning approach includes peer tutors who teach other students, making learning more flexible and entertaining.

On the contrary, students may find it easier to interact with their peers. As a result, pupils may reduce their anxiety about participating in the teaching and learning process (Falchikov, 2001). Meanwhile, the tutor may enhance their confidence level and sense of responsibility because they must support the tutees (Ali et al., 2015).

5. Digitally-Mediated Learning

The digital age, in which people live and work globally with the aid of technology, is the result of the rapid growth of digital technology. Digital technology has permeated practically every aspect of our lives, including social, recreational, and even educational aspects (Ng, 2015; Selwyn, 2013). Moreover, various alternatives of educational technology have been developed to be utilized in the teaching and learning process (e.g., Mali, 2016; Evans & Moore, 2012; Amhag et al., 2019). Thus, the studies regarding those digital alternatives for educational purposes have been acknowledged pervasively.

Integrating digitally-mediated peer tutoring is one of the forms of distance learning, including language teaching and learning, including writing skills. Distance learning is perceived as a classroom arrangement in which the instructor and learning participants are separated by time and space (Williams et al., 1999). This educational system allows learners to learn flexibly without requiring face-to-face contact with the instructor (Shelley, 2000 in White, 2003). Besides the advantages in terms of opportunities to engage in the learning process, the learners may find this distance language learning as their own impersonal experience in which they can be given a sense of being part of the community of learners (White, 2003). By becoming this part of the community, White contends that the learners can get support from others and reduce a sense of isolation, which may be their motivation to improve their learning. Therefore, by implementing digitally mediated learning in academic writing classes, students may have the opportunity to enhance their writing skills without any limitations in terms of time and space.

6. Collaborative Writing with Digitally-Mediated Learning

Integrating collaborative writing with digital platforms lets learners perceive writing as a dynamic process, making them focus more on the process than the final product (Lawrence & Wah, 2016). It is a dynamic process since the writers must interact with the related digital media, their peers, and the writing instructor. Moreover, when writing collaboratively in the online environment, the learners are expected to focus more on the process than the final products. It can be realized with the peers' engagement to teach, discuss, monitor, and provide feedback on their writing.

Lawrence and Wah (2016) add that paying attention to some psychological factors affecting the writing process is essential. Therefore, digitally mediated peer tutoring is promoted as an alternative to embody collaborative writing. The tutors are expected to reduce the psychological problems, specifically in the communication gap between the learners and instructor. When the learners feel they are in a supportive and positive environment during the teaching and learning process, they are automatically encouraged to learn (McCombs in Falchikov, 2001). Hence, with no communication boundaries between tutors and tutees, they can focus more on their writing projects and produce an excellent writing product.

7. Integrating Digitally-Mediated Peer-Tutoring in Writing Class

The global pandemic has created a new habit. However, the distance learning process is needed, particularly in rural areas where the distance learning system is not familiar enough to be adapted due to the accessibility issue. Therefore, a learning platform familiar to the students has been adapted. Google Classroom has considered the accessibility factor to facilitate the classroom virtually. It can be accessed freely and easily through their own devices. Google Classroom is a free learning management system considered one of the best platforms for complementing teachers' workflows (Iftikhar, 2016). It helps teachers and students communicate and collaborate in a paperless learning environment.

Moreover, this platform combines Gmail, Google Docs, Google Drive, Sheets Slides, etc., to help the learning process (Korman, 2020), especially in writing classes, become more convenient. Besides that, the teacher can manage the classroom by giving the students announcements, assignments, questions, and detailed instructions. Moreover, the submission process can be done through Google Classroom by providing the due date feature so that the teacher can coordinate with the students to submit their work on time.

Google Docs can be incorporated into the collaborative writing process. Google Docs is one of Google's features. It is a word-processing application that allows users to execute functions similar to other offline word-processing programs (Miller, 2011). However, Google Docs has this feature that helps users create, edit, and work directly online. In addition, Google Docs are suitable for use in collaborative writing, as the collaboration process is going on in real time, and the editing process can be done simultaneously. Collaborative writing online is also believed to develop students' writing skills (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2017; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014).

Based on the explanation above, the main processes of writing (creating or Drafting, Editing, revising, and working with others) can be realized with Google Docs. The students must access Google Docs; the participants must be connected to the internet. Even though the obstacle, such as a poor internet connection, might be a problem in accessing it, Google Docs are stored online so that they can revisit the work with other devices or places with an active internet connection (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014). Regarding implementing collaborative writing using Google Docs, the peer tutoring session is expected to run more effectively.

METHOD

This study used Classroom Action Research (CAR) and included 20 third-semester students from a University in West Kalimantan. The participants were separated into tutors and tutees based on a placement test. The tutors included five students who acted as teachers in their study group. The tutees were pupils who struggled with writing and may have required the assistance of tutors. The tutees were separated into five groups, with four or five students each.

This research was conducted in 8-12 meetings, with 4 meetings for each cycle. Classroom action research is an ongoing process because there will always be a new problem arising in classroom practices (McNiff, 2016). Thus, the cyclical process in this study conducted until the researcher meets the satisfactory result of students' writing proficiency. The data was gathered by observation and documentation. The observation method was carried out throughout the classroom to depict the peer tutoring process on a digital platform.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The effect of digitally mediated peer tutoring on students' writing performance was then

analyzed based on the pre-test and post-test results. The results of the analysis and comparison of the pre-test and post-test in Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and Cycle 3 are presented in the table below.

Table 1

Analysis of students' writing scores

	N	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean $(\bar{X})$	Standard Deviatisub-D)	Standard Error $(S_{\bar{D}})$
Pre-test	20	20	85	44,87	23,823939	5,3272
Cycle 1	20	54,9	88,5	77,395	9,242891	2,0668
Cycle 2	20	71	92,5	82,2	5,212334	1,1666
Cycle 3	20	78	97,5	87,3	4,953467	1,1076
Difference	20	-7	-5	-5,1	4,210263	0,9414

Paired t-observation of Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 test	
Degree of Freedom (Df)	19
T Stat	-4,335624
T Critical $\alpha = 0.05$ (two tails)	2,093024
P value	0,000356

The students' maximum writing scores showed promising growth from the pre-test to the Cycle 1 and 2 tests. The pre-test result was 85. It increased to 88.5, then 92.5, in Cycle 2, and 97.5 in the current testing cycle. In addition, the mean score improved from 44.87 in the pre-test to 77.395 in Cycle 1, 82.2 in Cycle 2, and 87.3 in Cycle 3. This improvement happened after each round. A paired t-test was used to show that the student's writing abilities had improved significantly between the pre-test and the Cycle 3 test. With a sample size of 20, the degree of freedom (Df) = n (20)-1 was 19. The table mentioned above also contains a t statistic of -4.953467. The data was analyzed using the two-tail hypothesis at a significance level ($\square$) of 0.05. The score resulted in a t-critical of 2,093024 and a p-value of 0,000356. The significant improvement of students was demonstrated by a t-statistic of 4,953467, which was greater than the t-critical of 2,093024 and higher than the p-value (0,05 > 0,000356).

Based on the facts above, the hurdles to students' writing proficiency have been proven to be overcome. The use of digitally mediated peer tutoring improves students' writing skills. The observation and document analysis provide evidence for the development of writing. How tutors identify solutions for their tutees in the digitally mediated peer tutoring process is critical

in enhancing students' writing abilities. Peer tutoring assists both tutor and tutee in improving their academic performance by providing one-on-one assistance (Hott et al., 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2022).

Furthermore, the pupils in this study experienced psychological issues. These students demonstrated low levels of self-regulation, motivation, attitudes toward writing, and writing apprehension, all of which had an impact on their levels of writing proficiency, as reported in previous studies by Alluhaybi (2015), Ip and Lee (2015), and Toba, Noor, and Sanu (2019). As a result, the observation process of digitally-mediated peer tutoring has demonstrated the improvement of both tutors' and tutees' social performance, with the tutors growing used to dealing with the tutees. Tutees, on the other hand, felt more comfortable, confident, and motivated to complete their writing assignments. This conclusion corresponded with the findings of other studies, such as Topping, Nixon, Sutherland, and Yarrow (2000), which showed improved students' attitudes toward writing.

Finally, this research has shown that digitally mediated peer tutoring improves teaching and learning. This conclusion can be drawn from the observation results and the pupils' scores. Digitally mediated peer tutoring has the potential to be used for a variety of abilities and disciplines. Because this study focuses on students' writing, primarily academic writing, it is possible to adapt the paradigm developed by Topping, Nixon, Sutherland, and Yarrow (2000) to other writing genres. Furthermore, altering the framework may need changes to other topics or abilities.

CONCLUSION

The academic writing process is challenging and needs collaborative engagement between the students and their tutors. Cognitive, social, physical, motoric, and cultural dimensions are involved in the skills and strategies for its achievement. The key objective of this study is to evaluate how peer tutoring was implemented in academic writing. In light of the findings and discussions, the application of digitally mediated peer tutoring successfully provided a solution to a writing class that can improve students' writing abilities and all aspects of writing. Therefore, to strengthen and maintain writing development among students, it is urgent to establish a writing program as a peer-tutoring academic writing program with a set of institutional syllabi and a curriculum base.

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