

Peer tutors' experiences in tutoring and teaching language on learners with special needs

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of peer tutors in teaching language to learners with special needs. It aimed to understand how tutors facilitated language learning while managing multiple roles and responsibilities. Peer tutors were purposively selected based on academic performance, willingness to serve, and parental consent. Findings revealed that peer tutoring is not only an instructional method but a transformative educational approach that fosters inclusion, empathy, and reciprocal learning. The study highlighted the importance of integrating peer tutoring into inclusive education programs, emphasizing the need for training in adaptive teaching strategies, communication, and emotional support. It also affirmed the role of peer tutoring in promoting the holistic development of both tutors and learners, consistent with social constructivist principles of collaboration and shared meaning-making. Recommendations include institutionalizing peer tutoring within the Department of Education's inclusive education initiatives and providing training and resources for tutors. School heads should nurture inclusive environments and sustain programs through mentorship and recognition. Teachers are encouraged to model inclusive practices, guide peer tutors, and collaborate with parents in supporting learners' growth. Peer tutors should reflect on their experiences for continuous improvement, while learners with special needs should be given opportunities to participate actively in peer-assisted activities that build confidence and communication skills. Overall, the study emphasized that cultivating empathy, adaptability, and reflective practice among peer tutors strengthens inclusive, engaging, and effective language instruction for learners with special needs.

Keywords: peer tutoring, inclusive education, learners with special needs, language learning

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1. Introduction

Teaching is a complex task that requires teachers to create learning environments that are physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially supportive for all learners. This responsibility becomes even more challenging when teaching learners with special needs (LSEs), who require individualized instruction and inclusive learning opportunities. One strategy widely used to support these learners is peer tutoring, in which a more knowledgeable or skilled student assists a classmate in learning academic concepts and developing social skills. Peer tutoring has been recognized as an effective instructional strategy for supporting learners with special educational needs. It promotes academic engagement, individualized assistance, and positive social interaction while encouraging collaborative learning among students. However, despite its documented benefits, schools continue to face challenges in implementing sustainable peer tutoring programs because of limited resources, scheduling conflicts, and insufficient institutional support. Wu et al. (2025) emphasized that inclusive schools often struggle to maintain consistent peer tutoring sessions due to rigid timetables and the limited availability of tutors and tutees.

Inclusive education ensures that all learners, regardless of their abilities, have equal opportunities to participate in quality education. Mainstreaming learners with special needs into regular classrooms allows them to learn alongside their peers while receiving the support necessary to succeed academically and socially. In many inclusive classrooms, teachers utilize peer tutoring to provide additional academic guidance, encourage participation, and foster meaningful social interactions among learners. In the Philippines, the Department of Education promotes peer-assisted learning through literacy initiatives such as DepEd Memorandum No. 244, s. 2011, which introduced the Shared Reading Project or "Big Brother/Big Sister, Kaklase Ko, Sagot Ko." This program encourages proficient readers to mentor struggling readers, demonstrating the Department's commitment to collaborative learning and literacy development. Research has shown that peer tutoring benefits both tutors and tutees by strengthening academic achievement, enhancing comprehension, improving confidence, and developing communication and social skills (Candelaria, 2023; Abuda & Jaromay, 2021; Berso & Lorente, 2020).

Studies have further demonstrated that students who participate in peer tutoring exhibit improved comprehension, reading fluency, retention, and engagement compared with those receiving only traditional instruction. These positive outcomes indicate that peer tutoring is an effective approach for strengthening learning and promoting students' personal development. Nevertheless, its effectiveness depends on various factors, including learner characteristics, instructional strategies, and the learning environment (Gubalani et al., 2023). Understanding these factors is essential for maximizing the benefits of peer tutoring in inclusive classrooms.

At Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School in Digos City, peer tutoring has been integrated into the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) Program, a school-wide initiative conducted every Friday to promote reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary development, and a love for reading. Although the DEAR Program is not exclusively designed for learners with special needs, it supports inclusive education by ensuring that mainstreamed learners with special needs actively participate alongside their classmates. Through peer-assisted reading activities, these learners receive individualized academic and social support while peer tutors develop empathy, leadership, responsibility, and collaborative skills. This practice contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by promoting equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Despite the continued implementation of peer tutoring and its observable benefits in classroom practice, there is limited empirical research examining the lived experiences of peer tutors who teach language to learners with special needs. Existing studies primarily focus on learners' academic outcomes, while the experiences, challenges,

strategies, and personal growth of peer tutors remain underexplored. This gap highlights the need to investigate how peer tutoring functions within inclusive literacy programs and how it contributes to both learner development and the growth of peer tutors.

Therefore, this qualitative phenomenological study seeks to explore the experiences of peer tutors in tutoring and teaching language to learners with special needs. Specifically, it aims to examine the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the valuable insights they gain while supporting learners in inclusive classrooms. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the improvement of inclusive education practices by providing evidence that can guide teachers, school leaders, and the Department of Education in strengthening peer tutoring programs and developing more effective learner-centered interventions for students with special needs.

Research Questions

- What are their experiences in peer tutoring language of learners with special needs?
- What strategies do they employ in their peer tutoring?
- What valuable insights can they share about peer tutoring of learners with special needs?

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring is a collaborative instructional approach in which students support one another's learning by assuming the roles of tutor and tutee. Rather than relying solely on teacher-directed instruction, this strategy positions learners as active participants in the learning process. Through explaining concepts, asking questions, and providing feedback, students become more engaged and accountable for their own understanding. Alexander (2023) emphasized that peer tutoring encourages reciprocal learning because students' alternate roles, allowing both tutors and tutees to benefit from the interaction. This reciprocal structure is important because it transforms learning from a passive activity into a shared academic experience.

The benefits of peer tutoring extend beyond the immediate improvement of academic performance. For peer tutors, teaching classmates deepens content mastery because explaining ideas requires organization of thoughts and clearer understanding of subject matter. Carisma and Fulgarinas (2022) found that tutors not only strengthened their comprehension of lessons but also developed valuable personal skills such as creativity, curiosity, leadership, and time management. This suggests that peer tutoring does not merely help struggling learners; it also cultivates higher-order thinking and personal growth among student tutors. In this sense, peer tutoring functions as both an academic intervention and a developmental strategy. However, the success of peer tutoring is not automatic. Topping and Lindsay (2020) argued that peer tutoring becomes effective only when tutors receive sufficient preparation, supervision, and structured guidance. Without these conditions, tutors may unintentionally model incorrect information or reinforce negative learning behaviors. Their argument highlights a crucial point: peer tutoring is not simply placing students together and expecting learning to occur. Instead, it requires thoughtful planning, teacher monitoring, and clear instructional goals. Thus, the quality of implementation determines whether peer tutoring becomes beneficial or ineffective.

In the Philippine context, peer tutoring has been widely promoted as part of literacy development initiatives. According to World Vision (2018), peer tutors are students who help classmates, particularly struggling readers, develop reading skills. This aligns with the Department of Education's National Reading Month initiatives under DepEd Memorandum No. 244, s. 2011, which encouraged schools to implement programs such as "*Kaklase Ko, Sagot Ko*" or Big Brother/Big Sister reading partnerships. In these programs, older or more proficient readers mentor younger or non-reading students (Malipot, 2023). Such programs show how peer tutoring can be localized as a practical response to literacy challenges in schools.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that peer tutoring is a flexible, research-supported instructional strategy that benefits learners across grade levels, subject areas, and student populations. Its effectiveness lies not only in improving academic achievement but also in fostering communication, collaboration, confidence, and responsibility. For language instruction in particular, peer tutoring provides individualized support in a non-threatening setting where students can actively construct understanding with classmates. As Candelaria (2023) emphasized, when systematically organized and carefully monitored by teachers, peer tutoring becomes a valuable supplement to traditional instruction and a practical means of strengthening students' achievement.

2.2 *Inclusive Education*

Education is a fundamental human right that helps lift both men and women out of poverty, levels inequality, and promotes sustainable development (UNESCO, 2023). A young person can become a contributing member of society with the aid of a good education. A successful career, good social prestige, a respectable existence, and the chance to realize one's goals are all based on knowledge. It takes a lot of work and desire to get past the first hurdle in order to achieve such a high level. An educated person is aware that they must continue to study and grow throughout their lives in order to be able to notice and take advantage of the many chances that are offered to them. Children that are thought to be different or lacking in comparison to other kids receive education as well as gifted kids (Juliandari & Pasaribu, 2021).

As a result, every child has the right to receive basic education and the ability to attain and maintain a suitable level of education while attending school (UNESCO, 2023). In light of this, all kids ought to have the chance to learn with their peers, enjoy equitable access to the general education system, and be able to get individualized instruction when it's required because of their differences or impairments (United Nations, 2021). It has been demonstrated that peer tutoring is an effective strategy that can be used in an inclusive classroom. It has been demonstrated that this method helps peer tutors grasp the material and develop their self-confidence in particular abilities (Cook, 2021). Inclusive education means diverse pupils from various backgrounds learning together in the same classroom. Together, they take part in after school activities, field trips and student governance (Open Society Foundations, 2023). It is one of the most current trends that many worldwide organizations working to educate individuals with disabilities attempt to promote in different educational systems across the world is inclusive education (Munongi, 2023). Many nations are pursuing inclusive education as an innovative idea and application in tandem with scientific advancement, the education of individuals with disabilities, and in order to fulfill and abide by the relevant international conventions (Madhesh, 2023).

These results imply that merely adopting policies is not enough to achieve sustainable inclusion; in order to guarantee fair access for all students, monitoring systems, substantial material assistance, and continual professional growth are necessary. Furthermore, research indicates that the longevity of inclusive practices is greatly influenced by strong school leadership and a favorable school climate, guaranteeing that students with disabilities and other marginalized learners experience both academic advancement and social inclusion (Ainscow, 2020). Establishing school-wide ideals, encouraging teacher cooperation, and fostering an environment where diversity is valued rather than viewed as a problem are all critical tasks for leaders. Inclusive practices can flourish when supportive leadership, teaching ability, and community involvement are combined.

Vice President Sara Duterte, Secretary of Education in the Philippines, advised educators to always promote inclusive education and to instruct kids in a language they can understand. In her keynote address at the Language and Inclusion Summit, Duterte emphasized the Department of Education's MATATAG "Make the curriculum relevant to produce job-ready, Active and responsible citizens; TAKE steps to accelerate the delivery of basic education services and provision facilities; Take good care of learners by promoting learner well-being, inclusiveness learning, and positive learning environment; and Give support for teachers to teacher better". This curriculum states that inclusion can only be the heart and soul of our reforms and efforts to improve basic education if we can put it at the center of what we do. She further stated that the program strengthened literacy among Filipino children in an inclusive manner (Department of Education, 2023).

2.3 *Mainstreaming of Learners with Special Needs*

The promise and challenge of meaningful inclusion in general education settings are highlighted by recent empirical studies on the mainstreaming of students with special needs. When students with mild to moderate disabilities are supported through structured mainstreaming programs that include co-teaching, differentiated instruction, and individualized support plans, they achieve greater academic gains and improved social participation, according to quantitative data from Philippine schools (Traya & Lopez, 2023). These results demonstrate how important well-thought-out teaching methods that are tailored to each student's needs are for promoting social integration and cognitive growth in inclusive classrooms.

This data supports international studies showing that when assistive technology and adaptive learning resources are methodically incorporated into classroom instruction, mainstreamed students gain the most. Students with special needs can access the general curriculum alongside their usually developing peers because to tools including curriculum modifications, interactive learning platforms, and speech-to-text software, which lowers obstacles to learning and participation (Gatchalian, 2025). According to the body of research, mainstreaming can greatly improve the academic and social results of students with special needs, but its effectiveness requires a diversified strategy. Well-trained teachers, easily accessible teaching resources, technology assistance, cooperative family partnerships, and institutional policies that guarantee uniform application are all necessary for effective inclusion. When these factors come together, mainstreaming can promote social interaction, meaningful learning, and fair chances for all students in a variety of educational settings.

In the Philippines, special education has gotten a lot of support as it has grown. The government, non-governmental groups, and stakeholders in response for all these years to the demands and difficulties of the times. The degree to which the public and the government are both the private sector has made significant progress in giving special needs children equal chances. The mainstreaming program is one example of inclusive education in the Philippines. Mainstreaming is the admission of learners with special needs into general educational settings or regular schools. All students' requirements should be met in mainstream educational settings, and any obstacles that would prevent them from participating should be taken down. The Philippine government may be committed to inclusive education through the mainstreaming initiative (Babiano et al., 2023).

In addition, Republic Act No. 11650, or the Establishing a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act, was enacted by former president Rodrigo Roa Duterte on March 11, 2022. This policy will include measures for enhancing access to education and other services as well as the rights of individuals with disabilities. Students with special needs can benefit from engaging in active learning by being integrated into a regular classroom. Despite the diversity and personal differences among the pupils, it also encourages inclusivity. Teachers' attitudes and perspectives regarding mainstreaming vary due to its complexity. They have both favorable and unfavorable views of mainstreaming. Major obstacles for teachers to overcome in adopting inclusive education include a lack of resources, facilities, support from the district, and/or the Department of Education. Teachers employed a variety of instructional techniques and strategies in the conduct of mainstream classroom which includes including peer tutoring (Gubalani et al., 2023).

2.4 *Language Teaching in Learners with Special Needs*

Teaching pupils with special needs is different from teaching ordinary students. Teaching English to special needs kids is typically a challenge for teachers. Communication is the first difficulty the teachers encounter. Teachers frequently fail to communicate with students who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Children with ASD may struggle to develop language skills and understand what people say to them. They frequently have trouble communicating nonverbally, such as through hand gestures, eye contact, and facial emotions. It is really challenging to elicit a verbal response from the kids. From the class observation, it was also discovered that the teachers needed to spend more time and effort grabbing the kids' attention for minimal communication, which can take anywhere from two to five months or even up to a year. Most of the time, teachers are unable to discern

between what the students desire and do not want (Yesmin et. al., 2020).

In Iligan, Philippines, the majority of teachers who work with students who have learning disabilities believe they are unqualified to do so since they have not received any special needs education training from the school. Additionally, SPED teachers are not well prepared to deal with students who have disabilities. Second, classes have inadequate learning environments, including a lack of funding, a lack of a curriculum guide, a lack of Instructional Materials (IMs), and even bad school infrastructure. Third, it may be inferred that putting students with special needs in a classroom with regular students is insufficient without the right support. Fourth, students with disabilities did not get all the assistance and services required to utilize the curriculum resources. Fifth, virtually little is being done by stakeholders to meet the requirements of the kids taking SPED programs. The pleasant working environment among school administrators, teachers, and stakeholders, on the other hand, was maintained through technical solutions to concerns and problems (Allam et al., 2021).

On their new normal in teaching English language special education teachers in Maguindanao, experience the following: Limited to Access to Child's Progress, Difficulty to Teach Finger Spelling, Limited face- to -face classes for hearing impaired learners, Lack of Strategy to Assess Students Works Properly, Inadequate Time to Plan Strategies and Assessment. It is also revealed that learning was extremely challenging. Teaching English to special education students is difficult, especially in this time of pandemic; it necessitates a significant amount of effort especially since the teacher is dealing with different disabilities in one classroom (Gallarde et al., 2022).

Studies show that teachers prefer to have students with special needs in their classes, but they lack the resources to meet their academic needs. The majority of general education teachers lack the necessary training to meet the educational needs of students who have behavioral or learning challenges. The presence of assistance, most frequently in the form of teacher assistants, and suitable resources in the classroom is crucial for instructors. The majority of teachers tend to have cautious, if not hostile views toward inclusion in the absence of a guaranteed support system (Hornby and Kauffman, 2024).

2.5 Theoretical Grounding/ Theoretical Framework

This study was viewed through the lens of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, introduced the idea of the ZPD. It describes the range of tasks that a student can complete with the assistance of a more experienced individual, like a peer, mentor, or instructor, but is still unable to complete on their own. To effectively implement peer tutoring within the framework of Vygotsky's ZPD, several key components need to be considered. Here's a framework outlining how peer tutoring can be structured to leverage the principles of the ZPD. First, evaluating of students through determining each student's present level of knowledge and proficiency. Second, pairing up with peer. Third, setting up learning objectives. Fourth, organizing guidance meetings. Fourth, using scaffolding techniques. Teach tutors how to use scaffolding strategies to help the tutee learn. Also, motivate tutors to give tips, cues, and explanations that are specific to the needs of the tutee. Sixth, giving reactions and thoughts. Encourage frequent feedback conversations between tutees and instructors. Lastly, observing and modifying through keeping a close eye on how well the peer tutoring sessions are working (McLeod, 2023).

The ZPD is dynamic and subject to alter as the student picks up new abilities and information. It is a key idea in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development, which emphasizes how language, cultural background, and social interaction influence the formation of cognitive abilities. The ZPD has real-world applications for teachers, motivating them to customize their lessons to each student's unique needs and skill level while offering suitable challenges and assistance to promote the best possible learning environment (Cho and Lee, 2020). A theoretical perspective of this study also viewed on conditions of learning theory of Robert Gagne, who emphasized that events in the environment influence the learning process. Gagne's theory identifies the general types of human capabilities that are learned (Mohamad et al., 2025). Conditions of learning theory and peer tutoring both emphasize structured, learner-centered experiences that promote active participation and skill mastery. Gagné

highlights the role of practice, performance, and feedback in stimulating cognition, while peer tutoring encourages deeper understanding through explanation, questioning, and problem-solving (Aju, 2022). Through these frameworks, teachers can systematically observe learners' behavior and gain deeper insights into the tutors' experiences, learning processes, and challenges in teaching language to learners with special needs. These perspectives also help educators design more effective support strategies that promote inclusive and meaningful language learning for all students. Furthermore, they provide a strong foundation for improving peer tutoring practices and enhancing the overall quality of special education programs.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Locale

This study was conducted in Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School, Digos Oriental District, Division of Digos City. Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School is one of the schools of Digos City Division that offers Special Education. In line with this, those learners with special needs who are capable enough to adapt to the rigors of the general education classroom are mainstreamed. Mainstreaming is the inclusion of learners with special needs into general educational setting. In Grade 4 level of Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School, there were seven learners who were mainstreamed and there were eight identified peer tutors.

3.2 Research Design

In this research, a qualitative phenomenological approach was taken to collection. Data gathered by the researcher through first-hand observation, interviews, questionnaires, participant observation, recordings recorded in natural settings, and documents were the primary sources of information utilized in this research.

3.3 Research Participants

This study had eight participants, and they were peer tutors of Grade 4 level of Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School, Digos Oriental District, Division of Digos City. The participants were selected according to the following criteria: student of Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School, grade 4 level; had above 89 general average in school year 2024-2025; those who were willing to become a peer tutor; those who were allowed by their parents to be a peer tutor. Excluded from this were those who were not enrolled in Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School, not from Grade 4 level, has below 89 average in the previous school year, not willing to be a peer tutor and were not consented by their parents to be part of the research study.

On the other hand, seven tutees participated in this study. They were Learners with Special Needs (LSENs) from Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School who were mainstreamed in the Grade 4 level. The participants in this study were chosen through a method called purposeful sampling. This purposeful sampling results in a greater depth of knowledge gleaned from a smaller number of carefully chosen cases. Using this method, the researcher found the participants using the established criteria from which eight were selected who undergone a one-on-one interview. The said number is acceptable for phenomenological study (Creswell, 2017).

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Experiences of Peer Tutors in Tutoring Language of Students with Special Needs

Peer tutors experienced significant communication challenges when teaching learners with special needs, particularly due to limited comprehension, complex vocabulary, and communication barriers. Many learners struggled to understand instructions, explanations, and classroom tasks, requiring tutors to repeatedly explain concepts, simplify language, and break lessons into manageable parts. Difficulties with unfamiliar or abstract

vocabulary further reduced learner engagement and interrupted the flow of instruction. These findings are consistent with studies by Norouzi (2023), which emphasized the importance of repeated interactions and structured dialogue to improve comprehension, and by Jumud et al. (2023), who found that many Filipino learners remained at a frustrated comprehension level despite peer tutoring. Similarly, Sparapani et al. (2021) reported that learners with receptive language difficulties often receive limited rich language input, highlighting the need for adaptive, learner-centered strategies such as repetition, multisensory instruction, and play-based activities.

Communication barriers also limited learners' ability to express themselves, follow verbal instructions, and participate in meaningful interactions. Many learners demonstrated weak expressive and receptive language skills, making it difficult for tutors to determine whether they understood the lesson or needed additional support. As a result, peer tutors relied on repeated questioning, careful observation, visual aids, gestures, and simplified prompts to facilitate communication. These findings suggest that peer tutors should be trained in communication-support strategies, including scaffolding language, using nonverbal cues, recognizing signs of misunderstanding, and creating supportive learning environments that encourage learners to communicate confidently.

Behavioral challenges, particularly hyperactivity and environmental sensitivity, also affected the effectiveness of peer tutoring sessions. Learners often displayed restlessness, impulsive behavior, excessive movement, and difficulty sustaining attention, requiring tutors to continuously redirect their focus while simultaneously providing academic support. These behaviors increased the cognitive and emotional demands placed on peer tutors and often disrupted lesson flow. Consistent with these findings, Yegencik et al. (2025) reported that although school-based interventions improve attention and academic skills, hyperactivity remains difficult to manage through school interventions alone, reinforcing the need for structured and adaptive tutoring approaches.

Environmental sensitivity further complicated tutoring sessions, as many learners were easily distracted by classroom noise, classmates' movements, and other visual or auditory stimuli. Tutors frequently had to repeat instructions, modify activities, and regain learners' attention to sustain engagement. These findings align with Mallory and Keehn (2021), who found that sensory processing difficulties reduce task engagement, and Thompson and Martin (2022), who highlighted classroom noise as a major contributor to off-task behavior among neurodiverse learners. Such evidence underscores the importance of implementing sensory-sensitive teaching practices during peer tutoring.

Finally, the physical learning environment significantly influenced the quality of language tutoring sessions. Crowded, noisy classrooms and the absence of quiet, dedicated learning spaces reduced learners' concentration and limited effective communication between tutors and tutees. These environmental conditions often undermined the benefits of peer tutoring, particularly for learners who are highly sensitive to distractions. As emphasized by Margas (2023), maintaining a calm, structured, and inclusive classroom climate that promotes acceptance, empathy, and mutual respect is essential for maximizing learner engagement and improving the effectiveness of peer tutoring for learners with special needs.

4.2 Strategies Employ by Peer Tutors in Tutoring Language of Students with Special Needs

Peer tutors recognized that addressing learners' comfort and basic needs enhanced the effectiveness of language tutoring by creating a supportive, stable, and emotionally safe learning environment. Beyond academic instruction, tutors ensured that learners were comfortable, allowed breaks when they became tired, provided encouragement, and minimized distractions before beginning lessons. These practices helped learners remain focused, motivated, and emotionally prepared to participate in language activities. The findings imply that peer tutoring programs should adopt a holistic, learner-centered approach by training tutors to recognize signs of fatigue, discomfort, or emotional stress and to establish calm, structured, and supportive learning environments. Empirical evidence by Van der Meulen et al. (2021) supports this finding, demonstrating that learners with special educational needs show greater behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement when their autonomy, relatedness, and competence are supported.

To overcome communication challenges such as limited comprehension, complex vocabulary, and communication barriers, peer tutors relied on repetition, reinforcement, multisensory instruction, and learner-centered scaffolding. Repeated practice and structured review enabled learners to retain language concepts more effectively, while visual aids, gestures, flashcards, pictures, tactile materials, and interactive activities strengthened comprehension, vocabulary development, and memory retention. Tutors further adapted instruction by simplifying language, slowing the pace of lessons, repeating explanations, and using nonverbal supports to match learners' readiness, communication abilities, and sensory preferences. These findings suggest that peer tutoring programs should intentionally integrate evidence-based repetition techniques, multisensory learning materials, and individualized instructional adaptations. Consistent with Butowska et al. (2024), spaced repetition enhances long-term memory, while these multisensory and scaffolded approaches promote inclusive and responsive language instruction.

Peer tutors also addressed learners' behavioral challenges by incorporating creative, interactive, and play-based teaching strategies that maintained attention and increased motivation. Through educational games, storytelling, singing, digital tools, puzzles, manipulatives, role-playing, and cooperative activities, tutors transformed language learning into enjoyable and meaningful experiences. These multisensory activities reduced off-task behaviors, minimized learning anxiety, and encouraged active participation while strengthening vocabulary, phonemic awareness, comprehension, and communication skills. The findings support Oikarinen and Havu (2022), who emphasized that multimodal and play-based instruction enhances engagement, comprehension, and long-term retention among learners with special needs by promoting active participation and strengthening neural connections associated with learning.

Peer tutors sustained learners' motivation through positive reinforcement, supportive communication, and nurturing relationships. Praise, patience, encouragement, token economies, and opportunities for play fostered learners' confidence, reduced anxiety, and increased their willingness to participate in language activities. Immediate and constructive feedback helped reinforce desired behaviors, improve attention, and strengthen communication skills, particularly among learners with developmental and attentional difficulties. These findings highlight the importance of equipping peer tutors with strategies that combine positive reinforcement and responsive communication to build trusting tutor–learner relationships and promote sustained engagement. This is supported by Gitimoghaddam et al. (2022), who found that immediate feedback and positive reinforcement significantly improve communication, social interaction, and learning engagement among learners with autism when implemented in natural peer-mediated learning environments.

4.3 Valuable Insights of Peer Tutors in Tutoring Language of Students with Special Needs

Peer tutoring fostered the development of empathy, patience, and inclusive dispositions among tutors through continuous interaction with learners with special needs. By observing learners' perspectives, regulating their own responses, and adapting instruction to individual needs, tutors became more emotionally sensitive, patient, and committed to inclusive education. These experiences strengthened their ability to support diverse learners and promoted more inclusive classroom practices. The findings suggest that sustained peer-mediated interactions cultivate positive personal dispositions that extend beyond tutoring sessions. This is consistent with Van den Broeck et al. (2021), who reported that peer-support programs enhance empathy, social awareness, communication skills, and positive attitudes toward inclusion, particularly when combined with training and reflective activities. Similarly, Feng et al. (2024) found that well-structured Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) programs develop tutors' interpersonal competencies, leadership, and readiness to support diverse learners.

Peer tutoring also contributed significantly to tutors' personal growth and future career preparation by providing authentic teaching experiences that developed confidence, adaptive instruction, classroom management, communication, and reflective practice. Through repeated teaching opportunities, tutors gained a deeper understanding of learners with special needs and recognized the importance of individualized instruction and continuous support. These experiences mirror essential competencies expected of future educators, suggesting that

peer tutoring serves as an effective experiential learning platform. Toulia (2023) supports these findings, emphasizing that inclusive peer tutoring promotes reflective practice, leadership, and commitment to inclusive education, making it a valuable component of teacher preparation.

In addition to professional readiness, peer tutoring strengthened tutors' academic mastery and metacognitive development. Preparing lessons, explaining concepts, anticipating learners' misconceptions, and evaluating instructional strategies deepened tutors' understanding of language concepts while enhancing their planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation skills. These experiences encouraged greater academic responsibility, improved study habits, and increased confidence in teaching. Research likewise indicates that peer tutoring enhances tutors' metacognitive skills, reflective practice, content mastery, and self-regulated learning, particularly when programs intentionally incorporate metacognitive prompts, questioning techniques, and structured feedback (Al Yahyaei et al., 2024).

Peer tutoring also provided tutors with a strong sense of emotional fulfillment. Building compassionate relationships with learners, celebrating their progress, and witnessing improvements in confidence and communication gave tutors a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and self-worth. These meaningful interactions nurtured empathy, patience, and emotional intelligence while reinforcing the value of helping others succeed. The findings suggest that peer tutoring benefits not only learners but also tutors' emotional well-being. Toulia (2023) similarly reported that inclusive peer tutoring enhances emotional awareness, empathy, and motivation by creating supportive and emotionally secure learning environments for both tutors and learners.

Finally, peer tutoring strengthened tutors' interpersonal relationships and social development through continuous collaboration and meaningful interactions with learners with special needs. Tutors developed active listening, empathy, respectful communication, flexibility, and teamwork while learning to adjust their communication styles according to learners' diverse needs. These experiences fostered a strong sense of belonging, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, creating an inclusive classroom community that supported the growth of both tutors and tutees. Consistent with these findings, Toulia (2023) concluded that inclusive peer tutoring promotes prosocial behavior, tolerance, social understanding, and stronger interpersonal relationships among peer tutors.

5. Summary, implications, recommendations

5.1 Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the experiences of peer tutors of Grade 4 Level of Don Mariano Marcos Elementary School, Digos Oriental District, Division of Digos City. It focused on participants' facilitation in tutoring language of students with special needs.

A variety of experiences were recalled, considered, and expressed in the participants' own words. In order to identify the developing themes of the study, key phrases from the comments and transcripts were recognized as thematic statements. Navigating complexities in creating supportive and inclusive language learning environments for learners with special needs, was the general theme created for the experiences of peer tutors in tutoring language of students with special needs. Out from this theme, there were three sub-themes created and these are the following: communication, behavioral and environmental challenges. Based on their shared experiences it was emphasized the need for emotional intelligence, flexibility, and resilience in addition to instructional proficiency when coaching students with special needs. Establishing a welcoming and inclusive learning environment was a dynamic process that requires ongoing adaptation, introspection, and empathy.

Implementing adaptive and multisensory instructional approaches to foster engagement, comprehension, and retention in language learning for students with special needs was general theme created for strategies employ by peer tutors in tutoring language of students with special needs. Out from this, it generated seven sub-themes

namely : enhancing learning and retention through repetition and reinforcement, utilizing creative and interactive teaching, adapting instructions and learner-centered scaffolding, using multi-sensory and visual strategies for language development, integrating play-based interactive and creative learning, facilitating engagement through attending to learner comfort and basic needs, and motivating and engaging through positive reinforcement and supportive communication.

In particular, the findings showed in coaching kids with special needs, the importance of emotional intelligence, adaptability, and resilience in addition to instructional excellence. The process of creating a warm and inclusive learning environment was dynamic and calls for constant adjustment, reflection, and empathy. Lastly, holistic personal and professional development through empathetic and inclusive peer tutoring was the general theme created for the valuable insights peer tutors in tutoring language of students with special needs. Out from this, it generated five sub-themes, namely: development of empathy, patience, and inclusive dispositions, personal growth and professional readiness, academic mastery and metacognitive growth, fostering personal growth and emotional fulfillment through altruistic engagement, and social connection and interpersonal growth.

5.2 Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for inclusive education, particularly in strengthening the implementation of peer tutoring as a supportive strategy for learners with special needs. The experiences of peer tutors revealed that while peer tutoring promotes inclusion and collaborative learning, tutors also faced communication challenges such as learners' limited comprehension, difficulty with complex vocabulary and communication barriers which implies that peer tutors must be trained in strategies that accommodate varying levels of communicative ability, including the use of nonverbal cues, scaffolding language input, and creating a safe, low-pressure environment that encourages learners to express themselves. Tutors also need skills to recognize signs of misunderstanding, prompt responses effectively, and adapt their teaching style to each learner's communicative needs.

Tutors also encountered behavioral challenges including hyperactivity and environmental sensitivity. These findings highlight that environmental sensitivity demands careful management and a supportive instructional environment, as tutors must navigate both behavioral regulation and emotional reassurance to ensure effective learning for students with special needs. Tutors must devote more time and energy to keeping these students' attention and emotional comfort since they are quickly distracted by movement, noise, or changes in their environment. This suggests that in order to lessen sensory overload, controlled, low-distraction learning environments and the application of soothing, regular routines are necessary.

The last challenges that peer tutors experienced was the environmental challenges which include notably noisy classroom. The results show important implications for the planning and execution of language tutoring programs for students with exceptional needs. The efficiency of peer tutoring sessions was considerably diminished by the ongoing environmental issues, such as noise, congested locations, and the lack of dedicated quiet learning areas. The absence of a controlled, low-stimulation setting made it difficult for students with exceptional needs to stay focused, follow directions, and persevere through reading assignments since they are extremely sensitive to visual and aural distractions. In order to ensure that physical environments support rather than impede the learning and communication needs of children with special needs, program developers and school administrators should view environmental management as a crucial part of inclusive education.

According to the study, peer tutoring provides significant chances for the overall growth of both tutors and tutees. Peer tutors help students with special needs succeed academically and socially, but they also help them develop critical abilities like problem-solving, effective communication, emotional control, and social responsibility. However, managing behavioral issues, communication breakdowns, and environmental sensitivities necessitates constant direction and emotional support from educators, highlighting the necessity of organized mentoring and monitoring. These results are consistent with social constructivism's tenets, which highlight

education as a socially mediated process based on communication and collective meaning-making.

Lastly, the results have significant ramifications for inclusive education practice and policy. By proactively addressing the linguistic, behavioral, and environmental problems that come with teaching students with special needs, integrating peer tutoring into the basic education curriculum can reinforce schools' commitment to inclusion. By integrating structured peer tutoring programs into regular classroom activities, schools may establish learner-centered, low-distraction, supportive settings that celebrate variety and promote teamwork. Schools may create more equitable, compassionate, and inclusive learning environments where all students, regardless of ability, are given meaningful opportunity to achieve academically, socially, and emotionally by methodically tackling these issues.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the thematic qualitative results, these are the recommendations that address the communication, behavioral, and environmental challenges encountered by peer tutors in teaching language to learners with special needs, the researcher recommended the following:

Department of Education (DepEd) officials may consider strengthening and improving peer tutoring programs by formally integrating them as a core component of inclusive education initiatives. To enhance program effectiveness, DepEd may reinforce inclusive education policies through the development of specialized training modules focused on communication scaffolding strategies, such as simplifying language, pre-teaching vocabulary, and utilizing visual and multimodal supports. To guarantee program quality and accountability, clear policy guidelines should be developed to define the qualifications, selection criteria, and responsibilities of peer tutors, while also addressing concerns regarding the appropriateness of children serving as peer tutors, including their maturity, capability, readiness, and ability to support their peers effectively

School Heads or Principals are encouraged to establish welcoming spaces that inspire cooperation, compassion, and diversity among students. They may ensure the availability of appropriate tutoring areas and facilitate regular capacity-building sessions that enhance tutors' skills in simplifying instructions, managing behavioral concerns, and adjusting to learners' sensitivities by include peer tutoring programs in school improvement plans and offering peer tutors monitoring, mentorship, and recognition systems, they should guarantee the programs' long-term viability.

Teachers, particularly in language and SPED programs, may closely guide peer tutors by modeling simple, age-appropriate communication strategies and closely monitoring tutoring sessions to ensure consistent and effective support for Grade 4 tutors. Teachers may demonstrate inclusive teaching practices such as using short instructions, familiar vocabulary, visual aids, and guided practice suited to the developmental level of both tutors and tutees. Regular observation, feedback, and coaching should be provided to help peer tutors improve their teaching and interaction skills.

Peer tutors are encouraged to use clear and concise language, visual cues, and positive behavior management techniques, while also embracing the opportunity to cultivate empathy—a core value in Values Education—through their meaningful interactions with learners who need patience and understanding. Peer tutors may also be given formal chances to reflect on their experiences, and peer tutoring should be incorporated as a supplemental educational technique to differentiated teaching.

Parents of both peer tutors and learners with special needs may reinforce supportive attitudes at home by encouraging empathy, responsibility, and willingness to assist others, while also communicating with teachers to help address challenges tutors may encounter. They should be encouraged to support and reinforce inclusive values at home. They may collaborate with teachers to monitor their children's progress and emotional well-being, ensuring that peer tutoring experiences remain positive and constructive. Parental awareness and involvement can also help sustain motivation and consistency in learners' engagement with language activities.

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