

## Benefits of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL): The Perspective of a Peer Tutor

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### ABSTRACT

Peer Assisted learning is a popular T/L activity in medical education. There are limited reports to support the effectiveness of peer learning effect in the peers who participate in peer assisted learning (PAL) in the training of students needing additional curricular support (SNACS). A peer tutor's experience in peer assisted learning in SNACS program is documented in this perspective.

#### Keywords:

*Peer Tutor, Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), Peer Learning Effect, Students Needing Additional Curricular Support (SNACS), Two-Way Learning Process*

Peer assisted learning (PAL) is an effective method of T/L in medical education (Shenoy et al. 2020). Whenever the high achieving students of the cohort are asked (on voluntary basis) to mentor the students needing additional curricular support (SNACS) of their batch, there is always a question on whether the peers also benefit from these Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) sessions. Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Medicine used PAL to enhance the academic performance of SNACS.

Peer tutors are expected to benefit from the experience of peer tutoring (Burgess et al. 2016, Shenoy et al. 2020). Some key benefits include:

#### Deepened Understanding

Peer tutors often gain a deeper understanding of the subject as they explain concepts to their peers. The peers help students SNACS to create concept maps. Further, such teaching reinforces their own learning, leading to a stronger grasp of the subject. It would be useful for enabling them to be prepared for competitive exams for licensing and postgraduate studies in future.

#### Development of Soft Skills

Peer tutors enhance essential skills such as communication, leadership, and empathy. Explaining complex concepts in simpler terms improves their ability to articulate ideas lucidly.

## Confidence Building

Serving as a peer tutor helps students build self-confidence in their academic abilities and communication skills, fostering personal growth. In the process, they serve as role models to build confidence among peers.

## Preparation for Future Roles

Peer tutoring allows students to experience mentorship and collaboration, which are essential in professional settings especially, especially in fields like medicine where teamwork and inter-professional collaboration and teaching skills are critical.

## Positive Reinforcement

Tutoring SNACS reinforces a sense of responsibility and achievement, motivating peer tutors in their own academic pursuits (distinctions/award, etc).

It is always a dilemma for Peer Tutors to join the PAL sessions as it involves extra commitment of time, communication and effort in mentoring.

Though the expectations are that the Peer tutors also benefit from such interactive sessions, it is important to document such evidence to motivate other students to voluntarily participate in peer mentoring program. The below letter from a Peer Tutor and student of second year MBBS (First author) on her experience is an attempt to showcase such a testimony.

*Our college, Manipal University College Malaysia, offers a unique two-way learning process in the form of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) which I am a part of. When I started with PAL, what initially seemed like a daunting burden, feels like a blessing in disguise now. I am glad that my teachers have given me the opportunity to be a part of an exhilarating experience of being a tutor in Microbiology PAL session.*

1. *Mutual Beneficial Deep learning: Peer Assisted Learning is a two-way learning process, in which students, who are high achievers in their university examinations, assist their peers, SNACS who were not able to perform satisfactorily in their exams. In the PAL sessions, the PAL peers share with SNACS their simple tips and tricks to perform better at the examinations. PAL is not only beneficial to the tutees who get to jot down some shortcuts, but also to the Peer tutors who are able to dive deep into the topic and understand it better.*
2. *Conducive Learning Environment: PAL creates a better learning environment for the tutees, in which they are much more comfortable. In my experience assisting my peers, I understood that they are much more comfortable clarifying doubts with me rather than approaching the teachers, thus enhancing their learning experience. Teaching made me think, analyse and retain.*
3. *Bridging Communication: PAL tutors act as a bridge of communication between the teachers and the SNACS, which in turn helps to improve their academic performance.*

4. *Exam preparedness: As a PAL tutor, I find it easier to cope with the studies during my exams. With so much of the syllabus at hand, it gets very overwhelming during the exams to revise everything. But with PAL, I become confident with the must know topics. It helps to release a little bit of pressure from the exam preparation (pressure cooker).*
5. *Empathy, teamwork and collaboration: PAL has made me interact with and understand my classmates better. It changed my perception about SNACS. They are able to interact and contribute better to the learning session with little motivation and support. The PAL sessions give us a level playing field without differentiation between students of different levels of academic performance.*
6. *Tutor learning effect: This reciprocal benefit in peer tutoring which is often referred to as the "tutor learning effect" is evident from my experience. The in-depth learning helped me to secure distinctions in all my year two subjects and helped me to ace the national level inter-university oratorical competition in Parasitology.*

*In conclusion, PAL's vision of a dynamic educational approach, collaborating critical thinking with personal growth, empowers both tutees and tutors, creates a symbiotic relationship, and enhances academic achievements on both sides. It also encourages social development, preparing students for collaborative learning and teamwork- the two elixirs to survive, specifically, in a healthcare field, and the ever-evolving world, in general. It is rightfully said by Phil Collins, "In learning you will teach, and in teaching you will learn." It's truly an honour to be a part of PAL.*

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