

Experiences of Peer Tutors of a Korean Language Peer Tutoring Program at a U.S. University: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study explored the experiences of peer tutors of a Korean language peer tutoring program at a U.S. university. Using qualitative methodology and gathering data from pre- and post-tutorial program individual interviews, monthly in-program group interviews, and reflective papers, this study aimed to investigate experiences of eight Korean language peer tutors. The findings revealed reasons for being peer tutors, how peer tutors addressed learners' needs, the importance of empathy in peer tutoring, and benefits of peer tutoring. This study's results can serve as valuable data for creating, growing, and improving Korean language tutoring programs at universities. Peer tutoring can be a useful tool for enhancing the effectiveness of Korean language education at universities, especially as Korean language learners increase.

Keywords: peer tutoring, peer learning, tutors, undergraduate language education, Korean language education

1. Introduction

The number of Korean language learners has been rapidly growing worldwide, partially due to the increasing popularity of Korean popular culture (Y. Choi, 2021; Hall & Otte, 2021). While there has been extensive research on the Korean language curriculum, teaching strategies, assessment methods, and technology-based learning (E. Choi, 2016; Kang, 2013; Song, 2016), there has been relatively little work on peer tutoring as a teaching and learning strategy within Korean language education, particularly in higher education.

Peer tutoring falls under the umbrella of Peer-assisted Learning (PAL)—or Peer Learning (PL)—with peer instruction, peer teaching, near-peer instruction, and peer collaboration. Peer tutoring is a “a system whereby learners help each other and learn by teaching” (Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006, p. 13), and is often used interchangeably with ‘peer mentoring’, ‘peer-assisted learning’, and ‘peer coaching’ depending on the role of peer tutors. In higher education, a growing body of research has explored the advantages of peer tutoring programs and how it contributes to enhancing academic achievement and student adjustment (Arco-Tirado, Fernandez-Martin, & Fernandez-Balboa, 2011; M. Kim, 2015; Topping, 2005). Existing literature about peer tutoring in higher education focuses on two major areas: writing and communication centers; and discipline-specific tutoring systems (Ervin, 2016; Iwata & Furnedge, 2016; M. Kim, 2015). Previous studies show how peer tutoring benefits not only learners (e.g. tutees), but also peer tutors. Peer tutoring helps both tutors and students develop their knowledge and skills, gain a deeper awareness of the learning process, acquire communication skills, develop friendships, enhance leadership skills, and participate in group work better (Kalkowshi, 1995; M. Kim, 2015).

With the growing number of Korean language learners, it is essential that we examine peer tutoring as an educational strategy for classrooms of diverse learners. While there are some U.S. universities that offer Korean language tutoring programs and have achieved anecdotal success, many of the features of Korean language tutoring centers in U.S. universities remain unknown. Particularly, the experiences of students in Korean language peer tutoring—both learners and peer tutors—are scarce. It is important to explore Korean language peer tutoring programs at universities as well as students who engage in peer tutoring, given the increasing number of Korean language learners and growing need for Korean teachers. To this end, this study aims to address the following questions: Why do students decide to become Korean language peer tutors? What are peer tutors' experiences of Korean language peer tutoring? How do peer tutors relate to Korean language learners and meet learners' needs? What benefits do peer tutors accrue from tutoring activities? Understanding peer tutors' experiences may shed light on utilizing peer tutoring as an educational

tool in Korean language education, as well as how to create, grow, strengthen, and improve Korean language tutoring programs at universities.

2. Framing ideas and Informing Literature

To understand the experiences of Korean language peer tutors, two framing ideas help provide a context for the current study. First, research on peer tutoring in higher education allows us to understand peer tutoring programs at universities. Second, research on peer tutoring in language education at universities provides background to understand Korean language tutoring programs. These two framing ideas from the literature provides inclusive groundwork for analyzing the Korean language peer tutoring programs at U.S. universities. In addition, the experiences of undergraduate Korean language peer tutors can be understood using these areas of research.

2.1 Peer Tutoring in Higher Education

Research on the types, forms, and benefits of peer tutoring and peer learning in higher education are well documented (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001; Colver & Fry, 2016). Peer tutoring has been used in various contexts and different levels of teaching in higher education in fields of mathematics, medicine, physics, psychology, and nursing (Anderson & Boud, 1996; Kang, Lee, & Joung, 2021). Depending on the types and purposes of the university peer tutoring centers, the roles of peer tutoring varies as well. According to M. Kim (2015), these roles include: supplementing main course functions; increasing students' opportunities to succeed and persist at the institutions; improving students' skills (e.g. communication, writing, reading, math, public presentation); helping to improve leadership and interpersonal skills; and improving career-related skills.

Advocates of peer tutoring in higher education document the various advantages and benefits of peer tutoring for students who utilize the peer tutoring services (Colvin, 2007). Through peer tutoring programs, students develop study skills, gain self-confidence, improve communication, foster cooperation, enhance understanding of problems and concepts, improve leadership skills, and social support among students. Students who use learning centers spend time on tasks in scaffolded learning environments, practicing and applying skills learned in class, form connections with peers, and apply active learning strategies to course material (Sanford & Steiner, 2021). Also, students may receive valuable help in understanding learning problems from peer tutors since fellow students have similar learning experiences (Moust & Schmidt, 1994). Studies have also shown how peer tutoring boosts academic performance and confidence (Kang, et al., 2021; M. Kim, 2015).

Along with the effectiveness and benefits of peer tutoring for students who use peer tutoring services at colleges and universities, recent literature about peer tutoring has focused on the peer tutors engaged in peer tutoring. Students who have the attributes of potential tutors include those with awareness of the benefits of peer tutoring, agency in their own journey as leaders, and understanding what it is to work hard to succeed (Sanford & Steiner, 2021). Tutors should also have clear communicative ability, interpersonal warmth, empathy and patience, a capacity for growth, and a willingness to face uncomfortable situations (Topping, 1996). Regarding students' experiences and opinions of peer tutoring, Hammond, Bithell, Jones, and Bidgood (2010) found that peer tutors showed enhanced or increased personal development, motivation and confidence through peer tutoring programs. Additionally, a study by Okawa and scholars (2010) about English peer tutors revealed that being a peer tutor gave students the opportunity to reflect on their own identities, improve their own writing skills, and increase their cultural sensitivity.

In addition to the educational effectiveness and benefits of peer tutoring, colleges and universities have been employing peer tutoring to address the challenges of expenditure on student services. Higher education in the U.S. is facing several challenges including growing diversity of the student body, growing resource constraints, growing demands for accessibility and equity, and increasing instructional expenditure (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011; Ehrenberg, 2012; Pugatch & Wilson, 2018). Peer tutoring has been an effective educational tool to resolve these concerns: peer tutoring is low cost because tutors are also students (Pugatch & Wilson, 2018); student-tutors can be hired at a relatively low wage or can be compensated by academic credits; peer tutoring can help remove financial barriers of advising at higher education institutions. Peer tutoring also helps support student retention rates, academic outcomes, as well as degree completion rates (Wolf-wendel, Ward, & Kinsey, 2009).

2.2 Peer Tutoring in Language Education at Universities

In the field of language education at universities, one of the most researched areas is peer-assisted learning at university writing and communication centers. The prominence of writing and communication centers in postsecondary educational institutions show that "developing written and oral communication skills is important across all of the academic fields" (M. Kim, 2015, p. 4). Previous studies examined the generally positive benefits and effectiveness of writing centers (Clarence, 2016; Dowse & Van Rensburg, 2015; Driscoll, 2015). While there have been numerous

studies documenting the effectiveness and advantages of peer tutoring in English at university writing centers, there have also been challenges and concerns that have emerged as well. For example, writing centers are a space where complex dynamics between native English-speaking tutors and English language learners surface. Writing tutors are generally native English speakers while students who seek help are English language learners. Hence issues of dominance often arise between L1 tutors and English language learning tutees. In their study, Bell and Elledge (2008) found that linguistic dominance occurs at university writing center sessions, and suggested there needs to be adequate training for writing tutors to effectively work with students of diverse backgrounds.

In addition to peer tutoring in English, many U.S. universities offer peer tutoring in other languages (e.g. ASL, Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Russian, Portuguese) through language centers, campus units, or academic and non-academic departments at universities. Savas, AuCoin, and Ferreira (2015) critically analyzed the trajectory of the Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) program for foreign language courses (focusing initially on Japanese and later Spanish) at Bridgewater State University, and showed how it was important that partnership between learners, tutors, supervisors and professors was essential in building an interactive and non-judgmental learning environment, specifically in language learning. In a study about target-language peer tutoring hours in Spanish language education at a U.S. university, Castañeda (2018) found that there was a significant correlation between the number of tutoring hours students complete and their (numerical) final course grades, echoing previous research on the educational effectiveness of peer tutoring.

While many studies have broadly examined peer tutoring in language education at universities, very little research has been done to investigate peer tutoring in Korean language education at universities. Korean language peer tutoring programs at the university-level gives opportunities for beginner and intermediate-level students a greater opportunity to practice and learn Korean while allowing native-Korean speaking students to gain pedagogical experiences in helping other students develop their language skills. Existing studies that report on peer tutoring in Korean language education are limited to Korean academic writing at Korean universities (Ahn, 2017; S. Kim, 2015) or unstructured peer tutoring, which resembles language exchange programs rather than Korean language peer tutoring programs (Baek, Yoo, Lee, Jung, & Baek, 2017). For example, Baek and colleagues (2017) addressed peer tutoring in Korean language in the context of a U.S. university, but focused on peer tutoring in the form of university language exchange between students. Baek et al. (2017) studied seven university students who were learning Korean and seven Korean university students learning English that were paired to randomly conduct language exchange via a Korean instant messenger tool, not as part of a peer tutoring language program. They found that although the results showed positive impacts of language exchange, the utilization of the instant messenger was not effective. Studies on peer tutoring in the context of Korean language peer tutoring programs in higher education remain scarce.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Setting

This study was conducted at a U.S. university, which is located in the Northeastern region of the United States. I chose this university because it was one of the universities in the United States that offered a Korean language peer tutoring program. The Korean tutoring program in the current study was established in order to address challenges including resource constraints, increasing instructional expenditure (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011; Ehrenberg 2012; Pugatch & Wilson, 2018), and a lack of accessibility to the local Korean community and Korean native speakers. The Korean language tutoring program was staffed by peer students, with the Korean program director leading the unit and other faculty members (e.g. Korean language lecturers, teaching assistant) supervising when needed.

The Korean language tutoring center was open everyday of the week (Monday through Friday), two hours per day. The location of peer tutoring was at a meeting room on campus that seated approximately 20 people. At the Korean tutoring center, one tutor works with one tutee at a time on a first-come first-served basis. The tutoring program was open to all students, but was utilized particularly by students who were taking Korean language courses (1st Year, 2nd Year, or 3rd Year Korean) or Korean culture courses at the university. Tutors of this program have been Korean international students in the US for their undergraduate degree, who are native Korean speakers.

In order for undergraduate students to enroll and register as a peer tutor, students were required to go through a one-on-one interview with the Korean program director. When selected, students registered to receive internship/practicum credits for their tutoring activities. Requirements for the course included a tutor log, in which after each tutoring session, tutors record the tutoring date and time, as well as topics covered with the students; monthly meetings; and a final reflection report. At the time of data collection, there were a total of eight undergraduate international Korean students that were enrolled as tutors for the Korean language peer tutoring program.

3.2 Participants

There were eight participants in this study (see Table 1) who were all Korean international undergraduate students, studying at the university. I reached out to the eight participants of this study two months prior to conducting the research for an initial meeting. After receiving their consent, I continued to keep in touch and set up interview dates with each participant as well as the group via email. There were four female and four male participants in this study, and their ages ranged from 21-25 years old. Prior to data collection, the university's research review board reviewed and approved the present study before it was initiated in order for the research to be conducted ethically. Voluntary, informed, and comprehended consent was obtained by all participants of this study prior to data collection as well.

Table 1. Information about participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Year at University	Major	Hours of Tutoring
Micah	Male	25	3rd Year	Accounting	5 hours/week
Ryder	Male	22	2nd Year	Business	5 hours/week
Wesley	Male	22	2nd Year	Business	2 hours/week
Piper	Female	23	4th Year	Business	2 hours/week
Vincent	Male	23	2nd Year	International Trade	5 hours/week
Lydia	Female	21	3rd Year	Communications	5 hours/week
Reagan	Female	22	4th Year	Psychology	8 hours/week
Eloise	Female	21	3rd Year	International Trade	5 hours/week

3.3 Data Collection

This research was constructed as a qualitative study in order to explore the experiences of Korean language peer tutors and elaborate on the common themes that emerged. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research focuses on the process, meaning, and understanding of social phenomena. In addition, in qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument of data collection and analysis. Qualitative methodology is used to gain insights into people's feelings and thoughts, and does not attempt to generalize the findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The number of Korean international university students who are Korean language tutors at U.S. universities is small, so qualitative inquiry was adequate; qualitative research has more to do with the information richness of cases selected than with the sample size.

The data for the present study was collected using three major sources: pre- and post- tutorial program individual interviews, monthly focus group interviews, and reflective papers. First, for the pre- and post- tutorial program interviews that were conducted individually, a semi-constructed interview form was used. This is because the study aimed to explore the Korean language tutors' inner world and their perspectives and experiences regarding the Korean language tutoring program (Patton, 2002). The form included questions regarding tutors' personal information and four open-ended questions about their motivation and expectations for participating in peer tutoring, things they may have experienced or observed during their Korean language tutoring process, and suggestions for the challenging issues they may have stated. Each pre- and post- tutorial program individual interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Due to the fact that the participants were native Korean speakers, I explained to them that they may use either Korean or English; whichever language they felt more comfortable with for the interview. Each individual interview was recorded with the participants' consent and was transcribed.

In order to provide a setting for all eight Korean language tutors to reflect on the questions asked by the interviewer, focus group interviews were conducted. Focus groups provide a more natural environment than that of individual interview because participants "are influenced and influenced by others- just as they are in real life" (Casey & Kueger, 2000, p. 11). Focus groups are also used to clarify, extend, qualify, or challenge data collected through other methods (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). There were four focus group interviews in total, and each focus group interview lasted about 45 minutes to one hour. The questions of the focus group interview were similar to the individual interviews, including challenges peer tutors may have had, things they have learned through tutoring, and overall feedback they had for the program. Similar to the individual interviews, the participants were given a choice to

either use Korean or English during the focus group interview. The focus group interviews were also recorded with the participants' consent and was transcribed.

All eight Korean language tutors were required to write reflective papers at the end of the tutoring program. This gave tutors the opportunity to reflect and respond to some of the issues they may have brought up throughout the semester. While the reflective paper did not have prompts, I explained that topics that the participants could discuss in the paper may be their overall experiences, evaluation of their own tutoring, areas to improve, and any other observations or suggestions. These reflective papers were turned into the author via email after the tutoring program ended.

Collected data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis has been defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Content analysis is an especially suitable methodology when there is not enough existing information or knowledge regarding a certain phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). I coded and categorized the transcripts of the individual interviews and focus group interviews as well as reflective papers to identify common themes that emerged. There were several inductive and comparative coding iterations throughout the analysis process.

4. Results

This section describes four key themes from the data: reasons why participants became peer tutors; meeting learners' needs; *gong-gam* (empathy) as an essential element to peer tutoring; and benefits of peer tutoring.

4.1 Reasons Why Participants Became Peer Tutors

There were two main reasons that emerged in why participants decided to become tutors for the Korean language tutoring program. Seven out of eight participants explained that one of the reasons why they wanted to become peer tutors was to “help students.” In fact, five out of the eight participants had experience teaching in formal or informal settings, which was a major motivation to become a tutor. Micah, who was a volunteer English teacher at an elementary school and part-time teacher at a *hakwon* (private institution) in Korea, stated that he “had lots of fun” teaching students in Korea and wanted to continue his teaching experience at the university. Similarly, Wesley also decided to become a peer tutor because of his Korean language tutoring experiences at a Korean high school. He reported “I love to help other students who are struggling with problems that I can help.”

The second reason why participants became peer tutors was because they wanted to learn from students they tutored. Six of the participants mentioned the tutoring program was not only to teach, but also to learn. For Lydia, who never had teaching experience, the tutoring program was a chance to “learn how to teach since this is my first time to teach someone.” Other participants described how they wanted to “learn their [students'] culture”, “learn things from them [students]” and “learn how to teach someone [Korean] in English.” Piper, a former English education major, stated: “I want to help foreign students in Korean language education, and I also want to learn from them. I want to share many thoughts about the Korean language and Korean culture and learn about foreign students' perceptions about Korea and learn about my own thoughts as a Korean student.”

It is noteworthy that when referring to students who used the tutoring center, the participants used terms such as “*waegukin haksaeung*” (foreigner student), “foreign student”, “*dareun nara haksaeung* (other country student), “other countries' people”, or “international student”, even when they were referring to American students. While participants were international students in the US themselves, they still identified themselves as “native” and “*Hangukkin* (Korean person)” and the learners as “*waegukin*” or “international” in the Korean language peer tutoring context.

4.2 Meeting Learners' Needs

Participants reported that there was a wide range of reasons students visited the tutoring center including enriching their understanding of the course material, practicing pronunciation, receiving help with homework and course-related assignments (e.g. skit scripts, speaking tests, dialogue practice, workbook questions, essays, presentations), understanding grammar, and wanting to learn about culture. Participants reported that students visiting the tutoring center needed help with all four skills including reading, speaking, listening, and writing. All participants indicated that they did their best addressing the needs of learners (e.g. “trying best to explain at students' eye level”, “figuring problems together”). For example, Vincent shared that he tried to determine students' Korean proficiency, what vocabulary and grammar they knew before helping them with the content they brought. Participants also attempted to use different examples from the textbooks, departmental resources, and popular culture as examples when assisting students to solve different problems.

However, participants expressed that grammar was the most difficult out of all the learners' needs. All participants were native Korean speakers and did not learn Korean grammar officially. Generally, when faced with questions about grammar they did not know, participants used the online tools and students' textbooks, or referred to other tutors and the supervisor professor to address their questions. For some participants, however, trying to explain grammar in English, which was not their first language, was "uncomfortable" and "a struggle." Three of the participants expressed they had anxiety about teaching grammar incorrectly (e.g. "was afraid of teaching wrong grammar to students", "worried that I explain grammar wrongly"), and also found it difficult to explain the slight nuances between different grammar points (e.g. -으려고 하다, -을 거다). As an example, Reagan recognized this challenge saying, "I was not fully trained in learning grammar, so there was a limit of explaining grammar to students and it is the most regrettable part during the tutoring session."

While participants reported that a majority of students came with course-related material (e.g. assignments, homework, textbook-related problems), this was not always the case. Participants like Eloise stated that some students visited the tutoring center wanting to practice speaking in Korean or talk about different topics related to Korean culture. Eloise said those students were the most memorable:

Some students, after they graduate, want to go to Korea and teach English to Korean students, and that's why they started to learn Korean. With these students, I talked freely about topics that were not academic like Korean culture, food, K-pop, daily activities, part-time jobs, and things like that. Talking about things that were not related to school helped me and the students not to have a wall between us, and the students became more comfortable practicing Korean later too.

Due to the fact that there were different students visiting the tutoring center on a first-come, first-served basis, participants were paired with different learners each tutoring session. This meant that they had to determine each student's Korean level and their needs before the tutoring session began. This required tutors to spend additional time with students, as well as have a deeper understanding of the curriculum. Three of the participants recalled times when there were more students than tutors available, resulting in students waiting for their turn and tutors shortening sessions to accommodate all students. Piper commented on how either increasing the length of tutoring sessions or pairing tutors and students for an entire semester may be helpful in addressing this issue:

The most difficult part about this process [tutoring] was that I didn't know specifically what grammar or content the students knew...each student's Korean background and skill was different, so unless tutors were paired with students one-on-one for whole semester, it was difficult to know the students' proficiencies in short times. I wanted to help students, make the tutoring session individualized, and assist them with what they asked, and I wanted to help on a deeper level, but I feel like some sessions just ended up with me 'licking the outside of a watermelon' (scratching the surface).

Along with lengthening the time of tutoring sessions, two participants mentioned that increased communication and stronger relationships between peer tutors would have been effective for tutoring, especially when addressing students' needs they found difficult to address on their own (e.g. grammar). While the participants were able to make friends and build relationships with the students who visited the tutoring center, they expressed that collaboration and cooperative work between peer tutors would have met learners' needs more effectively and efficiently.

4.3 *Gong-gam: Empathy as a Key Element of Peer Tutoring*

Participants indicated that empathy was a key element of peer tutoring. All eight participants felt that their experiences learning English as an English language learner made them more empathetic in tutoring Korean, and many used the word *gong-gam* to express their empathy towards peers. The Korean word *gong-gam*, refers to feeling what the other person is thinking, feeling, or expressing, and is often translated to empathy. The experiences that participants had as English language learners, especially in the US, influenced their identities and pedagogies as tutors. Ryder recalled how the "six years of studying in the US, learning English from foreign friends" helped him develop *gong-gam* and empathetic understanding for students who visited the tutoring center. Similarly, Eloise stated how her "experiences learning English as a second language helped [her] understand students" and feel empathy and compassion. Reagan also looked back on her English learning journey and how it helped her empathize with the students she interacted with and show patience:

I think when teaching to students, being patient is the most necessary factor as a teacher. Not being patient when someone can not pick up the materials is not acceptable. They might feel uncomfortable expressing the feeling of stuffiness. Also, if the tutors are not focusing on the students, this will make students feel that we

[tutors] are busy or they [students] are abandoned. I tried my best by thinking about when I learned English too.

While *gong-gam* was an important element for participants, one of the participants, Piper, noted the difficulties of developing deep, meaningful relationships with students through the tutoring program. She explained how she would have enjoyed building deeper relationships with students:

The limited time of the tutoring sessions was one thing, but the majority of the students really didn't talk about anything personal; most students just talked about the academic stuff. I'm sure there were friends who were interested in Korean culture and K-pop, but even if I wanted to have a deeper conversation, there were several reasons like the time constraint that prevented me from doing so. ...I wished tutors could also possibly make relationships with the students.

Piper added that before the tutoring program started, she was excited to "meet international friends" and "share a lot of conversations", but due to the time limitations of the tutoring sessions, she was not able to go beyond the material that the students brought to the sessions.

4.4 Benefits of Peer Tutoring

Participants reported that there were various benefits they accrued from tutoring activities. All participants' original reasons for joining the tutoring program (to teach and to learn) were fulfilled, but there was more they gained than that. Most of the participants expressed that the feeling of teaching students Korean language and culture was an incredibly rewarding experience. Specifically, six of the participants mentioned how it was meaningful and rewarding for them to teach their "*mogukeo* (mother tongue)." Vincent commented that "watching students improve in Korean...working on speaking, listening, writing together" made him "feel rewarded and end the semester with a joyful heart." Many also felt pride and value in tutoring as non-Korean students were learning "*urimal*" (our language) and "*urinara munhwa*" (our country culture). Reagan explained how she felt a sense of reward and satisfaction when tutoring:

As a Korean tutor, I experienced something very meaningful that I will not be able to experience again. I was extremely excited to teach my native language to other foreigner students who are interested in learning Korean. However, even though I speak my native language, Korean, teaching was way harder than what I expected. However, I really enjoyed having such a meaningful experience by meeting lots of students who show strong enthusiasm and eagerness to learn Korean.

Another benefit that four of the participants mentioned was self-reflection and personal growth. The tutoring program was an opportunity for participants to reflect and grow, which also boosted participants' confidence, encouraged overall positive attitudes, and strengthened their senses of responsibility. For example, Eloise said that the biggest "gain" from tutoring was self-growth: "The Korean tutoring experience helped me grow a lot. As a student, I was always in the position to learn from someone, but as a Korean tutor, I thought a lot about responsibility. It was also a meaningful experience that taught me to be a more responsible member of the community."

Vincent started the tutoring program with "big nervousness" and "carried pressure" because he was self-conscious about his Busan *saturi* (Busan dialect), worried he would "teach students incorrect pronunciation or intonation." However, as the tutoring program progressed, he said he became less self-conscious and instead, began to reflect more on his experiences as a second language learner and sought out ways to better help the students:

The worries were temporary. As I tutored, I adjusted [to the tutoring environment] quickly and was satisfied with the tutoring experience. Especially, I myself, am learning English in the US, and I know how difficult it is to learn a different language....I wanted to show myself a 'changed me' and the Korean tutoring program was one of the things that helped me transform myself...I gained some confidence as I tutored.

Similarly, Lydia recognized how the tutoring program helped her learn and grow: "While I was tutoring students, I naturally learned about myself....Before teaching students, I realized I needed to know about myself more.... I also gained a sense of responsibility as a tutor."

Wesley, who tutored two hours a week, said that he didn't expect so much change within such a short period of time. However, he shared that feelings of "responsibility and *aejung* (affection) grew" and how he "gained many realizations about [himself]." Wesley also said that because the students called him *seonsaengnim* (teacher), the feeling of responsibility continued to increase. He added that while he learned from fellow tutors and professors of the tutoring program, he learned most from the students who visited, especially their passion and dedication to learning. Wesley summed his tutoring experience and interactions with students as a "fresh shock, like someone hit my head with a

hammer”, describing that the tutoring experience encouraged him to reflect on his identity as a student, “grow a lot”, and “gain life teachings.”

5. Discussion

Peer tutoring is growing increasingly popular in higher education as more research has shown the effectiveness of peer tutoring and peer tutoring services (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011; Colvin, 2007; Ehrenberg, 2012; Pugatch & Wilson, 2018). Furthermore, researchers have reported the benefits of peer tutoring in language education at universities (Castañeda, 2018; Savas et al., 2015). To contribute to existing literature about peer tutoring in the field of language education at universities, this study attempted to investigate the experiences of peer tutors in a Korean language peer tutoring program at a U.S. university. The analysis of the data uncovered four major themes: (1) the reasons why participants became peer tutors; (2) meeting the needs of learners; (3) empathy as an important factor in peer tutoring; and (4) benefits of peer tutoring for peer tutors.

The first theme reflected the two main reasons participants decided to become peer tutors: to teach and to learn. These findings are in line with previous studies that show how students who value teaching and are aware of the benefits of peer tutoring are more likely to become peer tutors (Sanford & Steiner, 2021). Specifically, a majority of participants mentioned their willingness to teach their native language and culture as peer tutors. Participants also expressed they became tutors because they wanted to learn from the students as well. Peer tutoring is grounded on the ideas of ‘learning by teaching’ and ‘to teach is to learn twice’ (Topping, 1996); these participants were aware of these ideas that peer tutoring is grounded in.

It is interesting to note that throughout the interviews and reflective papers, participants clearly distinguished themselves from students using terms such as “native” and “Korean” to refer to themselves and “foreigner students” and “international students” to refer to students. These terms may point to the participants’ understanding of Korean identities (as opposed to ‘Other’ identities), and it may also indicate participants’ perceptions and assumptions about who native Korean speakers and Korean language learners are (H. Kim, 2021). Consequently, this suggests that Korean tutoring centers, much like university writing centers, may be a space where complex dynamics between native Korean tutors and Korean language learners arise. Further investigation about issues of possible linguistic dominance that may surface in Korean language tutoring centers, as well as adequate training for Korean language tutors to effectively work with students of different backgrounds, is needed (Bell & Elledge, 2008).

The second theme revealed learners’ needs and how participants addressed their needs. Participants reported a variety of needs of learners that encompassed curriculum-related content (e.g. writing assignments, skit presentation, speaking practice) as well as non-curricular, culture-based content. Participants did their best to understand the learners’ Korean proficiency level and prior knowledge before helping them with specific content, and tried to provide assistance depending on the individual student with various examples that students may understand. Participants were utilizing scaffolding, to guide and encourage their peers’ learning. Scaffolding is an important element of reciprocal teaching and peer tutoring, and adequate scaffolds are determined by learners’ needs (Topping, 2005). However, for Korean language tutors to use scaffolding as an effective tool, it is important that tutors receive efficient training of scaffolding methods including controlling the level of difficulty, giving prompts or cues, providing feedback, relating material with real-life examples, and providing additional coaching and modeling (Gillies, 2009), specifically related to Korean language education.

One of the areas that participants reported difficulties with in meeting learners’ needs was grammar. This is because the participants were native Korean speakers who had never learned Korean grammar. For this reason, participants found it challenging to explain grammar—especially in English, which was not their native language. It is important, however, that peer tutors are able to respond to a broad variety of student needs (Sanford, 2020). Tutors should be trained to support a curriculum and a variety of courses within a course of study, from introductory levels and beyond. (Sanford & Steiner, 2021). Therefore, it can be suggested that as part of the peer tutoring curriculum and pre-service training for the Korean language tutoring center, there be an element which provides students with comprehensive knowledge and tools needed to teach Korean grammar.

Among some of the difficulties experienced when tutoring, a few of the participants commented on how there wasn’t enough time in some of the tutoring sessions due to the first-come first-served basis. To this end, it may be worthwhile if the Korean language tutoring center includes options to pair tutors and students in advance for the tutoring sessions, “designing (or redesigning) a menu of offerings for students who use the center” (Sanford & Steiner, 2021, p. 42). The lack of opportunities to build relationships with other peer tutors was another minor difficulty that was reported. The Korean language tutoring center may implement joint tutor training, shared celebrations, and other ways of finding

common ground to develop affinity among tutors, as support for and among tutors is valuable (Sanford & Steiner, 2021).

The third theme centered on *gong-gam*, or empathy, which participants reported as a key element to peer tutoring. Participants reflected on their personal English language learning journeys, recalling the struggles and difficulties they had while learning, as well as effective learning methods they used to learn English. As second language learners themselves, participants were able to share the feelings of students and empathize, which helped communication, teaching, and learning (Wellington, 2007). Drawing on their personal experiences, participants used their experiences as reference to understand, help, and empower students. These results are supported by previous studies indicating the importance of the affective domain and empathetic understanding in peer tutoring (Sanford, 2020; Sanford & Steinhardt, 2021). Sanford (2020) states that “empathy is centered on the person speaking” (p. 81), and active listening and empathetic approach is important for peer tutors. While empathy and empathetic understanding was a recurrent theme for peer tutors, this may not have led to the development of more meaningful and personal relationships between tutors and students, as noted by one of the participants.

The final theme focused on the various benefits of peer tutoring. Participants indicated that peer tutoring gave them a sense of reward, opportunities for self-reflection, and encouraged personal growth. As Korean students in the US, participants felt pride and found meaning in teaching their native language and culture. Peer tutoring also led participants to reflect on their own identities, enhance their sense of responsibility, and encouraged motivation for their own learning. The results match those observed in earlier studies that show how peer tutors develop agency in their own journey as leaders, enhance personal development, gain motivation and confidence, reflect on their identities, increase their cultural sensitivity, and cultivate relationship (Hammond et al., 2010; Okawa et al., 2010; Sanford & Steiner, 2021)

This research has certain limitations and suggestions for future research. First, due to the small sample size, specific geographical area (e.g. Northeastern region of US), and limited educational context (e.g. university), the results may not be generalizable to all Korean language tutoring programs. Second, the history of the Korean language tutoring center of this study was relatively short, with many changes in leadership, and turnovers in peer tutors. As a result, future studies should explore well-established university Korean language tutoring centers with stronger foundations, more services, and effective tutor training programs. Third, considering that this study was conducted with peer tutors, it seems meaningful for future research in this area to examine the experiences of students using Korean language tutoring centers at universities. A final limitation of this study is the finite scope of time (e.g. one semester). Thus, future studies may benefit from undertaking longitudinal research to investigate the different features of Korean language tutoring programs across a longer period of time.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study was conducted with Korean international undergraduate students of a U.S. university who participated as peer tutors of a Korean language peer tutoring program in order to explore their experiences of peer tutoring during one semester. Overall, the results of the study indicated positive attitudes about peer tutoring for peer tutors, providing participants opportunities to teach and learn, feel a sense of reward, self reflect, and grow.

This study can provide valuable information as to why students become peer tutors and what directions Korean language peer tutoring programs may take. As Korean language learners increase, peer tutoring may be a valuable and effective educational tool for universities. However, as suggested in this study, strengthening the structure of the peer tutoring center and providing more training for tutors may boost their usefulness, thus improving the Korean language peer tutoring program. This study's outcomes were significant in that they can serve as useful data for developing Korean language peer tutoring programs at universities.

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