Implementing a "Big and Little" Mentorship Program in Pekan, Malaysia

Nathalie Santos[*]

Fullbright Program, Malaysia-American Commission on Educational Exchange (MACEE)
Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Dato' Mahmud Mat, Tanah Putih, 26600 Pekan, Pahang, Malaysia.

Abstract

The objective of this study is to measure the feasibility of a mentorship program between pre-university students (age 19 years old) and high school students (ages 13 to 14 years old) in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) Dato' Mahmud Mat. This study also aims to determine whether building a relationship between older and younger students will improve writing scores, boost confidence, and increase the frequent use of English at home. In this context, a pre-university student (e.g., big brother) spent one-on-one time with a high school student (e.g., little brother) for one period each week. Their interactions were at structured times and included informal activities and games. All activities were in English to encourage students to interact with each other in English. A survey and written test with open-ended questions were given to the students before and after the intervention to assess improvement in writing, confidence level, and frequent use of English. An analysis regarding barriers to implementation was also conducted through a survey given to the teachers involved.

© 2016 Penerbit Universiti Malaysia Pahang

INTRODUCTION

While students in Malaysia learn how to read, write, and speak English as early as primary school, many students still enter secondary school unable to confidently communicate and share ideas in English. Many parents and teachers from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) Dato' Mahmud Mat believe that students' inability to master the language is due to negative peer pressure associated with speaking English (parents and teachers, personal communication, 2015; Musa, Lie, & Azman 2012). For example, a student speaking English is seen by his or her peers as someone who is pretentious or thinks he/she is too good for Malay language. An additional factor that could inhibit mastery of English is the lack of opportunities to practice the language. Opportunities to learn outside of the classroom are given only to higher performing students (parents and teachers, personal communication, 2015). Additionally, programs like Public Speaking and Choral Speaking place emphasis on memorizing answers instead of thinking creatively and spontaneously using the language (English teachers in SMK Dato' Mahmud Mat, personal communication, April 2015).

Although numerous articles have evaluated the effectiveness of mentorship programs in higher education and professional settings, only a few studies have looked at the effects of peer-to-peer mentoring among older (pre-university) and younger (high school) students in relation to confidence and frequency of speaking a second language (Alcazar-Bejarano, Kyunghee, Tae Hee, & Mi Jung, 2015; Davis, Sinclair, & Gschwend, 2015; Hall & Jaugietsi, 2011; Herrera et al., 2011; Mayer, Blair, Ko, Patel, & Files, 2014; Poor & Brown, 2013; Sottie, Dubus, & Sossou, 2013). Additionally, even fewer of these --

---

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +612154351363; Fax: +612154351363.
  E-mail address: santos.nathalie89@gmail.com [Santos, N.].

studies were conducted in Malaysia, assessing the context of mentorship programs within the context of mentorship programs within the context of the country's school culture and norms.

A US-based research by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America reported in 2015 that young students who participated in the program are 33% less likely to hit someone, 52% less likely to skip school, 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 37% less likely to skip a class (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2015). While these results reveal a positive consequence of the peer mentoring program in youths, these problems (skipping school, doing illegal activities, and hitting students) are not crucial in Malaysia's education system according to Malaysia's Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohammad Najib Tun Abdul Razak. He emphasized the importance of changing academic standards to fit the 21st century employment and educational needs (International Consultants for Education and Fairs Monitor, 2015). The Prime Minister urged educators to hone students' critical thinking and communication skills to prepare them for the global industry. He further emphasized the need to improve English proficiency because it is a global language, and students who speak English fluently have a higher standard of living and higher prospects of finding international jobs (Sultana & Rosli, 2016).

Additionally, it remains unknown if a peer mentoring program would be feasible to implement in Malaysia, particularly in rural areas of Malaysia such as Pekan. The main goal of this project is to therefore assess the feasibility of implementing a peer mentoring program in Pekan, a developing town in the East Coast state of Malaysia. A Big and Little mentor program is a concept that has been implemented in other countries, but not widely applied in Malaysia. The secondary objective of this study is to measure the effectiveness of the Big and Little mentorship program in relation to academic progress, student confidence, and frequent use of English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the importance of providing opportunities for students to practice English informally, it seems imperative to analyze how Malaysia's current education system evolved. Within the last two decades, swift and drastic changes were made to improve national test scores. In 2003, a decision was made by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to increase English proficiency and fluency by using English as a medium to teach Mathematics and Science (Gooch, 2009). After nine years, schools transitioned back to teaching Mathematics and Science in Malay because of pressure from political parties and lower test results in these subjects (Gooch, 2009). Essentially, the decision to transition back to teaching Mathematics and Science in Malay resulted in English being taught as an isolated subject. Students received limited English instruction, often communicating and listening in English from only one teacher or in one period (English teachers in SMK Dato' Mahmud Mat, personal communication, April 2015).

Devoid of social and communicative uses, studies from both Ministry of Education (2003) and Ambigapathy (2002) showed that English was primarily being taught using teacher-centered approaches or the chalk-and-talk method. Educators spent large portions of their teaching time reviewing last year's examination questions, worksheets, and exercise books to improve test scores (as cited in Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012, p. 38). Noor Hashimah Abdul Aziz (2007) linked these pedagogical changes to higher student-reported anxiety associated with speaking English, which hindered students' success in higher education and job interviews (as cited in Musa, Lie, & Azman 2012, p.40). The lack of opportunities to communicate in English at school is even more detrimental because students preferred to use their native tongue to communicate with peers and teachers outside the classroom (Pandian, 2006).

There are numerous suggestions to improve the English curriculum. Hazita Azman (1999) suggested increasing parental involvement (as cited in Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012, p.39). Hazita Azman believed that parents should encourage their children to use comic books and informal texts that are unrelated to school as a means to learn English. In addition, Al-Hebaish's research indicated a high correlation between self-confidence and oral performance in English, leading to the suggestion that parents and teachers should motivate and build students' confidence. Al-Hebaish also encouraged educators to increase student efficacy by maintaining a relaxed teaching atmosphere and designing interesting activities

to engage learners (2012).

Recently, the Malaysian government recognized the need to allocate resources to improve the students' fluency in English. In 2011, the government budgeted to hire 375 native English speakers because they believed that hiring foreign teachers would force students to utilize English more often (Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012). The following year, the Ministry of Education allocated 50.2 billion ringgit to improve the education system, so it may "produce talented, highly-skilled, creative, and innovate workforce" (The 2012 Budget Speech, 2012, p.13).

Mentoring programs have recently been used in Malaysia, but the programs differ in objective as well as population target. One study conducted in Sarawak validated the benefits of mentoring between working professionals (Lo, Ramayah, & Kui, 2013). Survey results from 156 executive-level employees, from small and medium enterprises, revealed a significant positive relationship with mentoring and work environment, job performance, training, satisfaction, and coworker relationships (Lo, Ramayah, & Kui, 2013). Newly hired employees who received mentoring were more likely to be promoted and receive raises. Another study in Klang Valley, Malaysia, showed a similar positive trend among mentors and mentees in the auditor field (Kah Loong, 2011). Lastly, a peer mentoring program conducted in Sarawak from October 2013 to January 2014, demonstrated the benefits of peer mentoring in building leadership skills, confidence level, and study habits (Lian et al., 2015). However, this study was conducted among undergraduate medical students from Medical Faculty of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). UNIMAS, unlike SMK Dato' Mahmud Mat, has established a peer mentoring program for a long time, but never formally evaluated it.

Studies that looked at peer mentoring in relation to school performance are more common in other countries but not in Malaysia. In addition to the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program in America, a study in 2002 investigated the gains of the peer mentoring in Eisenhower High School Jazz Band I (Goodrich, 2007). This study collected data from 1,800 students residing in a large metropolitan area. Using empirical data from observations, audio- and video-recordings, formal interviews, informal conversations, and collection of artifacts, Goodrich showed that school climate, culture, and student relationships improved as a result of peer mentoring. The school educator and director, Brian Huggins, received two awards for his job performance, an Excellence in Teaching Award in 1999 and School Teacher of the Year Award in 2003. He attributed his success to the program's implementation, stating that peer mentoring "elevates and sustains the performance level of an ensemble" (Goodrich, 2007, p.5).

In order to meet current demands in employment and higher education, it is important to identify affordable interventions that will improve students' ability to communicate in English. This study was the first study in Malaysia to assess the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of implementing a Big and Little mentorship program in Pekan as it relates to academic progress, student confidence, and frequent use of the English language.

METHODOLOGY

3.1   Subjects

This is a feasibility study aimed to measure the cost and benefits of establishing a mentorship program in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) Dato' Mahmud Mat. Two classes were evaluated and were matched with each other: high school Form 2 students (ages 13-14 years old) and pre-university Form 6 students (age 19 years old). A short survey and written exam were given to each student before and after the 3-week intervention to measure academic progress, confidence, and frequent use of English. The study was conducted in June to July 2015.

Students in the Form 2 classrooms were in the highest performing track, meaning they were students who received the highest scores in their final Form 1 exam. A total of 9 male students and 14 female students in the Form 2 class were enrolled in the study. Meanwhile, students in the Form 6 classroom were a random mix of students, and they were not separated by test performance. These students were enrolled in a class which would prepare them for a required university exam. A total of 4 male and 22 female

students were enrolled in the Form 6 class.

Student pairs were based entirely by gender. However, there were only 4 male students in Form 6, while there were 9 male students in Form 2. In an effort to ensure that students from both classes could participate in the activities, 5 students from Form 2 were paired with each other (one group was a three-person group). For example, a male Form 2 student was paired with another male Form 2 student. This was done to ensure that none of the sibling pairs were from opposite genders, as research from Mack in 1998 suggested that same-gender matches were more successful in developing a trusting mentor relationship (Mack, 1998). The same procedures were followed for the 8 female students in Form 6 because the number of female students were insufficient in Form 2.

3.2   Research Instruments and Materials

The primary research instruments used to gather data were a survey and written exams conducted before and after the 3-week intervention. In order to encourage students to answer honestly, all students received a three-digit identification code (for example, 111 or 189) as identifiers in both the pre- and post-assessments. Students completed a survey that included their demographic information. The survey also assessed their confidence and frequent use of English using a five-point Likert scale. Finally, students needed to complete an open-ended written assessment to evaluate their academic progress.

To measure confidence, students provided a numerical answer to score their comfort level in speaking English with their parents, classmates, siblings, teachers, and foreigners. Students answered 1 if they were not comfortable, 2 if they were somewhat not comfortable, 3 if they were neutral, 4 if they were comfortable, or 5 if they were very comfortable speaking English with their parents, classmates, siblings, teachers, or foreigners. To measure frequent use of English, students provided a numerical answer to evaluate how often they spoke English with their parents, classmates, siblings, teachers, or people outside the classroom. Students answered 1 if they never, 2 if they almost never, 3 if they sometimes, 4 if they almost always, or 5 if they always speak English to their parents, classmates, siblings, teachers, or people outside the classroom. Students' self-reported scores were then averaged and tabulated using an Excel spreadsheet.

To measure academic level, students completed a written examination with open-ended questions that prompted them to state their opinion, provide an explanation, or write a creative story based on various pictures. Students' written work was evaluated based on focus, creativity, and grammar/mechanics using a predetermined rubric (see Supplementary Materials for more information). The survey and open-ended written exam questions are provided in the Supplementary Materials. All of the questions used for the written examination were derived from ice breaker questions, writing prompts, and other resources that have been widely used in the United States to assess reading comprehension, creativity, and mastery in English.

Research materials used to conduct the educational intervention were primarily procured online using SlideShare. The results of the written tests were averaged and tabulated using an Excel spreadsheet.

3.3   Intervention

Students in Form 2 and Form 6 met for a single period (40-minutes in duration) each week and interacted in English using various games and activities as outlined in Table 1. Because of public holidays (for example, Hari Raya and Ramadhan) that required a new school schedule, the intervention was only conducted for three consecutive weeks as opposed to the original plan of six weeks.

Table 1. List of activities provided weekly.

Week	Activity
Week 1	**Speed Dating:** Students met with as many students from the other class. They introduced themselves and discussed the topic provided. After quick introductions, students grouped themselves based on their favorite food or favorite color. Once groups were created, each group sang an English song with the word "love" in the lyrics. Students also listed three adjectives to describe themselves, and three adjectives to describe their ideal sibling
Week 2	**Sibling Pairs:** Partners met by asking other students a yes or no question to discover the word or phrase that was taped on their back. Then, they must find their famous pair or opposite. For example, if the student had the word "chocolate" taped on their back, he or she must ask yes or no questions until they guess their word correctly. Then, the student must look for their partner who has the word "vanilla." **Big and Little Survey:** Once students find their partner, the Big and Little complete a survey to help them get to know each other better. Questions varied from "who is your favorite singer" to "what is your favorite subject."
Week 3	**Importance of Communication:** The Big and Little pair needed to decide who would be the speaker and who would be the artist. The speaker was the only person who could look at the picture that must be recreated. The artist could not speak or look at the picture, but he or she is the only person who can draw what was described to them. They had 7-minutes to complete the task together. Next, the Big and Little pairs worked together to draw a picture that they saw for 10 seconds. The most accurate drawing received points.

FINDINGS

The students with missing pre-intervention or post-intervention data were not included in the final study although they participated in the activities. Also, students with no biological siblings were excluded as their answers about how comfortable or how often they spoke English with siblings were not relevant. In total, there were 23 students in Form 2 and 26 students in Form 6 whose data were included. In all measures, the students in Form 2 showed a more consistent and higher increase in confidence, frequent use of English, and academic progress than the older Form 6 students.

4.1   Confidence Level

Figure 1 depicts the confidence score of younger (Form 2) and older (Form 6) students in speaking English with parents, siblings, teachers, classmates and foreigners. Following the intervention, the Form 2 students had more confidence speaking English with their parents, teachers and foreigners. On the other hand, the Form 6 students were only more confident speaking English with their family members. They did not feel more confident speaking with teachers, classmates and foreigners after intervention.
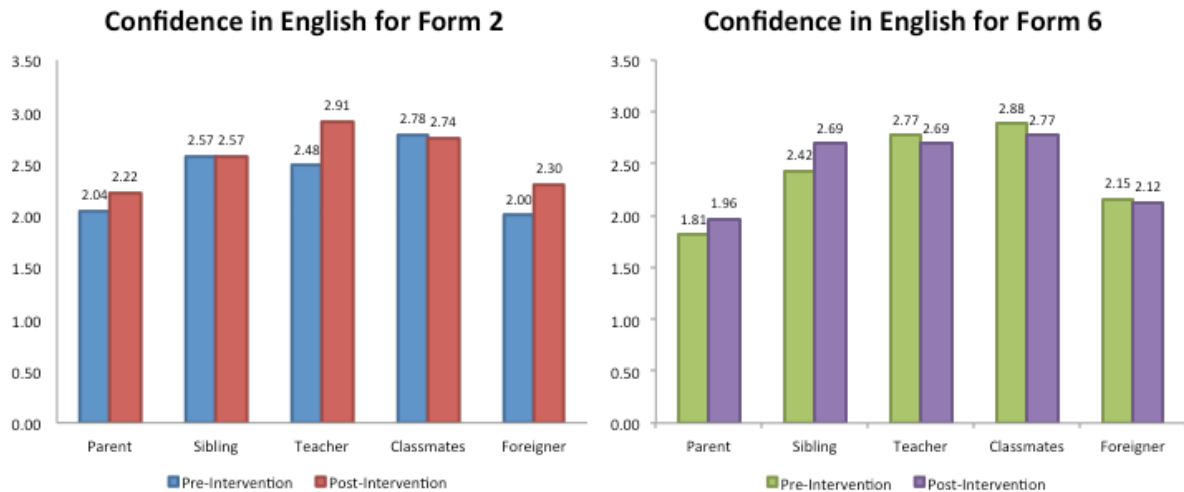
Confidence in English for Form 2

Confidence in English for Form 6

Figure 1. Confidence level of Form 2 and Form 6 students

4.2   Frequency of English Use

The results in Figure 2 illustrate the frequency of English use of the Form 2 and Form 6 students with parents, siblings, teachers, classmates and people outside the school. After three weeks of intervention, Form 2 students showed an increase in the number of times they spoke English with parents, siblings, teachers, classmates and people outside the school. The older students either had no change or a slight decrease in how often they spoke English with others.

The trend for the frequency scores was similar to the one observed in the confidence scores. The younger Form 2 students had higher confidence and spoke English more frequently with parents, siblings, teachers, classmates and foreigners. Meanwhile, the older Form 6 students had no to modest changes (increase or decrease) in these measures.
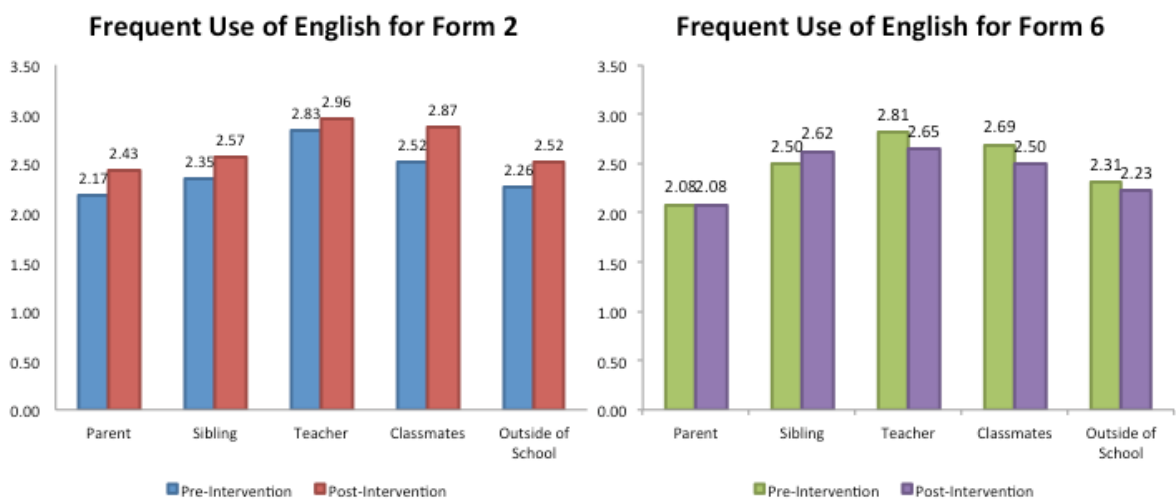
Frequent Use of English for Form 2

Frequent Use of English for Form 6

Figure 2. The frequency of English use of Form 2 and Form 6 students

4.3 Academic Progress

Figure 3 shows Form 2 and Form 6 students' progress in the open-ended, written responses that measured focus, creativity, and grammar/sentence construction (GSC). The younger students increased in their academic scores, specifically in focus and creativity. However, their GSC decreased after the intervention. Meanwhile, the older students improved in all parameters measured for academic progress. In fact, the Form 6 students showed the highest improvement in focus. They were able to provide more reasons to substantiate their opinions.
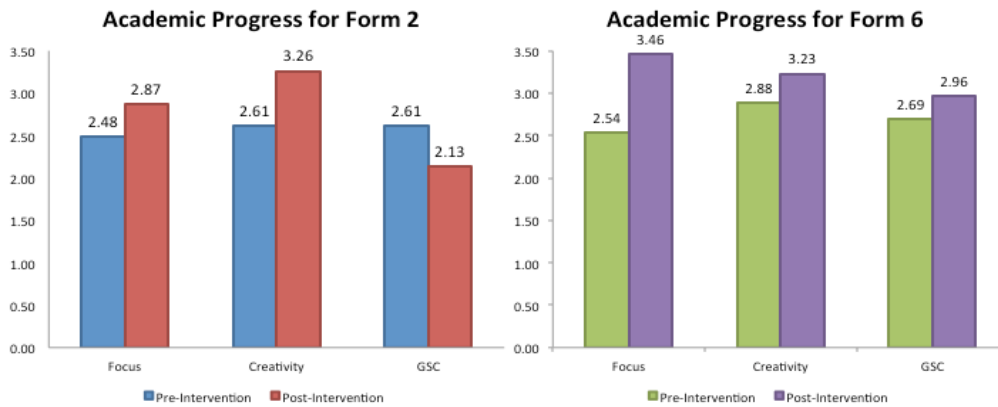
Figure 3. Academic progress of Form 2 and Form 6 students

4.4 Results by Gender

4.4.1 Confidence Level of Students by Gender

Figure 4 indicates the confidence level of male and female students in Form 2. After the intervention, the younger male students were more confident speaking English with their parents, siblings, and teachers; however, there were no changes in their confidence level speaking English with foreigners. Surprisingly, the younger male students felt slightly less confident speaking English with their classmates. The younger female Form 2 students did not feel as confident communicating in English at home, but they show higher confidence when speaking with teachers, classmates, and foreigners following the intervention.
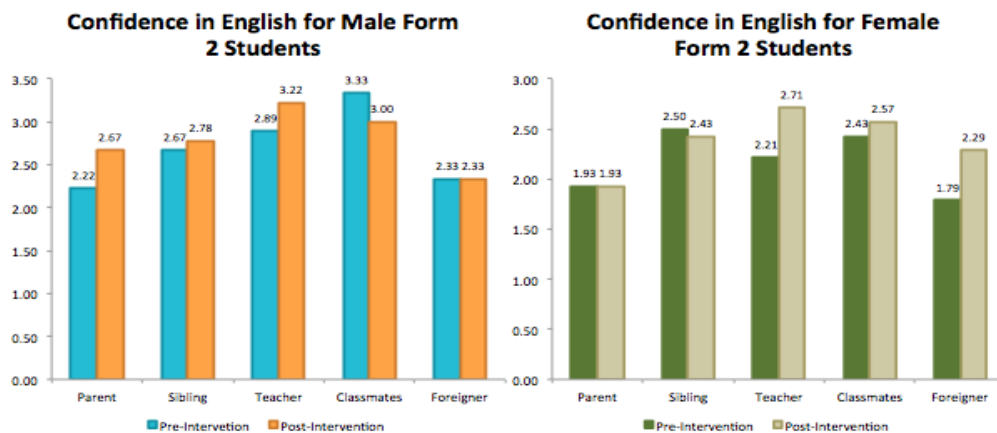
Figure 4. Confidence scores of male and female Form 2 students

Figure 5 reveals the confidence level of male and female Form 6 students. After the intervention, the older male students felt more confident speaking with their siblings and classmates. Their confidence remained the same when speaking with their parents. Overall, the female students in Form 6 had more confidence speaking English at home with both their parents and siblings. They did not report a higher level of confidence speaking English in school with their teachers and classmates.
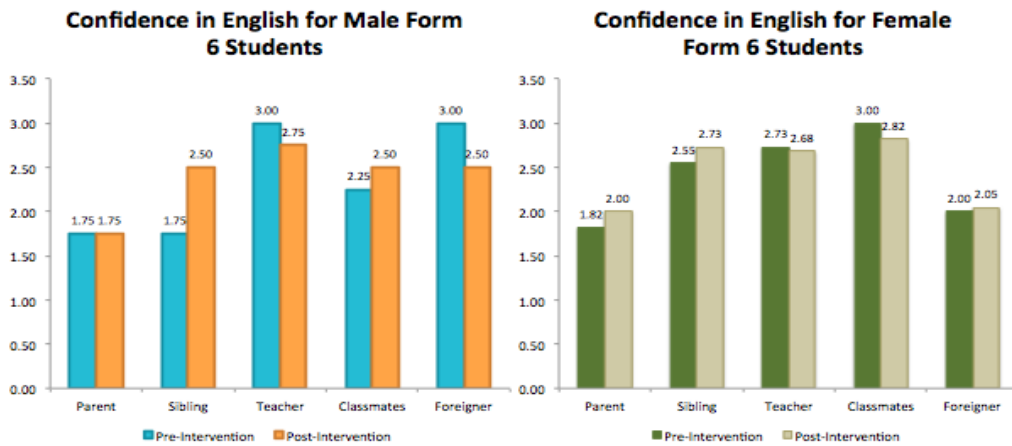

Figure 5. Confidence scores of male and female Form 6 students

4.4.2 Students' Frequency of English Use by Gender

Figure 6 shows the frequency of use of English with parents, siblings, teachers, classmates, and people outside of the school for male and female students in Form 2. The male students only spoke more often with their parents, siblings, and classmates. They spoke less often or in the same amount with their teachers and people outside the school. After the intervention, the female students spoke English more often to all groups.
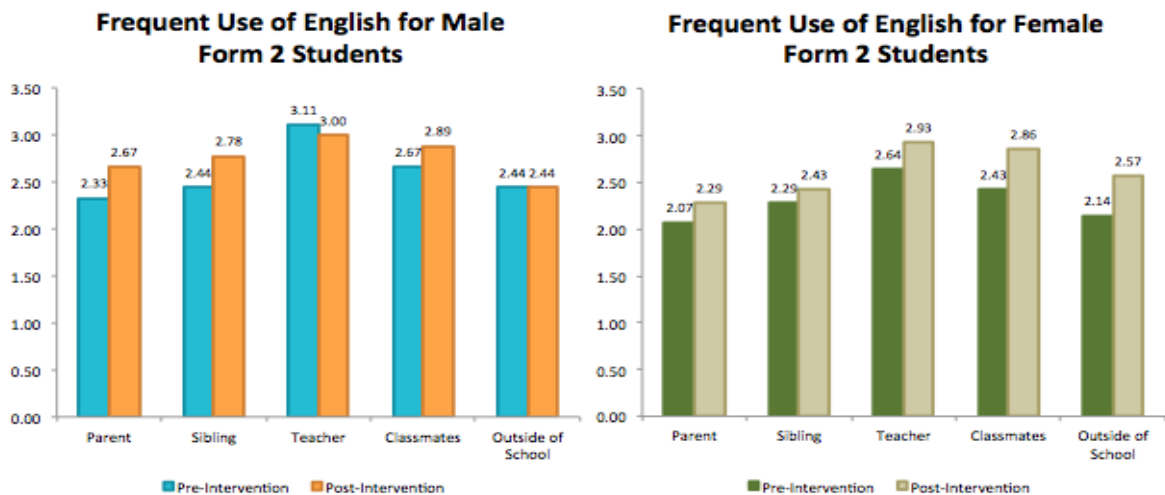

Figure 6. Frequency of English use of male and female Form 2 students

Figure 7 depicts the frequency of use of English for male and female students in Form 6. The male Form 6 students spoke more often with their siblings, while the female students in Form 6 spoke more often with their parents. In all other measures, the frequency of using English was either reduced or not
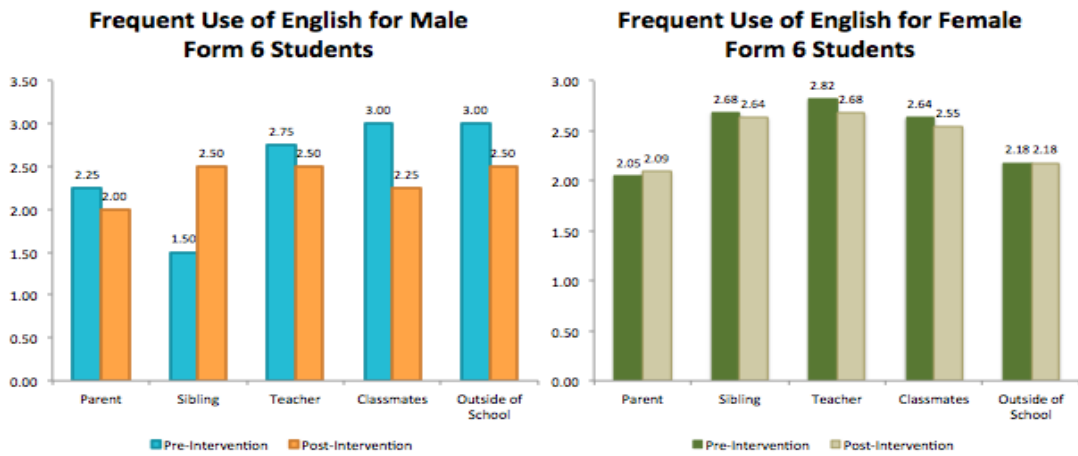
changed for both male and female Form 6 students.

Frequent Use of English for Male Form 6 Students

Frequent Use of English for Female Form 6 Students

Figure 7. Frequency of English use of male and female Form 6 students

4.4.3 Academic Progress of Students by Gender

Figure 8 illustrates the male and female Form 2 scores in the open-ended, written responses that measured focus, creativity, and GSC. Compared to the female students, the male Form 2 students showed significant improvements in focus and creativity. The female Form 2 students only showed improvement in creativity. Both the male and female students received a lower GSC score following intervention.
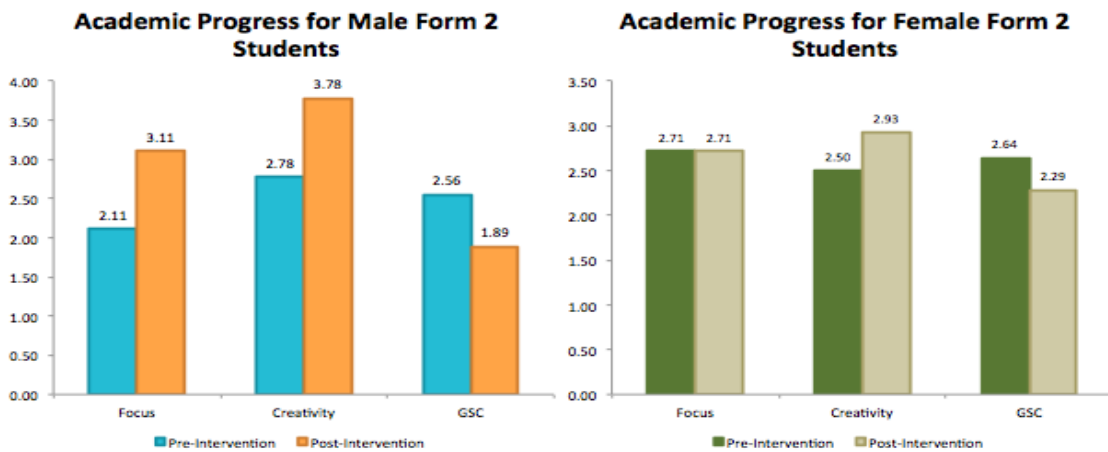
Academic Progress for Male Form 2 Students

Academic Progress for Female Form 2 Students

Figure 8. Academic progress scores of male and female Form 2 students

Figure 9 reveals the academic progress of the male and female students in Form 6. After the intervention, the female students improved in focus, creativity, and GSC. The male students showed only a slight increase in focus. They had reduced scores in creativity and GSC after the intervention.
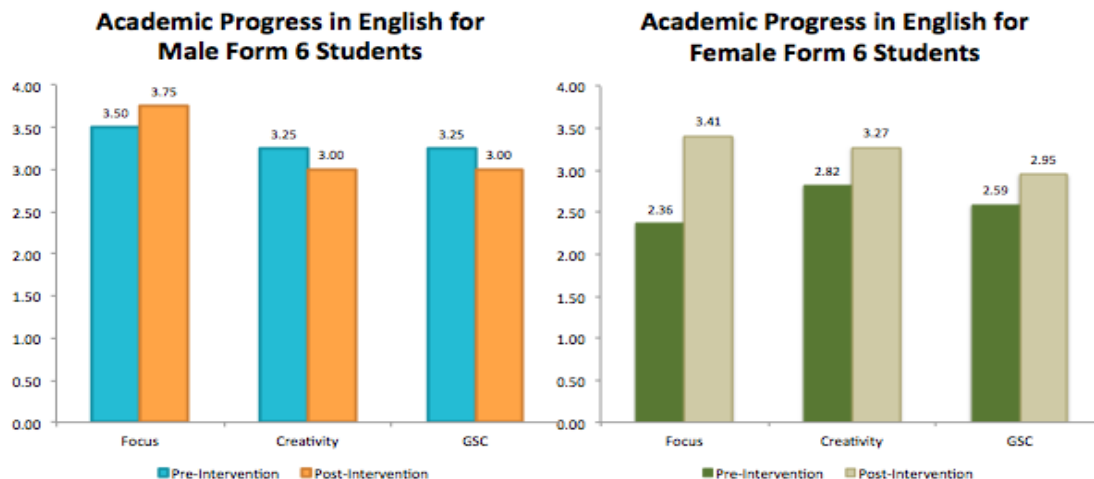
Figure 9. Academic progress scores of male and female Form 6 students

DISCUSSION

5.1 Feasibility – Cost of the intervention

Materials for the program were typical items found in any school. In the first session, no items were used. Students grouped themselves and sang songs with specific lyrics that include "love." In the second week, tape, markers, and paper were used. Students had objects or phrases taped on their back and were required to ask their peers yes or no questions to discover the word. Then, they were required to find their "sibling" by looking for the word's famous pair or opposite. Partners who deciphered the game quickly completed a survey that only required paper and ink. In the last session, only paper was used. Big and Little pairs recreated a drawing that was created with a pencil.

5.2 Feasibility – Limitation and barriers

Transportation

Originally, the mentorship program was meant for SMK Dato' Mahmud Mat and the nearby elementary school, Sekolah Kebangsaan Tanah Puteh. The schools are located about 10 minutes away on foot, but it was not feasible for students to walk there because of the hot weather conditions in Malaysia. Arranging a bus to transport the high school students to the elementary school was also not possible because it required more financial resources. Also, bussing students from one school to another required more time for transitions. Lastly, the bell schedules differed between the two schools, which made it more challenging to find a free English period that worked for the elementary and high school periods.

Partnering with a nearby community college was also considered, but it posed the same transportation dilemmas. In this situation, the cost of implementing a mentorship program between two different schools will be too expensive. It may not be a model that can be easily replicated in other school districts due to cost and transportation issues. Hence, the researcher overcame this barrier by creating the Big and Little mentorship program within the same school.

Language Barrier

Arranging a schedule between two schools and two principals when the researcher was not a native speaker of Malay or had a prior model proved difficult, especially when it came to explaining the objective of the intervention. It is likely that after implementing the mentorship program, this barrier may no longer exist as there is now an existing model in Pekan that can be used to create another peer mentoring intervention.

Age Gap

It would be ideal to have a greater age gap between the mentor and mentee because having an older mentor means he or she has more wisdom to share. Adults have the advantage of providing networking opportunities for young students that can lead to job opportunities. They are also better able to give advice that could apply to the mentees' academic and personal goals. It would also be more exciting to have a mentee or mentor that was not in the same school. However, due to limited resources, there were no older mentors that were recruited.

Schedule and Students' Time

Finding space for 60 students to complete a task was a barrier. The location changed in the third week because there was a religious event in the school hall, where normal programming for the Big and Little mentoring usually occurred. Students could not use any vacant classroom because there was not enough chairs or tables. On that particular day, students met in the computer lab. Informing the teachers and students about the new venue took time. Not all the students received the message at once. Students came in staggered times and were paired and re-paired according to attendance.

The intervention was carried only after three consecutive weeks. After Hari Raya's weeklong holiday, the teachers received a new teaching schedule, but it was not created or distributed until later in the afternoon when school already started. When the Form 2 teacher received her new schedule, she no longer taught the Form 2 class. Additionally, the English period that both classes shared was no longer available. Thus, it was not feasible to extend the intervention to the original timeline of six weeks due to changes in the teaching schedule after the Hari Raya holiday.

Logistics

Although the idea was to have students interact more in a non-formal setting, the interactions between the younger and older students were still limited in school. Some students did not have access to a phone or email, making it unlikely for students to interact outside of the school or classroom. There was also no practical way to track interactions between the older and younger students outside of the school.

Attendance

In order for the mentorship program to be effective, it is imperative for the older and younger students to meet regularly each week. However, some students were absent during the intervention period. The reasons for missing attendance are listed below:

- A few Form 6 students were transferred to a different school or started to work full time and no longer attended SMK Dato' Mahmud Mat.

- One Form 2 student took a pre-intervention survey and written exam, but could not finish the post-intervention survey and written exam because she needed time to recover from a motorbike accident.

- Some students were excused from participating in school activities because they were fasting for Ramadhan.

In these cases, older and younger students who did not have their original mentee and mentor would be paired last minute to allow them to participate in the event.

Teacher Participation

During the activity, the teachers did not participate in the planning or facilitation. They stood afar or in a nearby room. Given that the researcher who implemented the intervention was not a native speaker, explaining the rules to the students took time, which ultimately reduced the actual time students could informally interact and practice English.

The teachers in both classes were both new female teachers who recently graduated from universities. Both were open to trying the program in their classroom because they understood the

importance of enriching student experience. However, neither of the teachers was interested in independently continuing the intervention after Hari Raya, when a new schedule was distributed after the holidays.

5.3   Teacher survey results

Both the Form 2 and Form 6 teachers believed that the program helped students improve their English proficiency and fluency. However, the teachers showed reservation in implementing the program as it required a lot of time to plan and coordinate between both classes. One teacher would not implement the program because there were too many students to handle. She suggested that having the program afterschool would make the program more feasible to implement.

5.4   Peer mentoring program

Although mentorship programs have been used in Malaysia, the objectives focused on attitude and study habits or job satisfaction, income, and promotions (Lian et al., 2015; Lo, Ramayah, & Kui, 2013; Goodrich, 2007). Additionally, the programs were typically implemented in more populated areas that have access to more resources. Overall, these studies showed that mentoring provided a positive impact in the workplace. The use of peer mentoring programs in other countries, mainly in the United States, has also showed a positive impact in school climate, culture, and student relationships (Goodrich, 2007). Because there has not been a peer mentoring program created to improve student confidence and frequent use of English in Malaysia or other countries, the results of this study could not be directly compared with previous findings.

5.5   Impact on Confidence Level, Frequency of English Use and Academic Progress

In line with the original assumption that confidence is correlated with the frequent use of a second language (i.e., English), the results of the confidence and frequency scores in both groups were in agreement with each other. In general, the younger Form 2 students had higher confidence and spoke English more frequently with parents, siblings, teachers, classmates, and foreigners. However, the Form 6 students had no to modest changes (increase or decrease) in their confidence. They received a smaller improvement in frequency scores. These results may be due to the school climate and/or age as there are several factors that impact school performance in older teens that are not found in younger teens. Examples of such factors include hormonal changes, peer pressure, and the stress involved in getting into a university (Kaneshiro, 2015). It is also possible that the older students were more vested in preparing for the university exams that they spent more time improving written skills instead of building confidence or practicing English at home.

The academic scores of both Form 2 and Form 6 classes showed consistent improvement in focus and creativity. Drastic improvement in the academic progress of Form 6 students corresponds to the fact that their teachers spent more time preparing them for university exams, specifically focusing on the Form 6 students' written communication and grammar (Figure 3). The reasons for the decreased GSC scores in the Form 2 students remain unclear. It is likely that during the post-intervention, the younger students focused so much on answering the creativity part of the written exam that they were more likely to ignore whether the sentences were grammatically correct.

Although there was a gender difference observed, it is unclear if the gender difference is significant because of the small and unequal number of subjects in each gender group. Larger studies are needed to better assess the results observed between both genders.

5.6   Implications

Originally, the intervention was planned for six weeks but because of the Hari Raya (a week-long religious holiday where school is closed) and Ramadhan (religious holiday that involves fasting for 30

days) as well as the delay to set the teachers' schedules, this study had to be concluded after three weeks. It was not possible to prolong the intervention period because the Form 2 and Form 6 students no longer shared a period in English. Also, the teacher in From 2 was transferred to another class. Hence, additional studies with longer intervention period are required to fully assess the benefit of the mentoring program. It is important to note that eliminating the identified barriers to implementation could make the intervention more feasible to implement, resulting in longer and more successful peer mentoring intervention.

It would be of interest to see how the Big and Little program could benefit students of different age groups given that the results from the Form 2 and Form 6 students varied from each other. Furthermore, the results of this study may be relevant to other developing countries who have similar culture, socio-economic structure, limitations, and educational objectives as those observed in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study was the first of its kind to look at peer mentoring as it impacts English learning in Malaysia. Results of this study showed that although there were challenges that the researcher had to overcome, it was feasible and cost-effective to implement a Big and Little mentoring program between Form 2 and Form 6 students in Malaysia. The results in this study agree with the findings from the Ministry of Education (2003) and Ambigapathy (2002), which showed that providing students with opportunities to utilize English to communicate informally can improve students' English level (as cited by Musa, Lie, & Azman, p. 38). Although the difference between pre- and post-intervention scores were not significant, an overall trend towards increased confidence and more frequent use of English was observed in both groups, with the younger Form 2 students showing a more consistent increase in confidence and frequent use of English compared with the older Form 6 students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

Abidin, M. J., Pour-Mohammadi, M., Singh, K. K., Azman, R., & Souriyavongsa, T. (2011). The Effectiveness of Using Songs in YouTube to Improve Vocabulary Competence among Upper Secondary School Studies. *TPLS Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 1*(11). doi:10.4304/tpls.1.11.1488-1496.

Brewster, J., Ellis, G. & D. Girard. 2002. *The Primary English Teacher's Guide*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Alcazar-Bejerano, I.L., Lee, K., Park, T.H., & Kim, M.J. (2015). Effects of a Ubiquitous Mentoring Program on Self-Esteem, School Adaptation, and Perceived Parental Attitude. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal, 43*(7), 1193-1208.

Al-Hebaish, S. M. (2012). The Correlation between General Self-Confidence and Academic Achievement in the Oral Presentation Course. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2*(1), 60-65.

Big Brothers Big Sisters (2015). Big impact--proven results. Retrieved from http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.9iILI3NGKhK6F/b.5961035/k.A153/Big_impact8212proven_results.htm

Davis, E., Sinclair, S., & Gschwend, L. (2015). A mentoring program drills down on the Common Core. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *43*(16), 59-64.

Gooch, L. (2009, July 8). Malaysia Ends Use of English in Science and Math Teaching. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/09/world/asia/09iht-malay.html?_r=0.

Goodrich, A. (2007). Peer Mentoring in a High School Jazz Ensemble. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 55*(2), 94-114.

Hall, R., & Jaugietsi, Z. (2011). Developing Peer Mentoring through Evaluation. *Innovative Higher Education, 36*(1), 41-52.

Herrera, C., Grossman, J.B., Kauh, T.J., Feldman, A., McMaken, J., & Jucovy, L. (2011). Mentoring in Schools: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring. *Society of Research in Child Development, 82*(1), 346-361.

Leow, K.L. (2011). The Organizational Commitment: The Study of Mentoring and Leader-member Exchange (Lmx) Among Auditors in Malaysia-moderating Effects of Gender. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, 6*(1), 123-146.

Kaneshiro, N. (2015, February 2). Adolescent development. University of Maryland Medical Center. Retrieved March 2016, from http://umm.edu/health/medical/ency/articles/adolescent-development.

Lian, C. W., Hazmi, H., Jordan Hoo Ching, B., Chew Jia, Y., Nurul Nazleatul Nadira Mohd, N., & Siti Nurva'ain Mohd, K. (2015). Peer Mentoring Among Undergraduate Medical Students: Experience from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. *Education in Medicine Journal, 7*(1), e45-e54. doi:10.5959/eimj.v7i1.331.

Lo, M, Ramayah, T., & Kui, L. (2013). Mentoring and job satisfaction in Malaysia: A test on small medium enterprises in Malaysia. *International Journal of Psychology*, (13), 69-90. doi:10.7220/1941-7233.13.4.

Mack, D. M. (1998, Fall). The psychological features of effective mentors for girls and young women. The WAMLW Journal, 24–25. Retrieved May 2016, from http://people.uwec.edu/mackmd/documents/psychosocialFeaturesEffectiveMentors.pdf.

Malaysia releases landmark education blueprint. (2015, April 23). International Consultants for Education and Fairs Monitor. Retrieved August 2015, from http://monitor.icef.com/2015/04/malaysia-releases-landmark-education-blueprint/.

Musa, N. C., Lie, K. Y., & Azman, H. (2012, January). Exploring English Language Learning and Teaching in Malaysia. *Gema Online Journal of Language Studies, 12*(1), 35-51.

Pandian, A. (2006). What Works in the Classroom? Promoting Literacy Practices in English. *3L Journal of Language Teaching, Linguistic and Literature*, *11*.

Poor, C. J., & Brown, S. (2013). Increasing Retention of Women in Engineering at WSU: A Model For A Women's Mentoring Program. *College Student Journal, 47*(3), 421-428.

Sultana, A. M., & Rosli, N. B. (2016). Parental Involvement on Students" Learning Abilities and Achievement in the English Subject. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities, 6*(2), 103-106.

The 2012 Budget Speech. (2011, October 7). Retrieved February 2016, from http://www.kln.gov.my/web/syr_damascus/s2011/-/asset_publisher/ME2g/blog/the-2012-budget-speech?redirect=/web/syr_damascus/s2011.

Thain, L. A. (2010). Rhythm, music, and young learners: a winning combination. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.), *JALT 2009 Conference Proceedings.* Tokyo: JALT, 407-416.

Appendix A. Survey Questions

1. What is your ID number?   _____

2. How many younger siblings do you have?   _____

3. How many older siblings do you have?   _____

Please rate from 1 to 5 how comfortable are you in your English skills.
(1=not comfortable, 2=somewhat comfortable, 3=neutral, 4=comfortable, 5=very comfortable)

4. How comfortable are you speaking English at home with your parents?   _____

5. How comfortable are you speaking English at home with your siblings?   _____

6. How comfortable are you speaking English at school with your teachers?   _____

7. How comfortable are you speaking English at school with your classmates?   _____

8. How comfortable are you speaking English with a foreigner asking for directions?   _____

Please rate from 1 to 5 how often you speak English with your friends.
(1=never, 2=almost never, 3=sometimes/occassionally, 4=almost every time, 5=every time

9. How often do you speak English at home with your parents?   _____

10. How often do you speak English at home with your siblings?   _____

11. How often do you speak English at school with your teachers?   _____

12. How often do you speak English at school with your classmates?   _____

13. How often do you speak English at school, outside of class (ex. during recess)?   _____

Appendix B. Written Exams

Form 2 Student Written Exam Pre-Intervention
If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go? Explain your reasoning. Write a short story based on the picture:

Form 2 Student Written Exam Post-Intervention
If you were the principal of SMK DMMM, what would be the first thing you would do and why? Explain your reasoning. Write a short story based on this picture:

Form 6 Student Written Exam Pre-Intervention
If you could travel back in time three years and visit your younger self, what advice would you give yourself? Explain your reasoning. Write a short story based on this picture:

Form 6 Student Written Exam Post-Intervention
If you were the principal of SMK DMMM, what would be the first thing you would do and why? Explain your reasoning. Write a short story based on this picture:

Appendix C. Rubric for Grading Written Exams

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	Total Score
Focus Question 1	Does not restate the question. Unclear that the answer provided is relevant to the topic or prompt given.

Sentences are not varied and vocabulary is very limited. | Does not clearly restate the question and briefly provides an answer. Demonstrates minimal understanding of the task or vague reference to prompt provided.

Sentences are not varied and vocabulary is limited. | Restates the question, addresses all the requirement of text, but a limited range of vocabulary or sentence structures used. | Restates the question and demonstrates an understanding of the task. Uses a range of vocabulary and sentence structures used. Some explanation is provided to support reasoning. | Clearly demonstrates understanding of the task, insightful explanation or extends aspect of the prompt provided. A very good range of vocabulary and sentence structures used. | |
| **Creativity** Question 2 | Writing is off topic or only a simple description of the picture. Sentences are not varied. | Writing is mostly a description of picture. Sentences are not varied. The author does not seem to have used much imagination. | Story contains a few creative details and/or descriptions from the picture, but they distract from the story. The author has tried to use his imagination.

Needs a variety of sentence types. | Story contains a few creative details and/or descriptions from the picture. The author used his/her imagination.

Some sentences are varied. | Story clearly connects to the picture. Author uses a variety of sentence types to create a vivid story with details. The author has really used his/her imagination. The story contains many creative details and/or descriptions that contribute to the reader's enjoyment. | |
| **Grammar and Mechanics** | No evidence of understanding sentence structure. Sentences are fragments or run-on, **and** almost all sentences consist grammatical errors. | Some understanding of sentence structure. Several sentences are fragment or run-on, **or** almost all sentences consist grammatical errors. | Writing contains complete sentences. Some sentences are well written while others are fragments or run-on; minor grammatical error. | Mostly complete sentences that are well-written. *Few* or minor grammatical errors. | Many well-written, complete sentences. *Little* to *no* grammatical errors. | |

Appendix D. Teacher / Faculty Implementation Report

1. Do you think the big sister and little sister program helped students learn English? Why or why not?

2. Would you want to continue this program in your classroom?

3. In what context, do you see this program working in other schools?

4. What would make this program easier to implement?

5. What are some barriers in implementing this program?