

## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PEER MENTORING PROGRAM AT THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF SRIWIJAYA STATE POLYTECHNIC

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to evaluate peer mentoring program being implemented at English Department. Some problems are identified in this study such as how it is implemented, challenges faced, and student's perception on this program. Interviews, observations and document review are done in the area of mentoring covering concept, mentoring characteristics, its advantages and disadvantages. The result shows that students give positive feedback to this program such as the increase of students' engagement, academic atmosphere, communication skill and service learning. The atmosphere then motivates student to study among themselves which improves not only their intellectual ability but also their soft skill including communication, leadership and teamwork. While implementing the program, some challenging factors such as inexperienced mentors and time management makes the team not run smoothly.

**Keywords:** *peer, students' engagement, academic atmosphere, soft skill, mentoring*

### INTRODUCTION

College life is considered new for those students who just graduated from highschool. The students face independent learning which is different to the way they used to have when they were at high schools. Some are having difficulties in catching the lesson which they think is quite different to the way their teacher used to do, particularly those who decide to take major in English considered as foreign language. In addition, Some students might just new-comers in the city and they have to find rental house. It is not only that, they might have to face new culture in terms of cuisine, social customs and transportation system.

Although the new situation is challenging, many students can survive and adapt themselves easily to study and get engaged in not only class activity but also in extra curricula ones. For example, they have good performance seen from their GPA and some won in several competitions held by student union and or by other institute or organisation.

However, there are some students who find the new atmosphere at a college as a whole different world for several reasons such as less information about college concept before particularly if they are the first generation who have opportunity to study at higher level. They feel uncomfortable and not ease to justify themselves with the new situation. This makes them like to be alone, anxious, anti-social, reluctant to get engaged in class activity. As a result, they have poor performance and some even resign for being a student.

One strategy offered to help those students is by providing peer mentoring program. This program which has been introduced for almost one year, need to be evaluated to find out how it has been working, and the challenges faced in its process.

Out of many theories about peer mentoring, there is one proposed by Klassen and Clutter (2004). Klassen and Clutter (2004) suggested that mentoring covers up an integrated approach flexibly combining four development approaches: coaching, counseling, networking / facilitation, and guardianship. These incorporate both an intellectual and emotional need of the mentee. The mentoring relationship has positive characteristics; it induces purposeful change and maximizes the return on the investment in learning. It also shows how learning can be uniting and mutually beneficial processes

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and it customizes the learning experience fully to the mentee therefore producing more beneficial results.

Although it has positive aspects, it is still found difficult to implement due to some false beliefs which bring some misconceptions of mentoring. The growing false impression of the aims and outcomes of mentoring creates confusion about what characteristics a mentor should possess such as mentors must be all-wise and wonderfully patient individuals, mentors must be older than the mentee, mentors must be teachers, mentor mentee expectations are the same for everyone, mentoring is a complicated business (Murray and Owens, 1991).

As a matter of facts, Husband and Jacobs (2009), argue that mentors can be any without discrimination, whether they are young or old, it could happen in many different ways, whether it is in traditional methods or involving one to one setting for long time or just temporary. They continue that it also can run effectively even though the mentor is not a person who is very smart.

There are certain characteristics that are important for mentors to possess in order for mentoring to be successful. Responsibilities of all parties also need to be addressed to ensure the smooth running of the scheme. Mentors should be able to provide social support (emotional, appraisal, informational and instrumental) and have self-awareness, commitment, flexibility, patience, self-confidence.

Murray and Owen (1991) key elements that mentors need are strong interpersonal skills, knowledge of the organization, exemplary supervisory skills (for example, planning and appraising performance), technical competence, willingness to be responsible for someone else's growth and the ability to share credit. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2004) research suggest that mentors need skills and abilities that include; self-awareness, commitment, goal clarity and flexibility. Their attributes should include patience, self-confidence and encouragement. They should also have an interest in helping to develop others.

Mentoring brings many advantages. In its implementation it brings positive impacts to the mentee, mentor and organization. Basically mentoring provides assistance to students for they are given opportunity to explore their strengths and weaknesses in a confidential environment. Mentoring is always being able to find a source of help, reduced amount of stress, and for the mentors, this activity builds their experiences and satisfaction of helping other students. Glaser, Hall and Halperin (2006) found that helpful mentors were rated highly on accessing university services and understanding university requirements. In addition, Klasen and Clutterbuck (2004) state that advantages for mentees include; competence (identifying development needs, action planning and problem solving), goal setting, motivation and satisfaction, networking opportunities, personal change and time-effectiveness. And finally, Hill and Reddy, (2007) stated that advantages for the mentor include value, satisfaction, learning experience, credit and own reflection. It also reduces attrition rates and stress through informal supportive relationships and promotes positive educational behaviors.

Although mentoring schemes are effective they can also be challenging. However, these can often be minimized by making sure there are specific procedures in place and adapting the scheme to the setting as it progresses. The main weaknesses for the mentor are: the cost of time given to this activity, misunderstood expectations and objectives, stress, including lack of sufficient skills. As Husband and Jacobs (2009) state that although there is a myth saying mentoring demands amount of time and energy from mentors and mentees, as a matter of fact time demand is only at the beginning. Mentoring activity can be done during the routine. In addition Jacovy (2000) found frequent problems with mentoring include conflicting messages from staff, lack of consistency in meeting mentees, absenteeism of the student, and frustration of mentor by lack of impact on mentee.

Besides some challenging, at the same time it brings benefits to the institution include portraying a high-quality level of support, reducing exclusion and stress, enhancing services for the students; promoting self learning and increasing academic success. When it works, it creates conducive atmosphere such as: positive and caring atmosphere, self managed learning. Besides that mentoring promotes organizational effectiveness, performance, motivation and satisfaction of students, organizational change (reinforces desirable behaviours and mindsets), retention, strategic succession planning. It may also reduce dropout rate by giving students additional support. Finally It helps to improve improved grades, attendance and behaviour (Ehrlich, Hansford and Tennet, 2004).

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

Methodology covers methods of research, sample population, technique for collecting data. Method of research used in this study is a descriptive-qualitative research. It analyzes peer mentoring at English Department. Population of this research are those students who participated in mentoring program as mentors and mentees who are on semester 2 and 4 in 2012/2013 academic year. All population are used as source of information. The data are gathered using questionnaires, interviews, observations and document review in the light of mentoring concept, how it is implemented, the advantages and challenging during its implementation.

Questionnaires and interviews covers questions related to recruiting process, mentor training, time setting, mentoring scheme work controlling and evaluation.

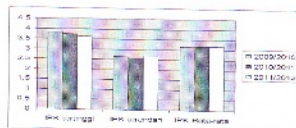
## Discussion

### English Department of Sriwijaya Polytechnic

English Department of State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya majoring in tourism and hospitality industry established in 2006 has already had successful alumni in various job fields especially in business, tourism, and hospitality industry. Currently it has approximately 200 students comprise 10 classes-4 freshman classes, 4 sophomore classes and 2 senior classes. Based on the GPA analysis, the average GPA of English students of State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya are good but still there are some students having difficulties in coping with learning.

The following figure describes students' GPA of English Department of State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya in academic year 2009/2010, 2010/2011, and 2011/2012.

FIGURE 1  
STUDENTS' GPA  
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLYTECHNIC OF SRIWIJAYA  
IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2009/2010, 2010/2011, AND 2011/2012



Source : English Department Poliri 2013

The highest GPA in the academic year 2009/2010 was 3.82, in the academic year 2010/2011 was 3.74 and in the academic year 2011/2012 3.62. The lowest GPA in the academic year 2009/2010 was 2.65, in the academic year 2010/2011 was 2.56 and in the academic year 2011/2012 2.7. The average GPA in the academic year 2009/2010 was 3.17, in the academic year 2010/2011 was 3.18 and in the academic year 2011/2012 3.19.

Based on data in Figure 1 above, it is clearly seen that there is a gap in students ability shown from their score of GPA. The lowest students need help so they can increase their GPA score as the GPA score for entering job market should not below 2.75.

Some problems are identified regarding to efforts to make students able to have high score of GPA and able to communicate using English in hospitality business. They are less participation in English conversation class, less in class engagement and less in participating in daily worker activity. Some students even dropped out or resigned because they failed to meet the demand of basic requirements such test score, absenteeism, and other personal problems which then become the reason of carrying out mentoring activity.

One thing that need to be considered here is learning English as a media of communication in hospitality industry requires atmosphere that can encourage students to speak English. Learner needs time to practice to improve their communication skill. Unfortunately, atmosphere outside English Department fails to provide this environment. Therefore the place that they can rely on to practice is within this department.

### Peer Mentoring Program at English Department

As it has been stated above that learning system in a college can be significantly different to new students, especially for those who have never been socialised about college concept before. Besides that learning English as a foreign language is challenging for students because the atmosphere outside this department in their daily life is not supporting. Therefore a strange new concept faced by new students can be a huge obstacle that disturbs significantly student's path.

To face this challenging situation mentioned above, mentoring program is considered by English Department as one strategy to help students to get adapted to college learning system, and to provide them environment to improve their leadership and communication skill. It is realized that students are in transition from high school to college system. Some of them have problem with motivation. They get less motivation because they have problems and they foresee none helps them. Therefore, having a peer mentor helps them to go through the transition a lot easier. Their peer will represent all supports, provide encouragement, advise in order they can succeed. Peer mentoring create an open atmosphere of learning, decrease the number of them failing in exams, increase engagement in teaching learning process, both in classroom and outside class activity and bring to competence among job market.

### Steps for implementing Peer Mentoring Activity at English Department

A number of important factors need to be taken into account when implementing a mentoring scheme into an organization for the first time. Regarding to recruiting mentors the main important points are providing an appropriate information, advertising and screening, finding a suitable match (mentor and mentee) and making sure the mentor has the required characteristics. Within training of mentors aspects that should be covered include; information about the student mentee, roles, responsibilities and mentoring skills (for example; communication, problem solving and conflict resolution).

Ways of improving the mentoring scheme long term would be to make sure feedback was obtained from each year to find out what the strengths and weaknesses are. This means that the weaknesses can be addressed and improved and the strengths continued. Steps for implementing peer mentoring schemes comprises recruiting mentors, training, making the mentoring scheme work, controlling and evaluation.

### Recruiting mentors

Recruiting mentors need to consider some characteristics mentioned before. Essentially a mentor should own characteristics which can inspire, responsible, committed, self awareness, self confidence, flexible and patience because they are asked to give social support in terms of emotional and intellectual through coaching, counseling, networking, and guardianship. Therefore it is important to screen mentors and find out that they have an interest in helping to develop others both emotionally and academically.

Started from beginning, all students are informed that one characteristic of mentoring is voluntarily work. Although it is voluntarily work, the students playing role as mentors will be given rewards in form of certificate showing their experience and achievement while mentoring their peers. Besides certificate of achievement, benefits that they get from mentoring are also explained in details so that they have motivation to participate in this activity. Some benefits that they can gain while being a mentor are in the area of being able to explore their strength and weakness, to build up service learning, team work and time management.

This stage of socializing was done not in one occasion only. It is founded in many occasions including in class during formal lessons, in gathering with student union and through posters and



leaflets. It is expected that this program when it is socialized will create academic atmosphere building up social norms about peer mentoring among students. Many students are not familiar with this program. Actually in their daily routine they have experienced this activity in many ways such as group project, study group etc., but it is not well organized. In this step, feed back gained from students as mentors and mentees is considered good. Almost all students gathered in the meeting held in department hall to get information about mentoring program that was given in form of discussion and movies of mentoring. Meeting with teachers, academic advisors, laboratories and library coordinators were also done to get support.

The recruitment process of mentors then is conducted at the beginning of semester. This activity involved the academic supervisors, teachers, and management. Information of when to do the recruitment was done formally such as formal announcement on notice board, and informally such as through student union gathering through small talks before and after a lesson given. Observations during this step was also conducted to see the students response revealing their willingness to participate.

The next step taken is the application forms for being a mentor or mentee are given to those who are interested. The forms ask information about personal information including special interest subject need to be assisted, kinds of assistance expected from mentors, skills owned by prospective mentors, hobbies and time available. The academic supervisor then matches mentee and mentor. From the number of log book distributed, there were 50 mentors and 50 mentees registered. Most of them were from year one and year 2 students.

Matching is one crucial part. According to some researches (Husband and Jacobs, 2009) the failure of mentoring process are found on mismatching. Mentor and mentees need to fit each other. Therefore, variables like hobbies, interest topic and skills need to be considered here. To minimize mismatching, academic supervisors focused not only to the forms filled up but also to run interview to screen prospective mentors and mentees to be matched. From questionnaire given to both mentors and mentees 95 % students playing role as mentee did not complain for their mentors, however there are 5 % commenting that they need more experienced mentor.

## **Training**

The training session for the mentors has been done first week of semester or according to the needs/ needs basis. Stressing on the content (subjects) material and the administration information, the training is to have Five Cs competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Training is not always in formal way. Training is done in form of informal gathering attended by mentors and academic supervisors. The agenda of the gathering is discussion, watching film about mentoring, how to motivate, time management and leadership issues. This is to empower mentors so they can work out with their mentees. Students give positive responses to the training given. While doing training, mentors suggested to have more training in the area of communication.

## **Making the mentoring scheme work**

During its implementation, academic supervisors and study program management should monitor their activities through log out book. This is important because many mentors and mentees need support and guide from their academic supervisors and management. The activities of mentoring scheme will be tutoring, homework help, test preparation, and structured tasks and will be under supervised by the head of English Department State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya.

For the first run, mentors were guided to contact their mentees and set the time and goal together. Both parties sit together and found out what kind of assistance that a mentor should provide. In first meeting they also had to do with time management and where and how they would work. Setting the goal was important so after a period time evaluation could be done by them to find out how far this activity works. From the questionnaire, it is identified that 99 % of the participants, whether they are mentors or mentees, complained that they faced hurdles in time setting. Both parties experienced delay and cancellation which discourage them significantly.

To overcome this problem, mentors and mentees are advised that they can take the advantage of technological change. Nowadays in digital era, community is provided with social media such as facebook, twitter, email, blog etc. These media are helpful to do telementoring. Mentors are

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### Controlling and Evaluation

To make this program sustained, controlling and evaluating were also conducted. Some researches suggest that key reasons for success in mentoring schemes are: monitoring of the program implementation, screening of mentors, matching mentors and mentees, preliminary training and on-going training, support for mentors, clear expectations of mentors and mentees, clear communications and set objectives by organizers.

Mentors were evaluated through Peer Evaluation Sheet given to the mentee. The mentee were asked to rate their mentors on each of the following:

- Attendance and punctuality
- Knowledge of the subjects
- Clear answers to the questions
- Use of helpful examples
- Patience
- Encouragement
- Caring and understanding attitude
- Overall mentor rating

Instead of the peer evaluation sheet, Students Sign-in Sheet and Contact Summary Sheet found in log-out book were also used.

From the questionnaire, it can be stated here that 95 % agree that they have good mentor with some attributes like patience, ability to give clear explanation, and appropriate examples, experiencing, caring and full of encouragement. However, 100 % mentees said that they had problems with attendance and punctuality which were also complained by the mentors.

From open questions related to the mentoring implementation which were given to all participants, it is found that after being carried out for one semester this program shows positive contribution for students in doing their assignment, increasing motivation, increasing the students' academic marks or score for certain subjects including writing, grammar, speaking and reading. It is found that 28 out of 44 students involved in this program stated that their score in those subjects increased significantly from C to B and from B to A.

This program also builds up communication skill. From 44 students interviewed, there are 25 students say that they gain self confidence in speaking English. They commented that practicing with their mentor builds up self confidence and their communication skill.

Other positive points that can be stated here is this program helps them finish their assignment, find the best strategy they can use to study, get relax while studying, keep motivated and learn leadership skill.

However, besides the positive aspects stated above, this program is challenging seen from several factors such as time management, place to study and various technique in mentoring. All students interviewed said that they had problems in time management. Changing schedule discourage their motivation. It is hard for them to stick on their schedule agreed by the mentor and mentee(s) due to changes on their daily activity. Time changes make them difficult to come to an agreement for the replacement. Others or four mentees complains that they need more experienced mentors and various material.

The challenging situation demands English department to take action in controlling and motivate them so the benefits of this program can reach all students and the problems can be minimized.

## CONCLUSION

Peer mentoring carried at English Department is being done with some purposes such as to help students understand the college life, to give academic support both to freshman classes and senior classes in order to improve students ability in their academic and non academic matters. The mentoring is done through some integrated activities such as coaching, counseling, networking and guardianship. It is expected that by participating in this program, the gap between those with high score of GPA and those of those with low score of GPA will get reduced so none of them will be left behind.

This program is implemented by having coordination with English Department and Student Union. The coordination is required to socialize this activity in terms of socializing the benefits, the steps of recruitment, training process, controlling and evaluation.

Although some problems are found such as time management and various technique required to avoid boredom some advantages are identified according to students sheet feedback. They are the increase of academic atmosphere, communication skill and service learning. The atmosphere then motivates student to study among themselves which improve not only their intellectual ability in term of academic score but also their soft skill including communication, leadership and teamwork.

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