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Heterogeneous Effects of Peer Tutoring: Evidence from Rural Chinese Middle Schools*

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Abstract

Peer tutoring is a well-known type of peer-assisted learning, which has proven to be a cost-effective intervention. We designed a peer tutoring program that matches high-performing students as tutors to their low-performing classmates and provides non-monetary incentives for them to study together and improve the pair's academic performance. We implemented the program and tested the effects in rural Chinese middle schools. The program significantly improved the tutors' math scores and produced other benefits regarding study attitude and social behaviors. However, the program did not improve the tutees' math scores and instead augmented their learning stress. The most compelling explanation is that the set-up of the program brought to light the tutees' standing, by design, in the bottom half of their class.

Keywords: Peer tutoring; group incentive; heterogeneous effects; mental health; learning stress.

JEL Classification Numbers: I21, I24, I25.

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