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Research Article

Tutorials: Transforming Student Learning and Generating Employment

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ABSTRACT

Tutorials provide quality learning and as a result empowered students. Teaching in a government university in Zambia, it is recognized like everywhere else in the world, there are large student numbers that flock universities each year with the idea of enhancing their qualifications for gainful employment and thereby achieve good lifestyles. However, the gap between learning and achievement is skewed. Many depend on minimal information sufficient enough to pass an examination. It has been observed that students will benefit greatly if there were tutorial hours set aside each day for students to consult, improve their knowledge, acquire confidence and gain a level of professionalism through student-student and student-teacher interactions and activities. Tutorial teaching is a method delivered following a lecture. In a tutorial the teaching is given to a specific group of students who have feel they need the added impetus to achieve their individual academic goals. The very aim of a tutorial is to help students to improve their academic abilities which are not explicated in a classroom with achievers and overachievers. Tutoring usually help strengthen subject comprehension, boost confidence, and build important learning skills. Tutoring gives students more attention than in a lecture theatre where any special attention which is well-nigh impossible for the lecturer, if one takes into consideration the limitations of time and the number of students in attendance. Tutorials help students who struggle to keep up with the rest, as well as those who are not challenged enough.

Keywords: Tutoring, Learning skills, Comprehension

Introduction

A tutorial is a great levelling factor in academic learning. Tutorials encourage openness, lends itself to sharing and friendly rivalry within the group. It provides the scaffold to successful learning and several aspects are involved to make them beneficial to students. Tutorials help students to acquire practical

knowledge in responding to individual challenges that may be relevant to their individual careers later. These are areas such as events planning, effective communication skills for delivery of thoughts, ideas and content, critical thinking, strategies for questions, helps generate creative activities, and provides motivation

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for the student to excel. A tutorial is an important teaching-learning tool and its benefits are psychological, emotional, academic and intellectual. Tutorials can and should be interactive, less formal than a lecture, because tutorials are small in which material from lectures and readings rendered can be discussed in additional detail, and maybe at a slower pace than a lecture (Guill et al., 2020).

Considering that students have varying levels of understanding and ability to respond to class lectures, therefore, a less formal approach will nurture a sense of well-being, promote active learning as it incorporates a positive energy shift into the course to enhance learning through individual and collective interactions (Guill et al., 2020). It will encourage students, especially reticent students to be vocal – to ask exploratory questions, especially so, as tutorials constitute small groups. Tutorials can have varied patterns of delivery and can be a combination of methods, suitable to the subject or topic on hand:

- **Q & A:** It can be – student to student; student to teacher; teacher to student; teacher to group; group to teacher; student to group.
- **Discussion-oriented:** These focus on exploration of course content through discussions, analytical thoughts and debates.
- **Problem-solving:** They are common in the science subjects where the focus is to seek and find solutions, processes and quantitative reasoning.
- **Reviews of books, journal articles, conference or seminar papers and their own work:** Students ask questions after review of key factors in the material to consolidate their learning from their instructor. Sometimes the discussions can help them individually in their assessment.
- **Observations and Reasoning:** Here the pros and cons of a situation or stand with qualitative understanding are answered using insight and rationale.

Tutorials are meant to be and begin as ice breakers and knowledge enhancers for students who have difficulty in reaching their optimum level of learning for varied personal inhibitions and academic reasons, and therefore

fail to achieve their individual academic peaks during and at the end of the course. It is necessary to make tutorials an opportunity to work closely with other students and understand their learning curve. All of the above will help learners enhance their communication, ethical and social skills with a focus on cultivating open minds, critical thinking, time management for delivery of their work and professional outlook. For many graduate students, tutorials often provide their first and sometimes only chance to apply and develop their teaching skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Tutorials encourage:

- **Extra reading:** The group's openness and rivalry can promote a desire to learn more with additional reading either through the library or with the help of online sources. The additional information will provide the impetus to challenge their peers.
- **Student participation:** State clearly that student participation is expected and that they should comment upon, question and debate the topic discussed. A tutorial usually provides opportunities for sharing and participation.
- **Obtain student feedback:** Tutorials may be the only time when teachers can get feedback on their work. Tutorials should help students to uncover their misconceptions and how they are proved correct and where they are proved wrong. Feedback can be either written or verbal.
- **Levels of understanding students:** Students will regard the tutorial as being important if they feel that they are recognized as individuals, and that you will notice if they are absent. They will share information that will provide insight into their individual performance scale.
- **Professional behaviour:** It is an opportunity for lecturers, teachers and students to practice and impart professional behaviour. Check your students' work climate by watching how they relate to other students. Instill in students the need to focus on correct behaviour. Do not socialize or encourage erratic behaviour. Teachers can undertake regular assessments and ensure that students do not question your objectivity.

- **Intolerance of disruptive student behaviour:** Dealing with students can be difficult, and in adverse situations resolution should be found as soon as possible, otherwise it can form and set a negative pattern for replication from other students to do as they wish irrespective of locale, privilege or jurisdiction. It is necessary to inform students of expected classroom behaviour and decorum as stated on the first day of the tutorial. There may also be a need to speak to the students involved outside of the class, individually.

Planning a Tutorial

A tutorial needs to be planned well ahead of time to bring out efficiency of the program and the academic learning skills of learners (Weitzel and Blank, 2019). Practice whilst acquiring the added ability to handle the various aspects related to learning lends itself to overcoming challenges for the instructor and the student, as several factors come into play during a tutorial. Students learn how to handle queries related to the content, to outline and flesh out an essay; prepare a seminar or a conference paper with some degree of confidence. The added focus is that the students do not work with fear or a sense of defeat or lack of motivation. The students come to a tutorial for two reasons, to learn and improve in their academic performance as well as to acquire a sense of purpose and put on the correct path to survive their respective futures. To achieve the ability and level of confidence, the student must understand the following essential factors:

- **Recognized learning goals:** Tutorial goals are congruent and born out of the goals set for the course and clearly define the expectations from the students. These goals must be communicated to the students. Focus and encourage active learning among your students, and provide them the opportunity to practice, with feedback, the core concepts or skills for the course.
- **Establish guidelines:** Devote time early in the term to familiarise students with your guidelines to indicate the progress of the tutorials. It is necessary to ask for student input. Make and maintain non-negotiable

rules such as submission policies and deadlines. It is necessary to provide allowances for valid reasons for delay and if the delay will attract a deduction in marks. It is necessary to provide students with a copy of these guidelines and post the rules on the bulletin board.

- **Harness the lesson to the mind of students:** It is necessary to begin with your learning objectives for the session to help you limit your content to a limited number of ideas or concepts for a session. Time estimates for each section of the tutorial must be included. Additional time may be considered if it is necessary and warranted.
- **Use support materials:** In use visual aids such as slides, power points, hand-outs, etc. to activate thinking, make certain that the information is legible, concise and comprehensible and demonstrate equipment use, ensure there is practice before the tutorial. It is necessary to avoid any distracting emojis, unnecessary gifs, etc. Though old in methodology, the instructor can use the time-honoured chalkboard for tutorials, and it will establish its own impact with students. It is also necessary to prepare examples and exercises should students need additional practice.

Conducting a Tutorial

A tutorial can be conducted in an individual fashion, but for students to understand not just the content but the related skills, the instructor must anchor the tutorials with skill, care and sense of purpose (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), because it is not merely content that a student learns. The student also acquires a level of professionalism which will form their individual career path. Therefore, it is crucial that there is a pattern to conduct these tutorial classes.

- **Synchronize the lecture and tutorial:** Tutorials usually are a follow up on a lecture. Therefore it is imperative for these students to attend lectures before attending tutorials, as it must be made clear that tutorials do not replace lectures. It is not necessary to have a tutorial for every lecture. However, it necessary to cover the topic of the lecture through tutorials. Alternatively,

arrange for students to share with you a copy of their notes, so that you have an understanding of their knowledge level. This usually provides the starting block for the instructor to progress with the topic under consideration.

- **Establish connections:** Students need to visualize the large canvas of the subject to the idea, issue, sense or thought that forms the topic and integrate the tutorial with their experiences in the course. There is need to weave the old information previously taught with new or additional information, thereby making it coherent with the information already instilled, aiding students to make links –between topics in a subject as well as between subjects.
- **Use examples:** Explanations could be made with suitable examples taken from the subject and topic being considered. There could be a sharing of personal experiences, observations, research, or real-world information to help students hone in on the practical applications of concepts.
- **Student engagement:** It is crucial to establish eye contact during tutorials and to accept questions, brief discussions and to develop and establish rapport with students. At the start of the tutorial, the instructor can inform the students if interruptions for clarifications in between your lecture are acceptable or if they need to raise it at the end of the lecture. It is necessary to be voluble to retain the attention of students. The sense of informality can be had when you interact with students are while they are engaged in individual or shared work. This allows the quiet students to ask questions easily.
- **Use of visuals:** It is good to use the blackboard, to look at and speak to your students with visuals encourage comprehension and prevent ambiguity among the students. It is good to speak loud enough so that students can hear and see you and as an instructor you can also get a grasp of their responses to your teaching.

Assessment Strategies

Any teacher or instructor would and should appreciate feedback with regard to the content imparted during a course taught (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). These can in three points of the course, – it could be the formative, continuous or summative assessments i.e:

- i) at the commencement of the course, where the students are gauged for their individual academic knowledge level
 - ii) midway to estimate how much the students have absorbed and retained
 - iii) at the end of the course through an assignment or test
- **To ask detailed questions:** It is necessary for students to be aware that they can ask questions, just as much as the instructor can during a session. In your rules you can specify that they need to make notes, raise doubts, arrive at questions and issues as they arise during lectures and bring their individual lists to the tutorial. Encourage students to search and find answers by themselves before they approach the instructor. This could be done, using the library or through online sources.
 - **Prepare questions:** It is good to challenge students to move beyond their current knowledge and comfort zone to explore new possibilities. In order to accomplish this successfully, the instructor must design questions ahead of the tutorial sessions with the correct answers or links to the path to finding the correct answers. Prepared questions and answers help to improve student learning and it increases their confidence. It also provides a sense of fulfillment for the instructor.
 - **Clarity of purpose and thought:** Tutorials do not encourage silence on the part of students as the purpose of a tutorial is to break the shackles of timidity and silence. This can be done by using the inductive or deductive approach. This is done to encourage a discussion from a point raised by a student for questions on specific topic areas related to the session. It also clarifies the individual point of view of the student.

If the question does not raise a response, use follow-up questions framed around the topic under study. These could be the standard “wh” questions. This usually builds the student’s desire to understand the concept and elicit more questions to seek deeper understanding of the subject. A tutorial is never hurried or hastily conducted, therefore ensure there is sufficient time for clarity of the points to register with the students.

Tutorial Assessments

Tutorial assessments are an important aspect of the teaching-learning exercise. It provides valuable feedback, which could change, improve subsequent tutorials or rectify areas to make the tutorials additionally effective for both – the instructor and students. Therefore there is need to set goals, organize content and select teaching strategies, design specific assignments and activities to help students gain learning satisfaction and to enable them to achieve course goals. In this section of the tutorial, there will be need to decide how to assess student learning in the course. Activities and assignments, mean that there is an already developed assessment strategy and pattern that will be followed for the duration of the course.

Assessment of student learning can range from informal assessments such as observing a well-informed, well-articulated analysis or discussion of a topic or the level of student involvement and contribution in the discussion, to a formal assessment of a test to evaluate student learning that has contributed positively to individual grades in the course, and to student responses in a specific class to specific situations. It may be decided that the planned student activities and assignments are enough to meet the goals, or there may be need to add additional or different strategies to straddle the factors of time, intellectual capacity of the learner and generating energy and sustained motivation.

Tutorials are not only for weak students or limited to schools students. It must be seen as beacons of inspiration for students and faculty at all levels of education. A glance at No. 4 on the UN’s list of global universal sustainable development goals (SDG) is a call to “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”. It must be remembered that people are not alike and their experiences, milestones and situations are different. Yet, they form a part of our micro and macro society. As teachers, lecturers and members of management of educational institutions at the primary, secondary, senior secondary and tertiary levels, there is a need to include students from diverse backgrounds and strata. Tutorials will help achieve a better future for themselves, the society they will positively impact through their education and create a better world for their future citizens. Tutorials should inspire individuals and institutions the world over into education which will lead to tolerance, unity and peace. Allow tutorials create an environment for learning that is inclusive of all students.

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