

The Effectiveness of Tutor Questions in University Tutorials: A Case Study*

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ABSTRACT Students from previously disadvantaged educational backgrounds enroll at institutions of higher learning underprepared for academic work. One of the reasons for this is that in schools there is very little exposure to English because learners are taught by teachers whose English proficiency is low and this is passed on to the students. Consequently, they enter tertiary education with very low competency levels in the language of instruction. The objectives of the study were to establish how the use of closed-display, closed-referential, and open-referential questions by different tutors encouraged student participation, enhanced comprehension of academic content, provided feedback to discussion questions and sustained interaction in tutorial. To undertake this investigation, qualitative and quantitative research design was used and an analytical framework to examine the quantity and quality of students' output. The findings revealed that open-referential questions produced elaborate student output with many more discourse acts, while the closed-display questions generated limited responses in the form of reply-informs. Closed-display questions were used differently and to better effect because they functioned as follow-up questions that provided links between student turns and sustained the interaction.