

PEER INTERACTION AND THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE DURING DISTANCE EDUCATION FACE-TO-FACE TUTORIALS

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses classroom interaction with reference to the link between tutor discourse effectiveness and learner initiative during peer interaction. English, which is a second language for both tutors and learners is used for conducting tutorials, and not Setswana, the first language of the interactants. Two areas are focused on:

- a. the effects of ideas about oracy on initiative during peer interaction; and
- b. how initiative enhances negotiation of learning

Nine tutors of the Small Business Management course, offered through distance education in Botswana, participated in the experiment. The experimental group comprised six tutors who received some training about classroom talk, while the three constituting the control group did not receive such intervention. Tutorials were audio-recorded before and after intervention. These were then transcribed and analysed using pre-specified discourse categories derived from the discourse analysis model by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). Results from the two stages showed that tutors who received training about oracy selected more effective discourse, and that learners under their care showed a higher level of initiative than their counterparts. The conclusion drawn was that learner initiative and the capacity to negotiate learning are enhanced when learners are taught by tutors who consciously apply ideas about oracy. This led to a number of recommendations, one of them being that distance education tutors should be systematically trained about the potential of oracy ideas for more effective face-to-face tutorials.

Keywords: Oracy, collaborative interaction, discourse effectiveness, initiative.