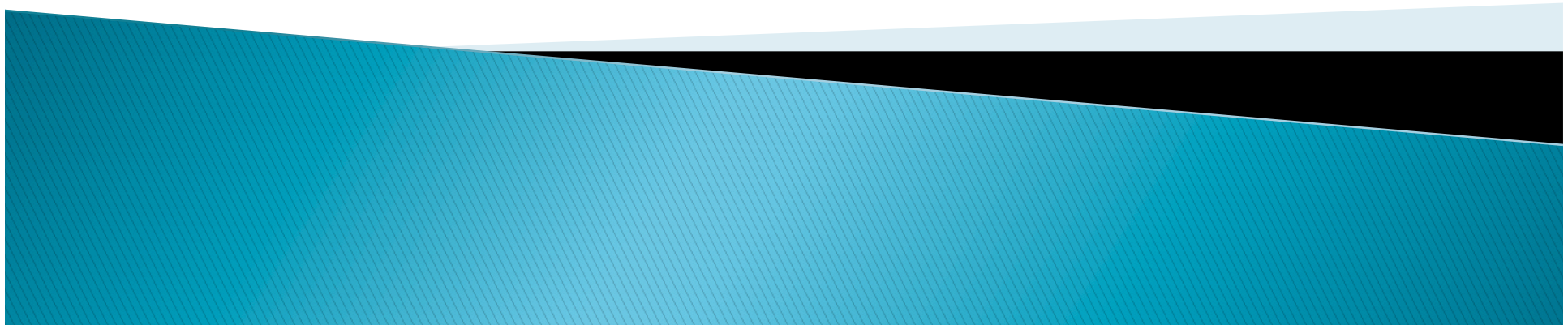# Evaluation of a tutor training programme: An institutional study

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Fundani:CHED

Purpose of study

- Impetus: Absence of data on effectiveness of the tutor training programme (TTP) and the impact of tutorials on the performance of tutees.

- Main aim: To undertake an evaluation of the TTP at CPUT (see Hassan 2012 for conceptualization of evaluation; Hassan 2013).

- Purpose of this paper: To provide an account of some of the key findings of the study and to discuss the main recommendations made for the improvement of tutor training.
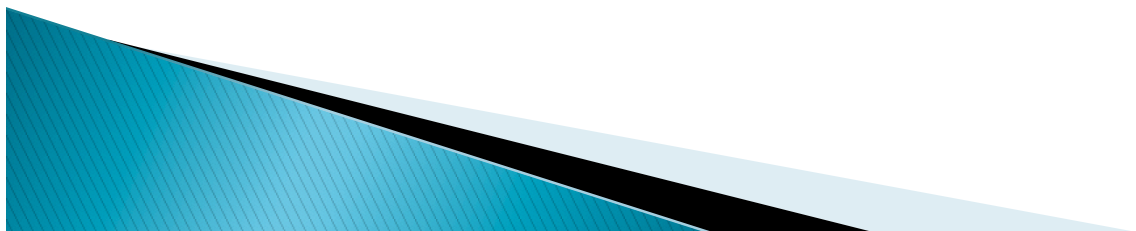
Literature background

- Tutorials improve the teaching & learning experience of tutees (Comfort 2011; Topping 1998).
- Mechanism of enhancing deep learning in small groups (Hanley (1996; Underhill and McDonald 2010).
- Bruffee (1993) claims that tutors provide support in translating the terms of the communities they are trying to enter so that they may incorporate the practices of that group.
- Reciprocal peer-tutoring: Tutors may learn by teaching (Topping 1998) while developing and enhancing communication, interpersonal and organizational skills (Falchikov 2001).

# Theoretical framework: Activity theory (A.T.)
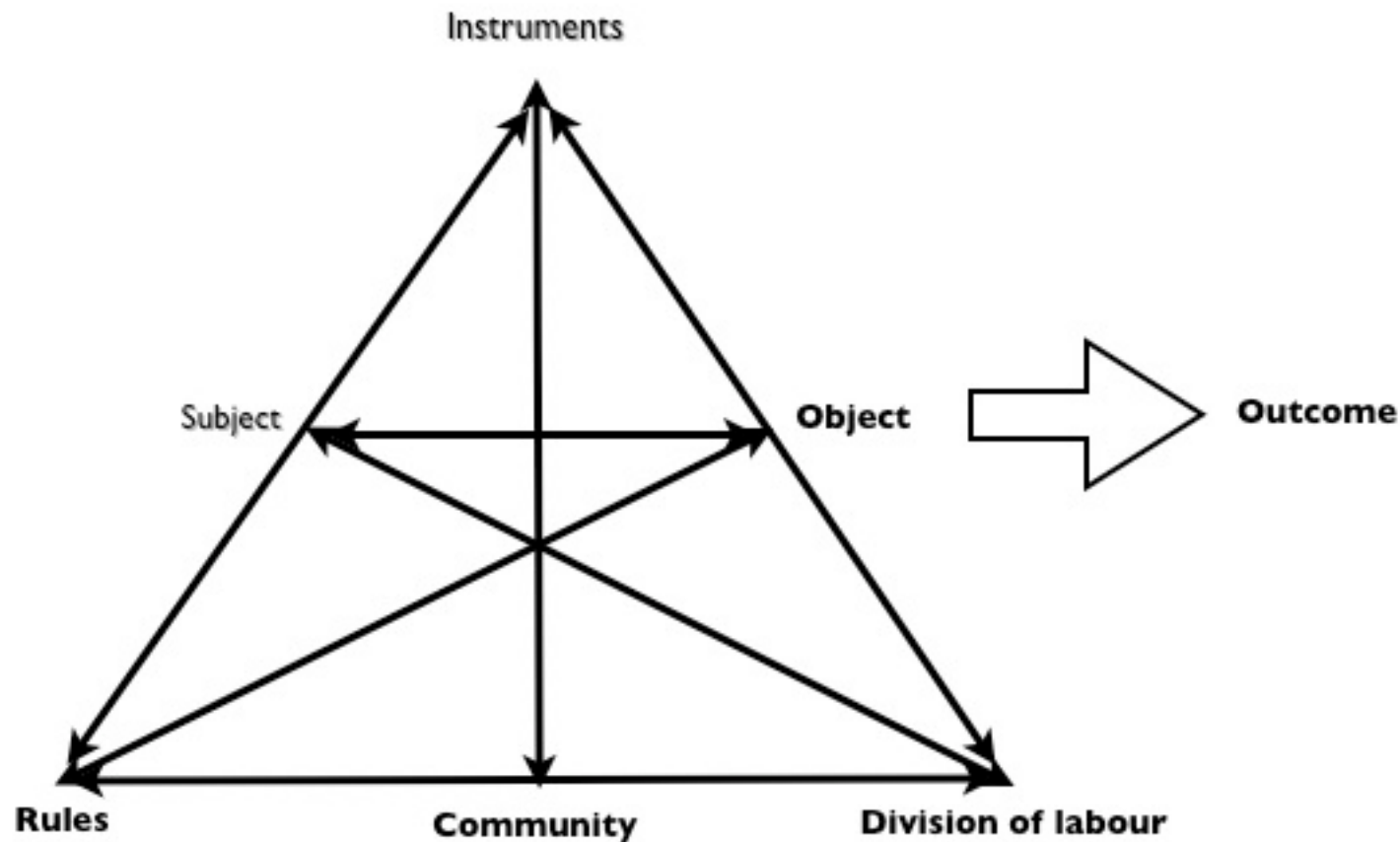
Application of A.T.

- When Activity theory was used in evaluating the application of the TTP in departments:
- Subject was the tutor.
- Object was the enhancement of learning among tutee
- Tools were the course materials, technology, and teaching and learning methods
- Community: tutees, link lecturers, lecturers and tutor-training coordinators.
- Rules referred to relevant policies.
- Division of labour: Who was doing what.
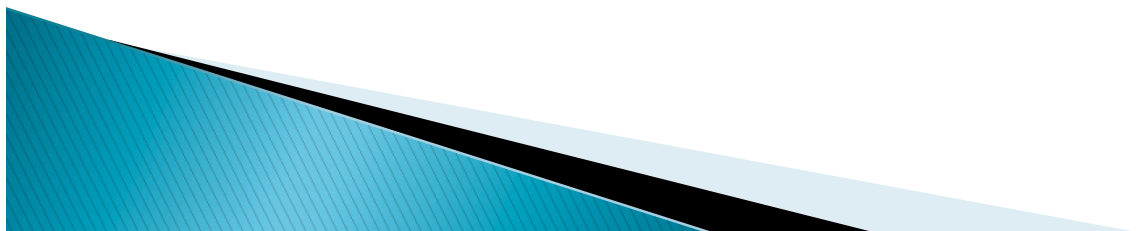
Contradictions

- Engeström's (2008) view of contradiction is that it is the key to understanding the source of the problem in addition to having a developmental potential: "contradictions manifest themselves in disturbances and innovative solutions.
- An activity system is a virtual disturbance and innovation-producing machine" (Engeström, 2008, p. 205).
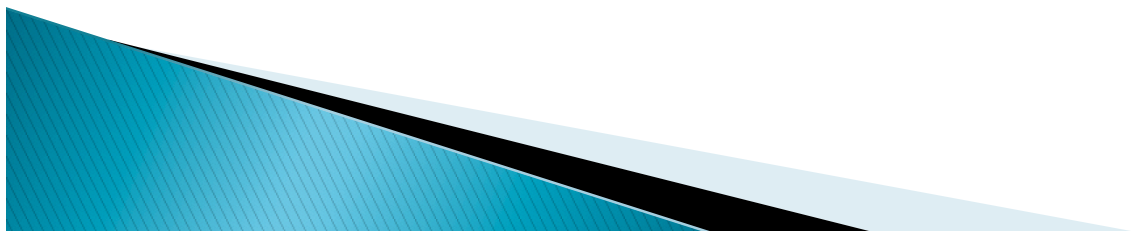
Research question

▸ What are the perceptions of lecturers, link lecturers, tutor training coordinators, tutors and tutees regarding the implementation of the tutor training programme and/or tutorials?
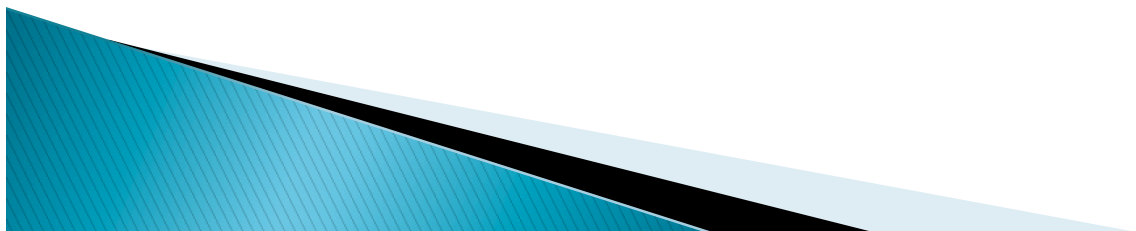
Tutor training programme (TTP) models

Centralized

De-centralized
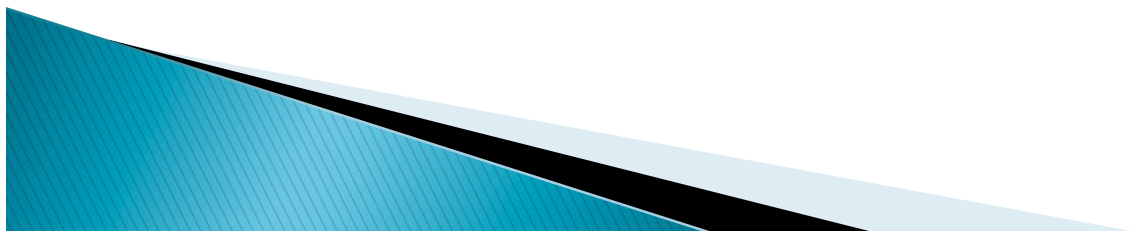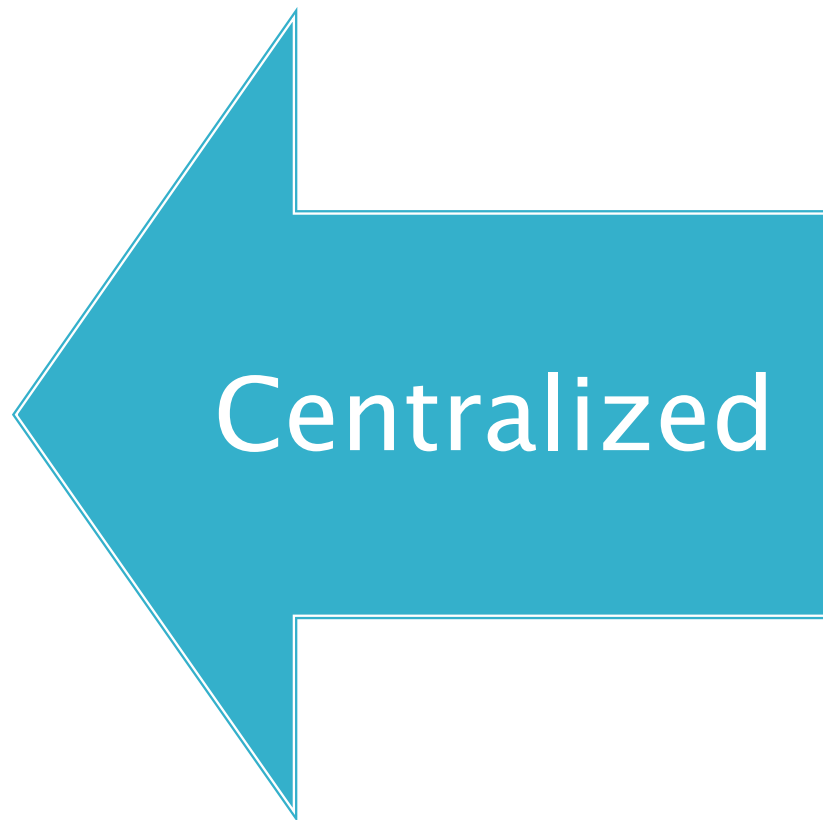
Methods

- 1) A qualitative study involving face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with the subject and community, namely, the TTP manager, tutor training coordinators (3), link lecturers (3), lecturers (7) and tutors (6);
- 2) A qualitative study pertaining to observation of the tutor training programme (to evaluate the tools);
- 3) Document analysis of the course materials (tools) and other relevant documents, and
- 4) A quantitative approach involving self-administered questionnaires to elicit tutees' perceptions of tutorials as the object. (896 tutees responded).

# Results: Main findings

- 1) Over-emphasis on generic training at the expense of discipline-specific tutor training,
- 2) Lack of post-training support for tutors.
- 3) Lack of training for lecturers in the management of tutors and tutorials.
- 4) Tutees held tutors in higher regard than the lecturers.
- 5) Tutorials were deemed to be beneficial and instrumental in enhancing tutees 'academic performance.

Results: Generic training

- TTP was effective in that generic skills training such as the accommodation of diversity and cross-cultural communication were useful in enabling tutors to cope with the challenges of tutoring a diverse student population.
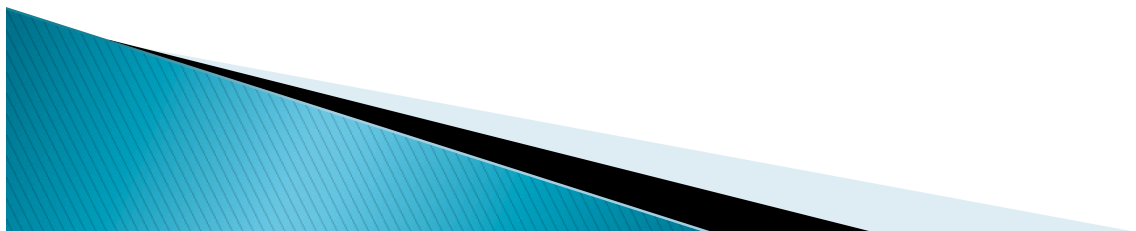
# Results: Generic vs discipline specific training

▸ The de-centralized model was meant to be providing discipline-specific training but this was not happening; instead training was mostly generic.

▸ Primary level contradiction (Engestrom 1987; Roth 2004) can be found in the tools.
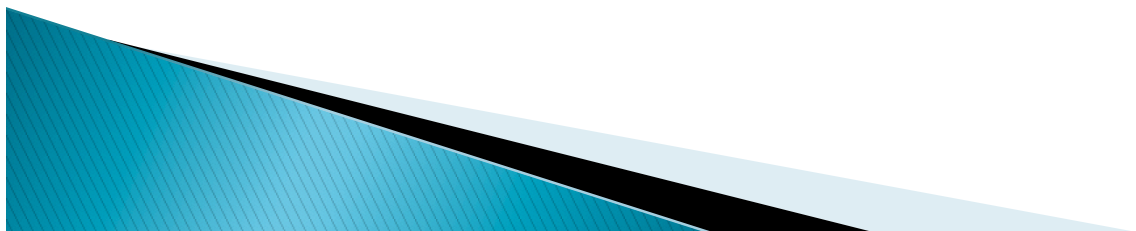
Results: Post-training support

- Limited support was being provided to tutors after the training.
- Departments expected to provide further training: "…. The lecturer is the expert in the subject and gives further training in the subject …[but] I wouldn't know if this is being done".
- Some support is offered is on an informal basis.
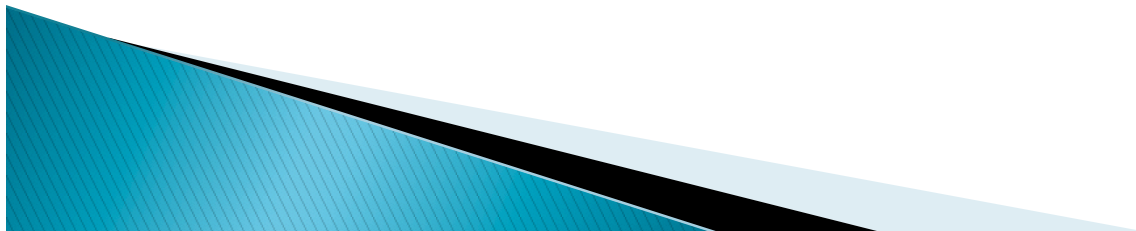
Results: Role of the tutor

- Tutors explained that their role was as follows:
- To work with the lecturers regarding conducting of tutorials.
- To explain difficult concepts to students.
- To explain concepts in the student's mother tongue language.
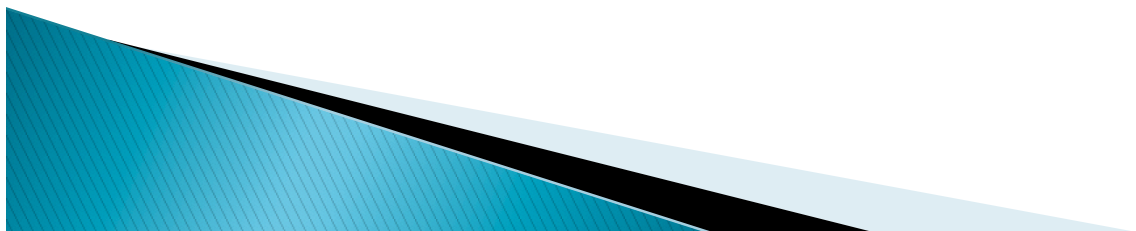
Results: Community

- Furthermore, in some faculties tutors were not being utilized because some lecturers felt that, as undergraduates, tutors lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to assist tutees.
- Contradiction: tutors were trained but not utilized.
- Lack of training for lecturers.

Results: Perceptions of tutees

▸ Tutees expressed confidence in the role that tutors played and stated that they were more effective and approachable than lecturers in promoting an understanding of the subject.
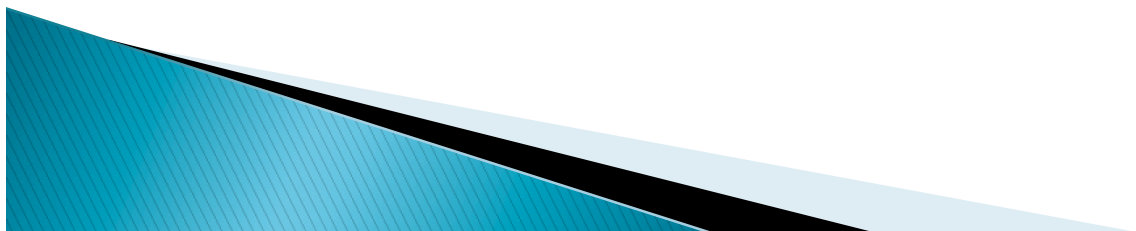
Tutees perceptions of tutorials

	A	N	D	Total n
Attending tutorials helped me improve my test or examination marks.	85	10	5	890
In general, I found the tutorials helpful.	67	22	11	824
I feel that the lecturer could have been better than the tutor at explaining difficult concepts.	42	34	24	866

Tutees perceptions of tutorials

|	A	N	D	TOTAL n
The tutorials should be better organized.	66	16	18	869
Tutorials were not scheduled in the class timetable.	41	18	41	861
The tutor was not able to explain concepts in an understandable way.	63	22	15	883

Tutees comments

▸ "I benefitted from tutorials as it showed me what to expect from examinations".

▸ "It showed me how questions could be asked during exams".

▸ "The tutor helped me to answer questions correctly".

▸ "Getting to understand the subject more".

▸ "I got the opportunity of being told something I did not understand in my mother tongue".

Tutees perceptions of tutors (use of tools)

- Communicated effectively (78%).
- Explain concepts in an understandable way (63%).
- Explanations in tutees' mother tongue (46%).
- Were able to teach well (73%).
- Not able to use visual aids effectively (45%).
- Motivated tutees to learn.
- Covered content that was of a high standard (47%).
- Should ask more probing questions to encourage tutees to engage with the content (70%).
- Tutor encouraged tutees to ask questions (83%).
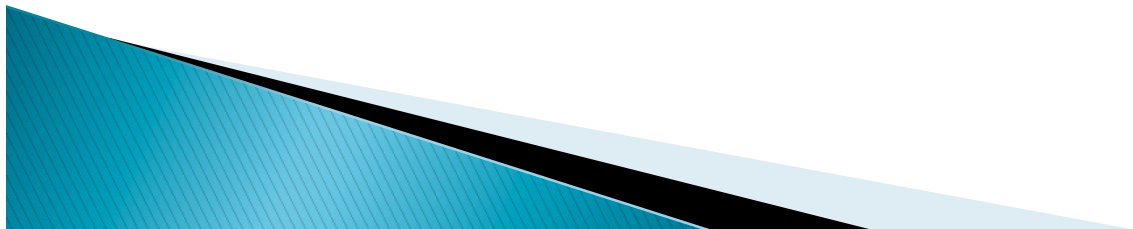
Conclusion

- Generic TTP was effective but discipline-specific training was lacking.
- Consensus (among the majority of tutees and most lecturers) that tutors were effective in managing and facilitating tutorials and that tutorials had resulted in improvements in the academic performance of tutees (outcome).
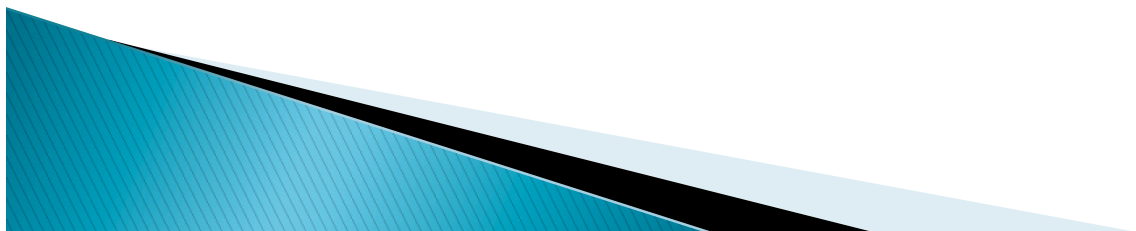
# Recommendations

- A balance between generic training and discipline-specific tutor training was needed to promote contextualized learning.
- The community needed to include senior students (BTech, Masters and Doctoral) who should be employed as teaching assistants.
- Discipline-specific training should be implemented for lecturers and their teaching assistants→transformation of the object.

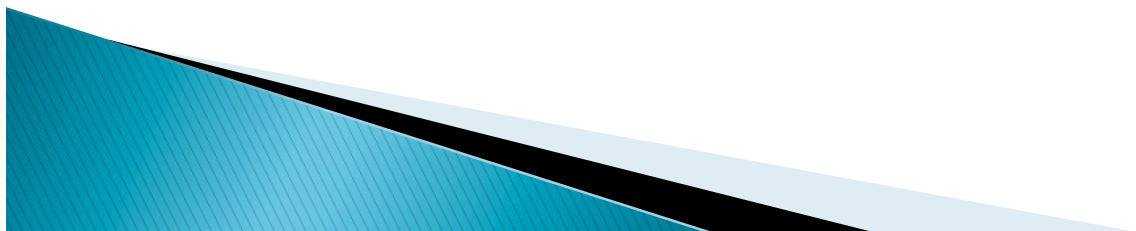# Recommendations con't

- **Roles:** As a staff development initiative, lecturers need training on *how to plan tutorials and how to work with tutors* in the running of tutorials so that learning among tutees is enhanced.
- **Subject:Tutors** should undergo continuous *disciple-specific tutor training* within their *departments/faculties* and should collaborate closely with TAs and/or lecturers.
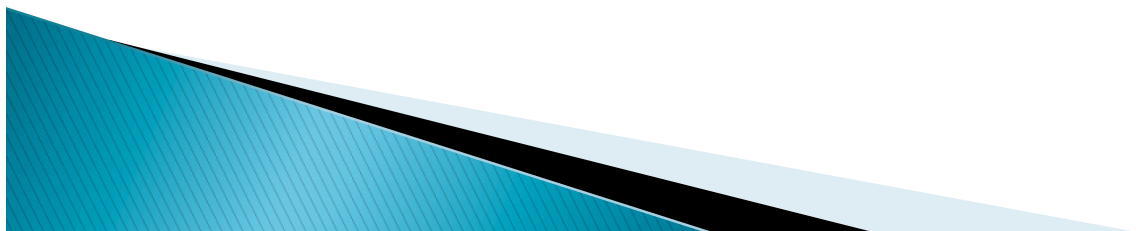
Research uptake

- Emerging findings led to implementation of a discipline-specific TTP for lecturers and teaching assistants.

- Therefore, contradictions identified in the evaluation study led to a transformed TTP (one of the tenets of A.T.).

- The generic model is still being adopted and runs alongside the discipline-specific model.

Recommendations

Roles:
As a staff development initiative, lecturers need training on how to plan tutorials and how to work with tutors in the running of tutorials so that learning among tutees is enhanced.

As a **rule** tutorials should be timetabled and conducted in *all* subjects and in *all* faculties as tutorials could potentially improve throughput rates (**outcome**).

Tools: Tutees should be given the option of attending tutorials in their mother tongue.
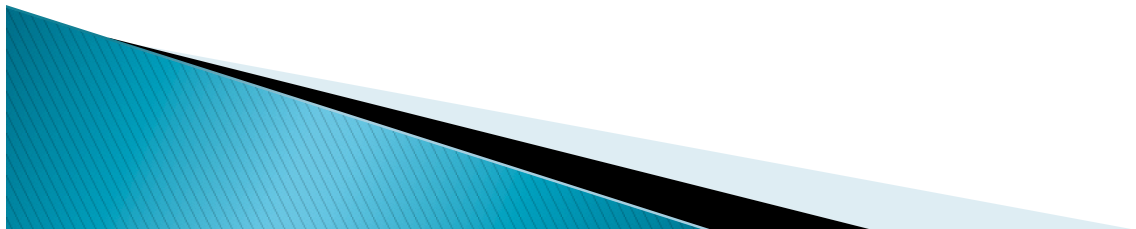
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