

# Effectiveness of Online Discussion Forum at Open University Malaysia

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Prof. Dr. Ansary Ahmed  
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Abtar Kaur  
Harvinder Kaur  
Rames Mariapan

# Outline

- Background of Study
- About Open University Malaysia
- Online Learning
- The Study
- Results
- Summary of Findings
- Implications
- Recommendations
- Concluding Remarks

# Background of Study

- A study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of online discussion forum at the Open University Malaysia. Three different data sets were obtained namely:
  - A qualitative analysis of tutors interactions with students
  - A quantitative analysis of students perceptions on online learning
  - A quantitative analysis of tutors' perceptions on online learning.
- Today's presentation will highlight the qualitative data

# About Open University Malaysia

- Open University Malaysia (OUM) was established on August 10, 2000 as the seventh private university in Malaysia and started operations in August 2001



# About Open University Malaysia

- OUM leverages on the quality, prestige and capabilities of its owners - a consortium of 11 Malaysian public universities
- In coming together to establish OUM, the 11 public universities made available finances, human resources, infrastructure, experiences and their respective brands

# About Open University Malaysia

- The primary focus of the Open University Malaysia is for the working population and adult learners
- Today, within a short period of three years, OUM had established herself as the first and main Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Higher Education provider in the country with an enrollment of close to 25,000 students

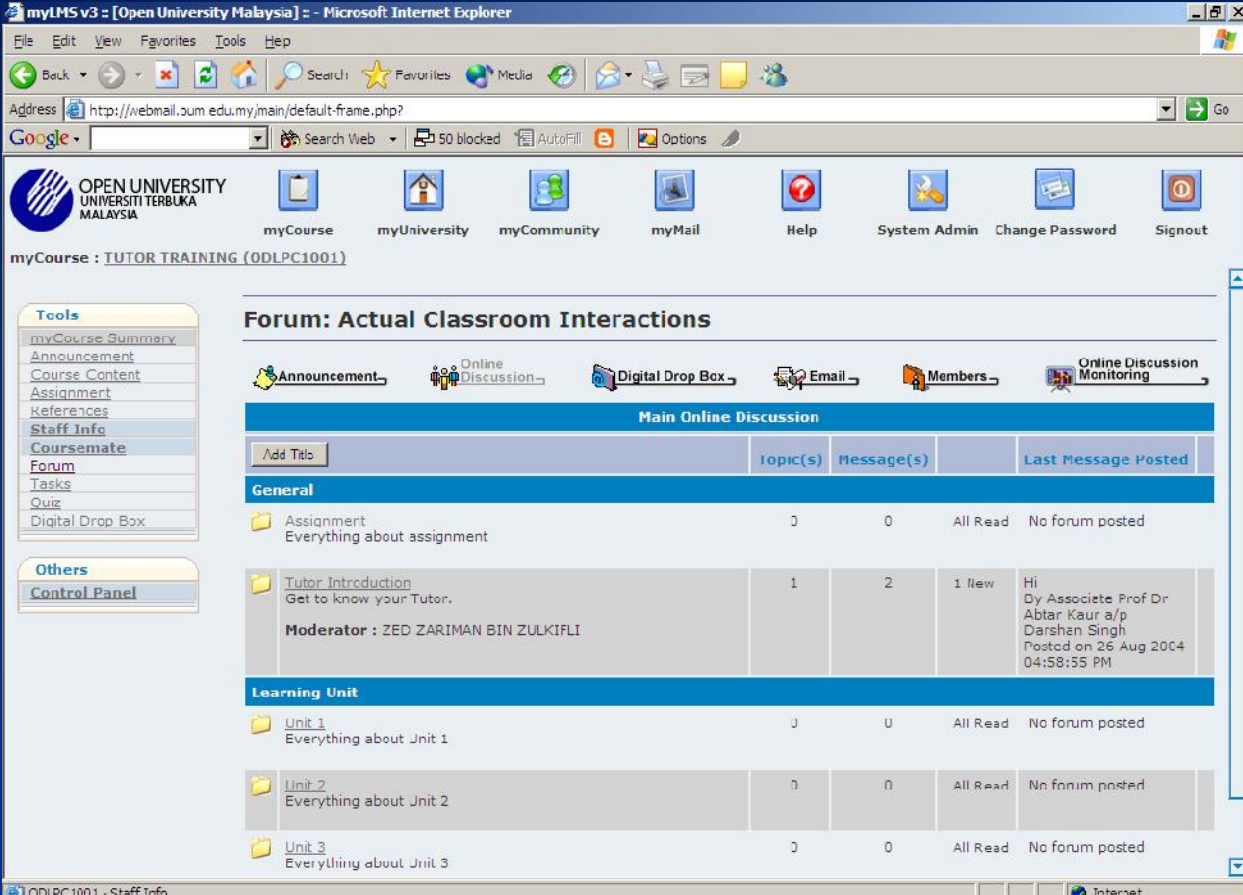
# OUM's Blended Pedagogy





# Asynchronous Online Learning

- The focus of today's discussion is on asynchronous online learning
- Asynchronous online learning is conducted using OUM's Learning Management System called MyLMS



myLMS v3 : [Open University Malaysia] - Microsoft Internet Explorer

Address: http://webmail.oum.edu.my/main/default-frame.php?

myCourse : TUTOR TRAINING (ODLPC1001)

### Forum: Actual Classroom Interactions

Announcement | Online Discussion | Digital Drop Box | Email | Members | Online Discussion Monitoring

#### Main Online Discussion

	Topic(s)	Message(s)	Last Message Posted	
<b>General</b>				
Assignment Everything about assignment	0	0	All Read	No forum posted
Tutor Introduction Get to know your Tutor. <b>Moderator : ZED ZARIMAN BIN ZULKIFLI</b>	1	2	1 New	Hi Dy Associate Prof Dr Abtar Kaur a/p Darshan Singh Posted on 26 Aug 2004 04:58:55 PM
<b>Learning Unit</b>				
Unit 1 Everything about Unit 1	0	0	All Read	No forum posted
Unit 2 Everything about Unit 2	0	0	All Read	No forum posted
Unit 3 Everything about Unit 3	0	0	All Read	No forum posted

ODLPC1001 - Staff Info



# The Study

- Objectives of Study
- Research Questions
- Methodology
- How Rubrics Were Used to Analyse Postings

# Objectives of Study

- To ascertain the quality of online discussion forum provided by OUM tutors for the Faculty of Education, Arts and Social Sciences (FEASS)
- To determine the perceived effectiveness of online discussions among OUM learners
- To determine the perceived effectiveness of online discussion among OUM tutors

# Research Questions

- What was the quality of online discussion provided by OUM tutors?
- What was the perceived effectiveness of online discussion among OUM learners?
- What was the perceived effectiveness of online discussion among OUM tutors?

# THE QUALITY OF ONLINE DISCUSSION PROVIDED BY OUM TUTORS

# Definition of Online Tutor

An online tutor provides learning support in a virtual classroom environment. The tutor stimulates discussion to enhance learners' collaborative, content and thinking skills, support learners in increasing ownership of learning and enable flexible, lifelong learning

# Pedagogical Principles in Online Tutoring

- Excellence in tutoring online is fundamentally no different from excellence in other forms of teaching:

*it requires enthusiasm and involvement, intellectual perception & insight and ability to model an understanding of subject matter. It has to be highly interactive and collaborative*

» Salmon, 2000

# Pedagogical Principles in Online Tutoring

- “It takes both technical competence and effective pedagogy to teach in an e-learning environment” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2001, p. 2).
- Quality is affected by pedagogically driven instructional design (structure learning objectives with progression through Bloom’s Taxonomy; and application of cognitive learning using Gagné’s methodology).



# Sample

- Total number of tutors involved: 35
- Total number of learners : 255
- Total number of postings posted online by:
  - Tutors = 922
  - Learners = 1929

# Data Analysis

- Quality of online interactions was measured using the following rubrics
  - Motivational support
  - Communication
  - Engaging the Learner
  - Knowledge Building
  - Encouraging Higher Order Thinking
  - Collaboration
  - Technology Support

# How Rubrics Were Used to Analyse Postings

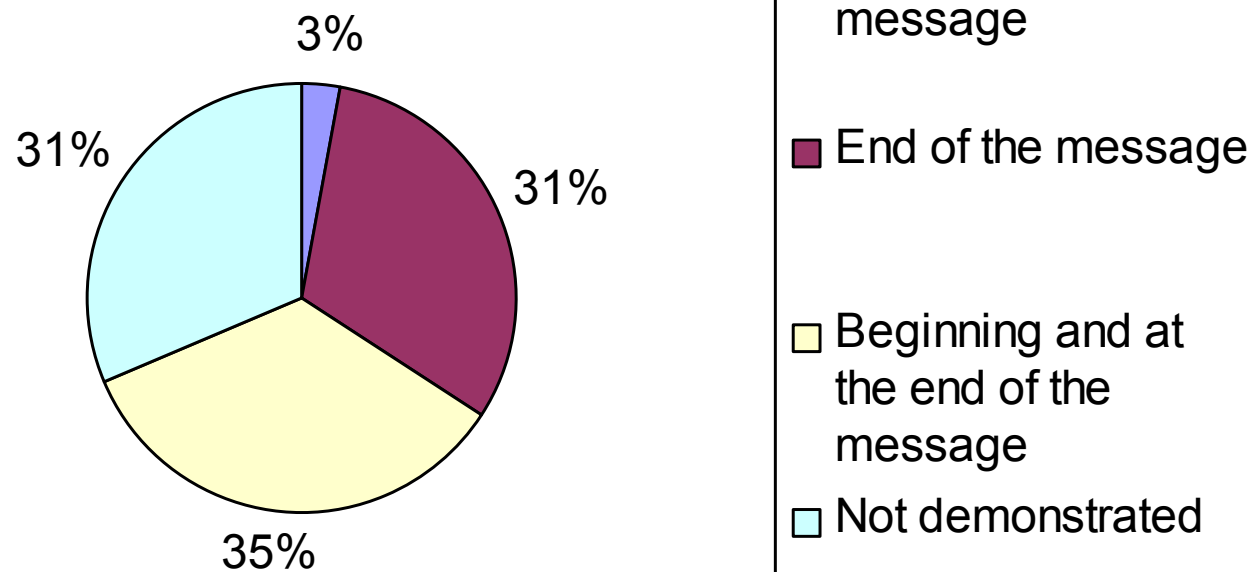
- Rubrics are specific criteria or guidelines used to evaluate a person's work or performance
  - Each [message](#) posted by tutor and learner was analysed according to each question in the Checklist for Online Discussion Forum Instrument ([Appendix 1](#))
  - Messages were then read again to analyse if the messages were focused to subject content.
  - Tutors' messages were then read again and [analyzed](#) according to criteria set in [Appendix 2](#).
    - Here each posting was given an excellent, good, satisfactory or 'requires more effort' based on criteria.
  - The final recordings were transferred into [Appendix 3](#)

# Rubric 1: Motivation

- The criteria used for motivating learners included any of the following:
  - Encourage inactive learners to participate
  - Provide encouragement by giving positive feedback on learners' messages
  - Provide motivational messages

# Rubric 1: Motivation

**Number of Tutors Showed Motivating Messages  
in the Postings**



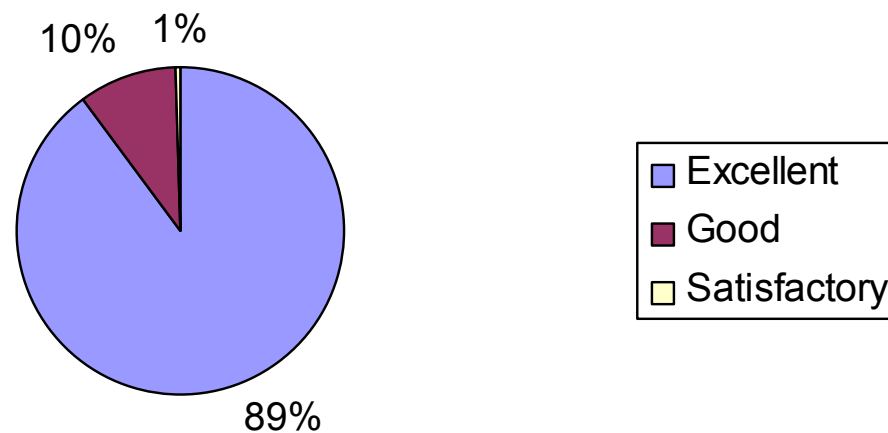
# Results

- A total of 69% of tutors provided some form of motivating messages as compared to 31% that did not demonstrate this.
- The most motivating messages were those that started and ended the forum (35% did this).

# Rubric 2: Communication

- Criteria used:
  - Accepted language
  - Free of typological errors
  - Language used conveyed the right message

Number of Tutor's Postings that Showed Quality of Communication

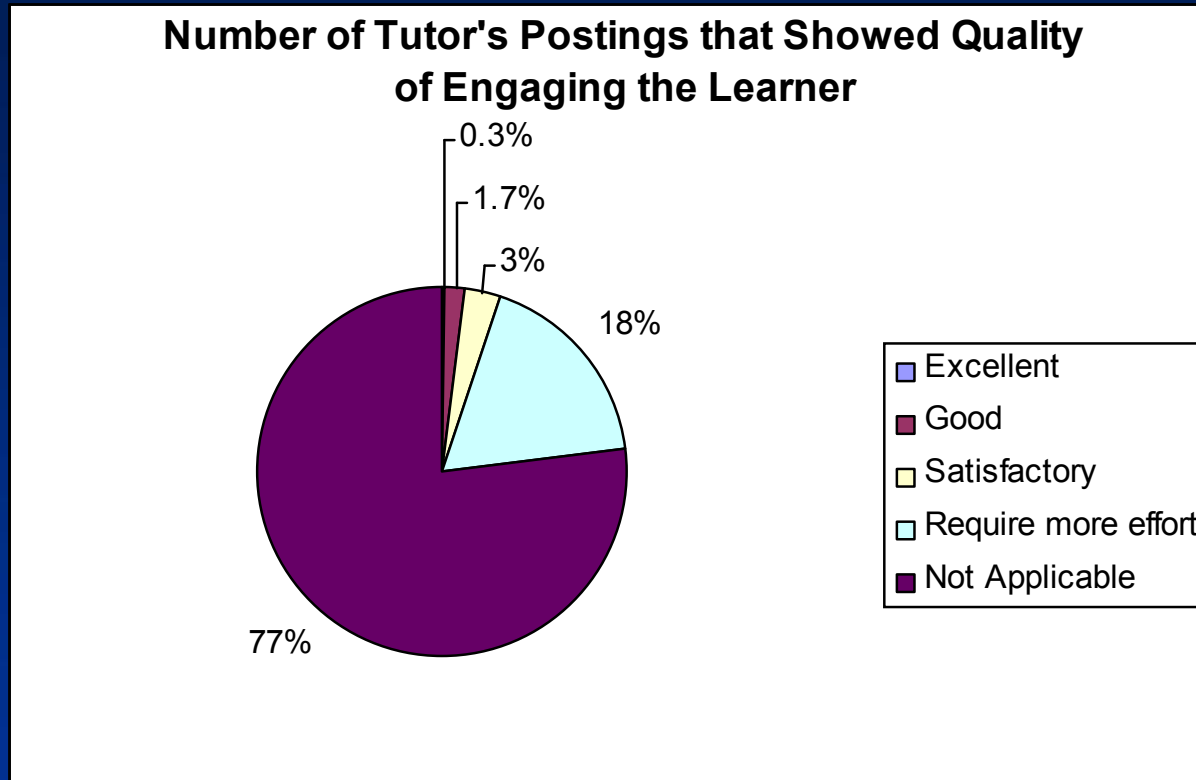




# Results

- 89 % of the postings analysed showed excellent communication strategies (showed all the criteria).
- 10% of the postings were categorized as good (showed two of the criteria).
- 1% of the postings were satisfactory (showed only one of the criteria).

# Rubric 3: Engaging the Learner



Criteria used:

Question was posted to engage learner

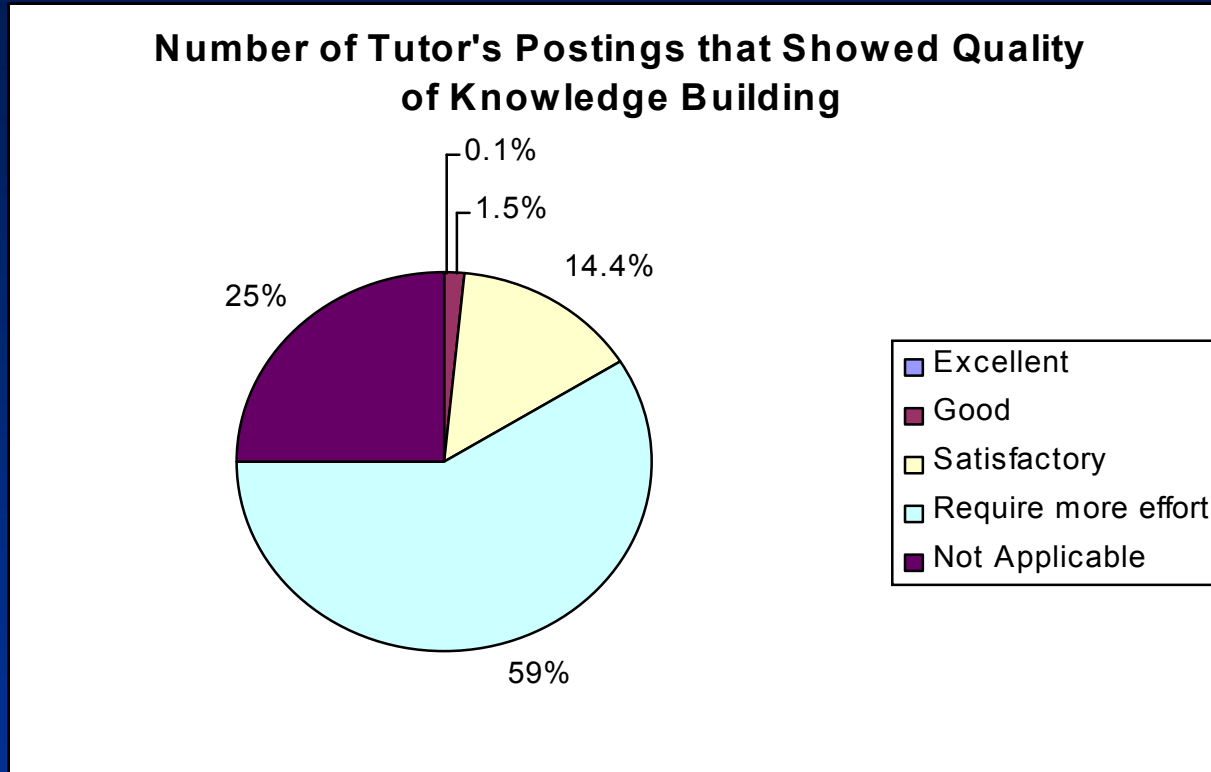
Learners were referred to other resources/material (website/books)

Learners were asked to do activity or exercise which required mental effort

# Results

- On the whole, tutors did not get learners engaged in a constructive way.
- Only 5% of the tutor's postings engaged learners in an active manner.
- 18% of the postings needed more effort.
- A total of 77 % of the tutor's postings did not engage learners in any way.

# Rubric 4: Knowledge building



Criteria used:

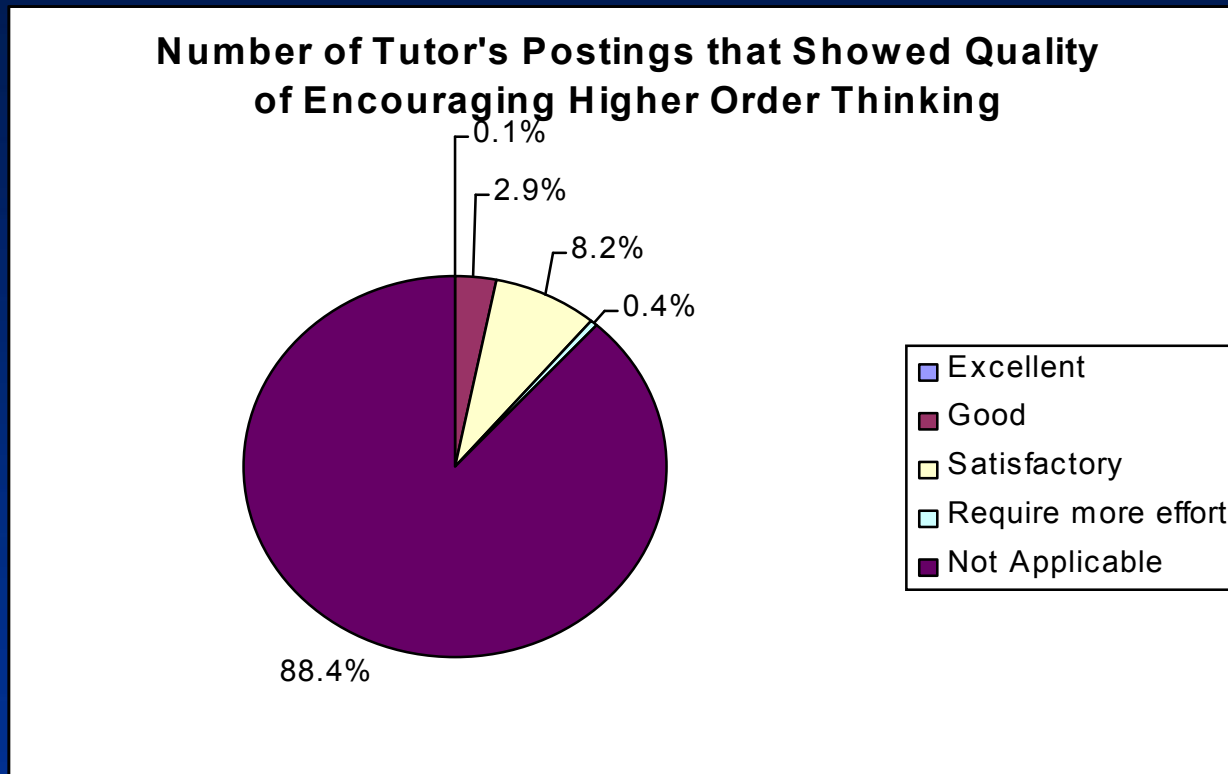
New knowledge was created - learners were able to come up with answers to their questions

Gathering information - learning were connected from one topic to an other

# Results

- 16% of the tutor's postings supported knowledge building.
- A total of 59% of the postings were seen as requiring more effort.
- 25% of the tutor's postings provided answers which were not applicable in this area.

# Rubric 5: Encourage Higher Order Thinking



Criteria used :

Required learners to analyse information

Required learner to synthesize information

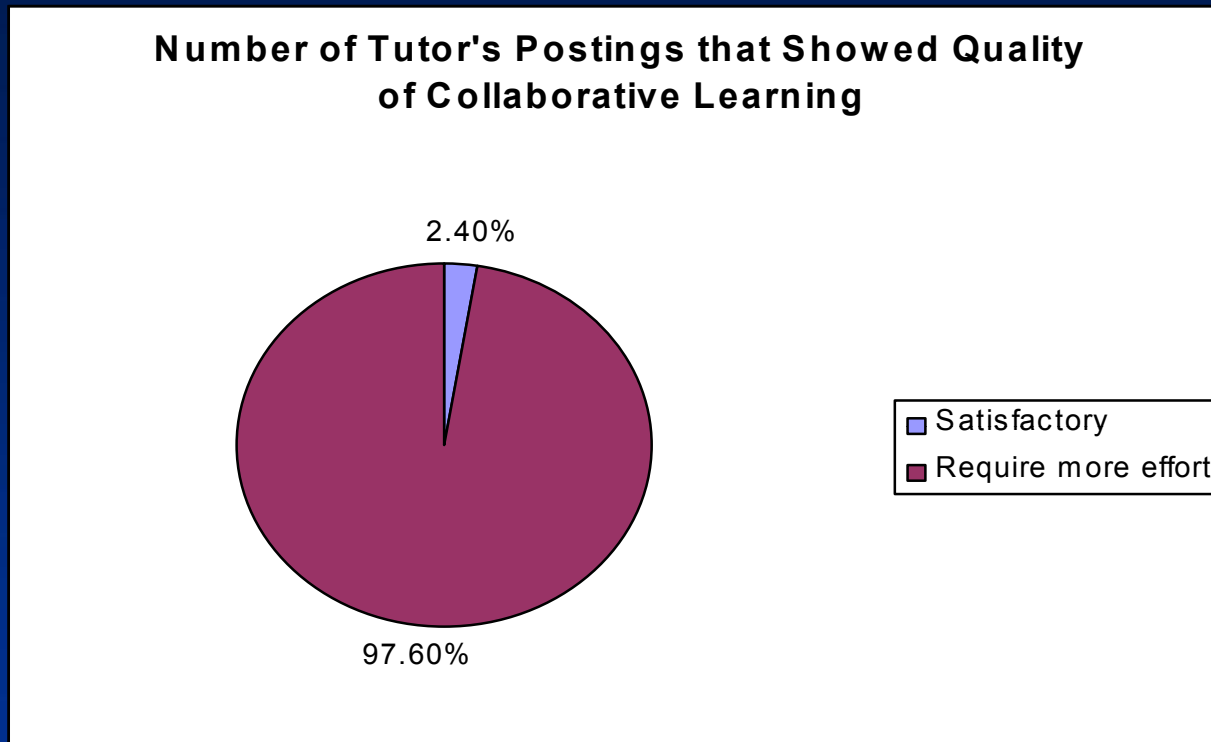
Required learners to evaluate (judge) information

# Results

- Only 11.2% of the tutor's postings encouraged higher order thinking.
- On the other hand, a total of 88.4 % of the postings were not applicable to thinking process.



# Rubric 6: Collaborative Learning



Criteria used :

Tutor promoted interactive learning

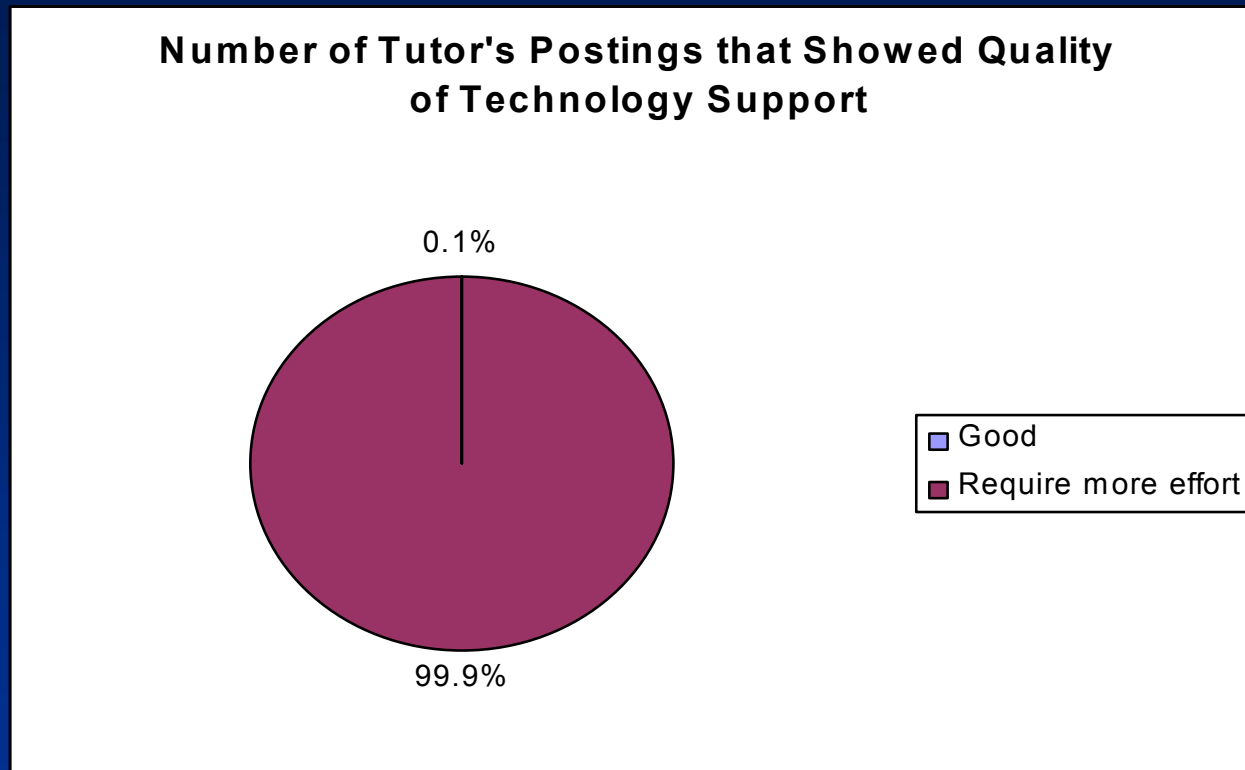
Tutor supported learners by using various techniques such as probing, asking groups to reflect and challenge each other's ideas

Groups are self-supervised and group activities are self organized

# Results

- Only 2.4 % of the postings encouraged collaborative learning.
- A total of 97.6 % of the tutors' response required more effort.

# Rubric 7: Technology Support



## Criteria used:

- Tutor provided support in hardware applications (familiarise with PC)
- Tutor provided support in general software applications (MS Windows, search engines)
- Tutor provided support in specific software applications (MyLMS)

# Results

- Only 0.1 % of the tutor's postings encouraged technology transfer.
- On the other hand, a total of 99.89 % of the tutors' response required more effort.

# Summary of Findings

- 68% of OUM tutors provided some kind of motivation to learners
- 90% of OUM tutors communicated excellently
- More than 90% of OUM tutors need more support in the following:
  - Engaging learners
  - Knowledge building
  - Encouraging higher-order thinking
  - Encouraging collaborative learning
  - Providing technology support

# Implications

- OUM tutors are at appropriately at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of Salmon's Model
  - This is important as learners need the motivational and communicational support early in their exposure to online learning.
  - Further more, tutors are also new to this environment and it is refreshing to know that being new, they are able to adapt to what is needed most from them.
- However, they could improve on the technology support that is needed at Stage 1 and Stage 2.
- OUM tutors need further support in all other pedagogical areas :
  - enhance thinking skills of learners
  - engage learners in collaborative efforts
  - provide an arena for knowledge building
  - actively engaging the learner

# Recommendation

- Provide further training on how tutors can actively engage learners, incorporate higher-order thinking techniques, enhance collaboration and encourage knowledge building
- Tutor evaluation to be guided by these criteria
- To inform learners of the criteria used to grade their 5% online discussion marks
- Technology advancements should be heavily utilize to enhance interest in online learning methodology



# Interim Measures

- A [forum](#) has been created so that tutors participate actively with subject matter experts and experts in online discussions in preparation for their roles this semester
- More online training efforts have been carried out in the last tutor training session
- More efforts are in the pipeline to create simulated environments so that our tutors are engaged totally in the online processes
- Alternative models of online discussion are being researched

# Concluding Remarks

- Online discussions are a crucial component in the total blended pedagogy of OUM. As technology advance, we believe that this mode of engaging learners in ODL learning processes will become more important and exciting.
- With proper management of the online discussion, open and distance learners will be able to become better knowledge workers and seekers and will serve as a cornerstone for higher education transformation in years to come.

Thank you