

# What drives student participation in online tutorials?

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# Background-1

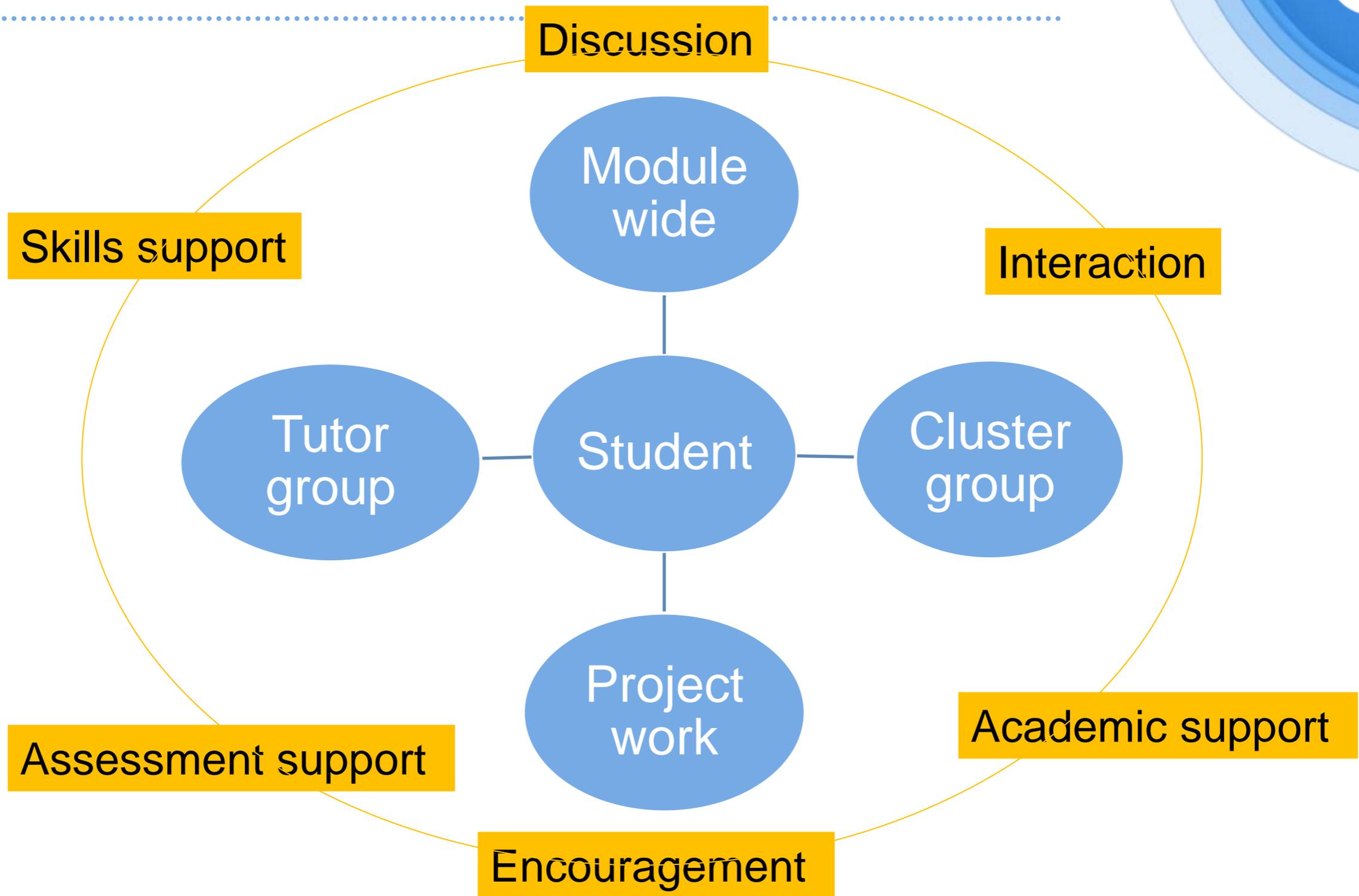
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**OU's method of distance learning is referred to as 'supported open learning' or SOL**

- **Flexible** –meet the needs of part time distance learners
- **All inclusive** - students are supplied with all the learning materials they need, these can be printed texts and/or online resources
- **Supportive** – Associate Lecturers provide academic expertise, guidance and feedback and run group tutorials
- **Social** -students come together at synchronous tutorials (face to face or online) and through online conferencing via forums

OU tutorials have traditionally emphasised **student centred learning** and **peer associated learning** but student attendance is not mandatory.

# Introduction



# Background-2

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Synchronous online tutorials take place currently in OU Live (OU version of Blackboard Collaborate) and this mode of delivery is now used for the majority of tutorials in OU Life Sciences modules.

Most OU Life sciences modules currently offer different types of synchronous online tuition:

- *Tutor group tutorials* (around 20 invitees) –with students' own AL (personal tutor)
- *Combined tutor group tutorials* (up to around 200 invitees) - with two or three ALs drawn from a tutor team and a collection of tutor groups
- *Entire student cohort* on module (up to 1500 invitees) –with a group of ALs and other staff

**Online tutorials are routinely recorded to offer flexibility in order to meet the needs of part time students**

# Background-3

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Inevitably the different types of tutorial format lend themselves to different types of learning activity, student engagement and participation

However in all cases, Associate Lecturers are encouraged to make their tutorials as interactive as possible, using the full range of tools available in OU Live

For example:

- Emoticons
- True or false questions
- Polling
- Answering/asking questions in the chat box
- Writing content onto the whiteboard
- Drag and drop activities on whiteboard
- Answering/asking questions by a microphone
- Application sharing requiring student input
- Student group work and discussion –using break out rooms

# Example OU Live room



OU Live – SDK100-16J ONLINE TUTORIAL ... TH EAST (13) CG [2280] SDK100-16J

File Edit View Playback Tools Window Help

AUDIO & VIDEO

Fit Page

How are you feeling about studying SDK100?

Vikki Haley-Mirnar

PARTICIPANTS

MAIN ROOM (12)

Vikki Haley-Mirnar Moderator

a

c

b

a

a

a

CHAT - Supervised

- Your chat permission has been enabled. ( 11:52 ) -

- Joanne Carter 1 joined the Main Room. ( 11:52 ) -

How are you feeling about studying SDK100?

A – very excited/happy

B –

C – I'm not sure what to expect

D – very nervous

a	4/12 (33%)
b	2/12 (16%)
c	2/12 (16%)
d	3/12 (25%)
None	1/12 (8%)

vote here

AUDIO & VIDEO

Talk Video

PARTICIPANTS

Vikki Haley Moderator

ROOM (1)

Vikki Haley Moderator (You)

CHAT - Supervised

- You joined the Main Room. ( 12:30 ) -

- Your chat permission has been enabled. ( 12:30 ) -

Room Moderators

How are you feeling about studying SDK... 2:08 52:53

11:53 16/01/2017

# Expectations of student interactivity

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## Level of interactivity



Entire  
student  
cohort

Up to 1500  
students

Several  
tutor  
groups

Up to 200  
students

Tutor  
group  
tutorial

Up to 20  
students

# Initial observations: AL focus

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After viewing/evaluating a large number of recorded Life Sciences tutorials **of all types** it has become apparent that regardless of the number of student participants in the tutorial, many Associate Lecturers:

- deliver a PowerPoint presentation based largely on the OU materials the student already has
- rely on only the simplest of the interactive tools available in OU Live – namely T/F questions, MC questions, polling and chat box traffic
- have little or no expectation that students will speak using the microphone
- are reluctant to run activities which draw explicitly on student's understanding
- do not offer opportunities for extended group activities within the tutorial
- are unsure how to establish the learning needs of the students present
- make little attempt to assess students' understanding
- are unsure whether to cater for the needs of the students present or the potential audience who will listen to the recording

# Initial observations: student focus

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After viewing/evaluating a large number of recorded OU Live tutorials **of all types** it has become apparent that in all contexts, for many students:

- there is little or no opportunity to contribute to the agenda
- there is little opportunity to speak
- communication is only via the chat box
- there is limited or no peer interaction during a tutorial
- there is limited opportunity to test their understanding
- there is little opportunity for individual support with threshold concepts

# Why does this matter to us?

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We are concerned that our current provision of online synchronous tuition

- does not enable a student centred, constructivist approach to learning
- provides no or little additional benefit for students to attend tutorials in real time, the same benefit can be derived from simply viewing a recording
- places unrealistic burdens on our ALs to attempt to offer student centred tuition in an online environment which favours tutor-led activity
- is not perceived as valuable by the many students – synchronous engagement is low (25- 30%)



# Aims of our project

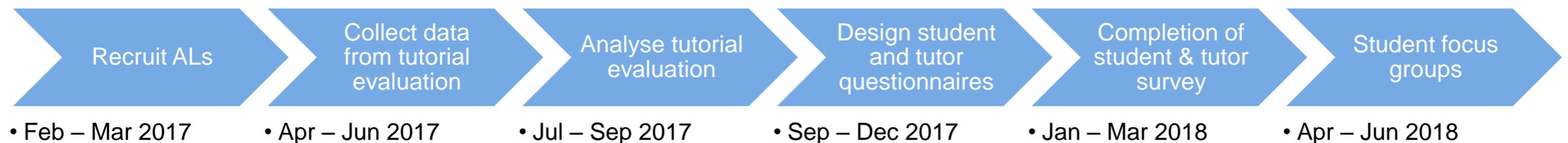
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- To achieve a fuller understanding of student-tutor and student-student interactions in synchronous online tutorials
- To achieve a better understanding of student perceptions of online tuition
- To identify areas where practitioner professional development is required
- To inform future tutorial policy in Life Sciences and in the wider STEM faculty

# Methods

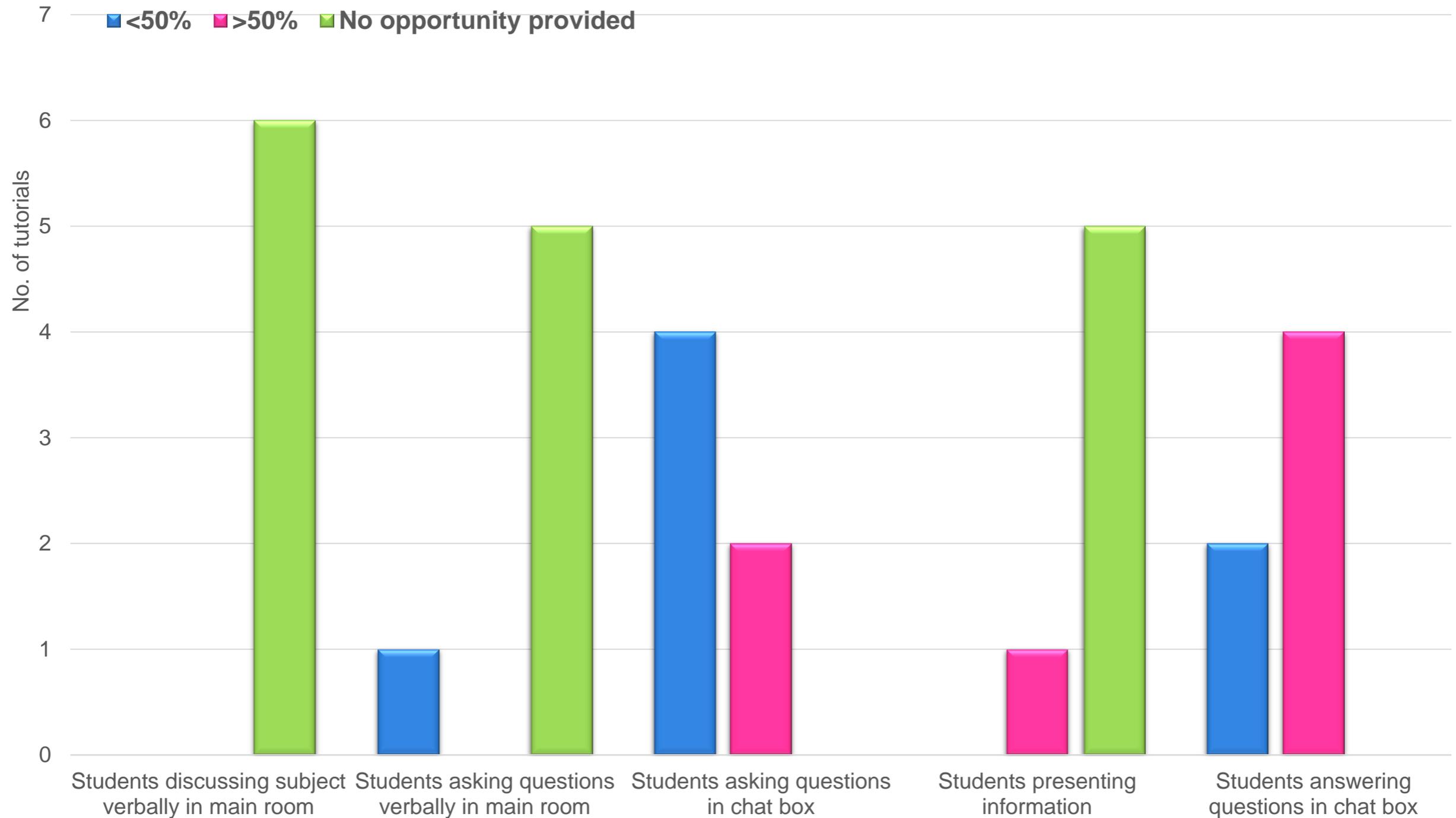
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- Phase-1 - completed
  - Reviewing a range of online tutorials in Life Sciences (via recorded tutorials)
  - Development of an evaluation tool
  - Trial evaluation tool with small number of recorded tutorials
- Phase-2
  - Recruitment and briefing of Associate Lecturers to evaluate a series of online tutorials per module
  - Collect quantitative and qualitative data from the evaluation tool
  - Data analysis
- Phase-3
  - Student and tutor survey
  - Focus group activity



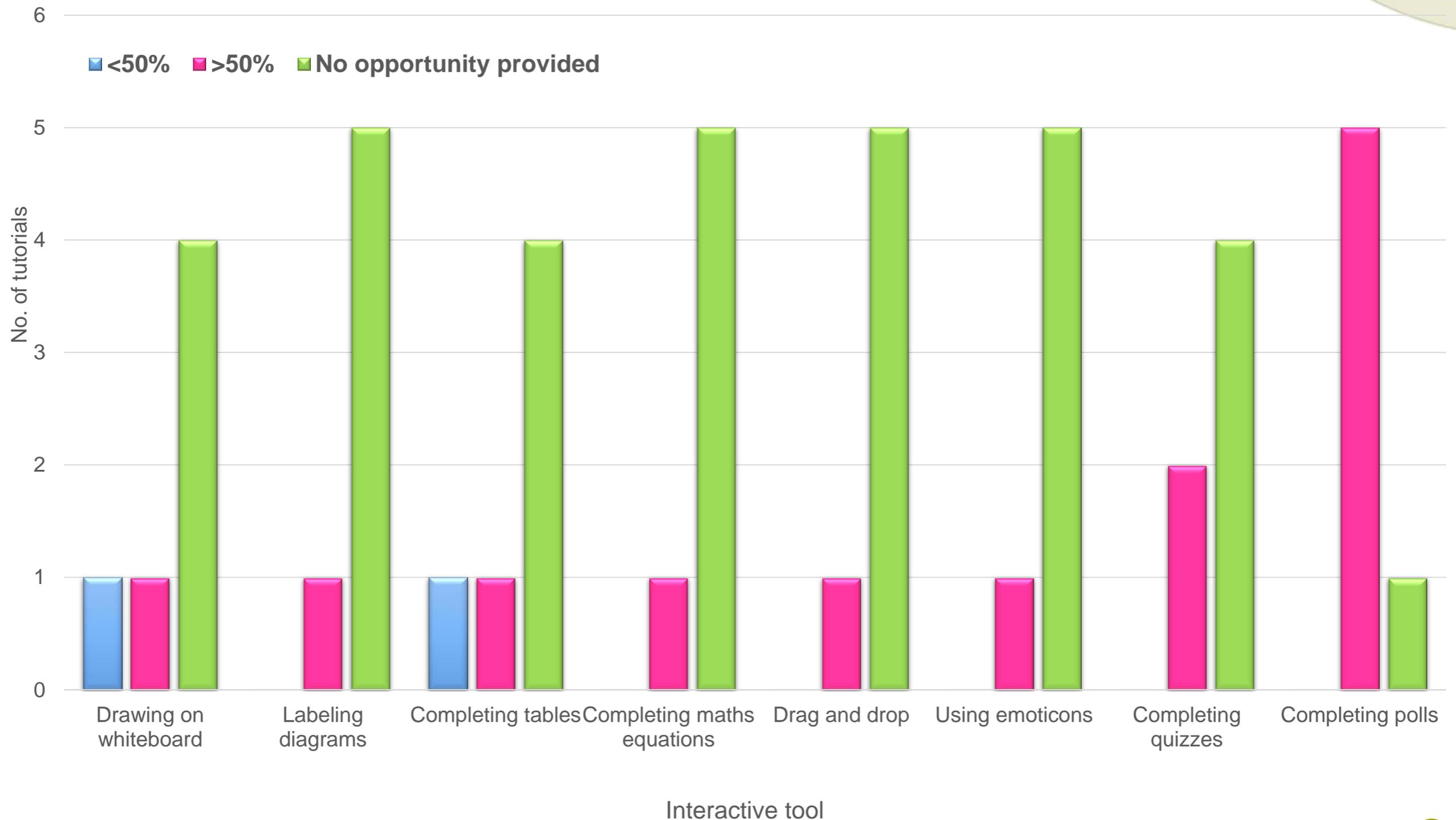


# Phase 1: Student communication during online tutorials





## Phase 1: Student engagement with interactive tools during online tutorials





# Questions