CONCEPTUALISING FEEDBACKS RELEVANT TO STUDENTS

Azmat Gani

Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

Corresponding Email: azmat@squ.edu.om

Abstract

The paper's primary motive is to provide a conceptual discussion of the type of feedback expected to be given to students who have been successful aswell as those who have not achieved competency. This paper is conceptual in that it provides not only a theoretical perspective on feedbacks, but develops key focus areas of feedbacks to unsuccessful as well as successful students in higher education. The conceptual discussion identifies a range of dimensions of feedbacks for competent students as well as those who have been unsuccessful. It is noted that the failure to notify students on their performance through feedbacks means leaving students on a lost path, where they are unable to understand their weaknesses as well as opportunities. The feedback dimensions can be empirically tested in future studies. The originality of the paper lies in the identification of a range of dimensions of feedback that are useful in higher education.

Keywords: Feedback to Students, Learning Environment & Reverse Feedback.

## 1. Introduction

This paper outlines and discusses the type of feedback given to students who have been successful as well as those who have not achieved competency.The next section begins by providing a discussion of 'feedback' from a theoretical perspective. Part three discusses the feedbacks that should be given to students who have succeeded, while section four discusses the feedbacks that should be given to students who have not achieved competency. Section five presents a short conclusion.

2. A Note on Feedback From A Theoretical Perspective

An essential part of education is to provide feedback to learners to improve learning outcomes. Garwe (2015) noted that continuously engaging student voice could improve the quality of teaching, while Cabezas et al. observed that faculty having empathy can facilitate achieving learning objectives. According to Sadler (1989), feedback is considered as 'telling' or 'corrections' or as information handed to the student on tasks. Feedbacks are designed generally to improve quality (Olivier et al. 2008 and Andrade, 2011). Tai et al. (2018) note that feedback may be focused specifically on evaluative judgement across a curriculum, indicating gaps in understandings ofquality and how quality is influenced by discipline and context.According to Espasa and Meneses (2010), feedbacks are linked with higher levels of performance achievements and greater levels of satisfaction with the running of the course.Ovando (1994) illustrated that feedbacks are a two-way phenomenon, from teachers to students and vice versa, as depicted in flowchart 1.

Flowchart 1. The feedback process
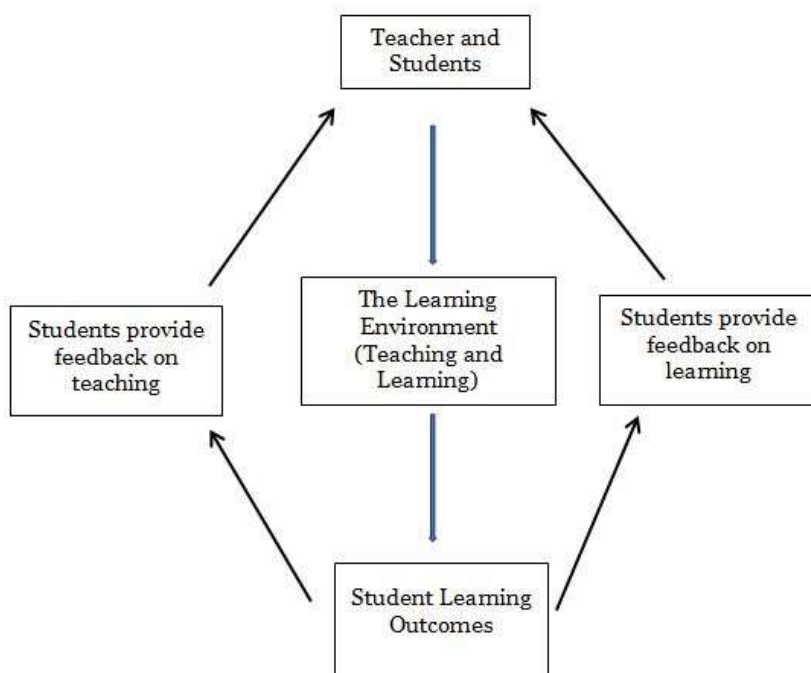
Feedbacks serve to improve quality. Muhonen et al. (2018) talk about educational dialogue strongly associated with student's performance. About this notion, Alexander (2013) argued that the quality of the interaction between teachers and students as well as that of educational dialogue is most critical for the construction of knowledge and learning in classrooms. In their study, Arani et al. (2017) noted that identifying students' mistakes and further learning from them provides opportunities for more profound reflections. Espasa and Meneses (2010) and Ley and Gannon-Cook (2014) state that feedback fosters interactive regulation in the teaching and learning process.

Feedbacks can be motivating an energising elements in the learning process for both the teacher and the student.Oltenu (2016) noted that teachers change their behaviour through reflection processes. Each party expects some responses to their performance. A genuine interest in students needs and progress can be demonstrated by Faculty who are accessible, approachable, encouraging and supporting (Rogers and Smith, 2011).Useful feedback comes through the identification of student goals. For example, van Halem et al. (2016) noted that the identification of goals and student needs is important for teachers during their lesson study meetings. For example, teachers have a duty in providing useful feedbacks while learners have the expectations from their educators in receiving feedbacks. The teacher is looking forward to improvements in teaching quality while the student is looking towards improving performance. Feedbacks propel their desired intentions.Feedbacks also raise awareness among learners of their strengths, weaknesses as well as identify the opportunities for improvement. Finally, feedback from teachers to students and vice-versa should be considered as an enrichment of self-knowledge on both parties rather than distinguishing between the good and the bad.

The literature on assessment indicates that there is an absence of agreement on how assessment is defined. Some studies have systematically investigated the meaning of assessment feedback, as reviewed in Evans (2013). According to Evans (2013), assessment feedback is concerned with all the giving responses and taking responses within assessment designas well as beyond the immediate learning context, being overt or covert (actively andpassively sought and received).

Theoretically, feedbacks take different forms and are usually categorised as informal or formal.Ramaprasad (1983) was the first in placing a strong emphasis on the critical importance of feedback, mostly with the context of formative assessment. Tigelaar and Beijaard (2013) have commented that formative assessment feedbacks provide insight into teachers functioning about reference levels and supports the teacher in setting learning goals and choosing learning activities that may help them to move forward to anticipated learning benefits. Black and William (1998) stated that effective formative assessment practices could play a dominant role in learning experiences. Formal feedback is something that may get documented as part of the student record and may include teachers written responses to assessments that were both correct and incorrect.

Feedbacks can also take informal forms. For example, teachers encounter students on a day to day basis (in classrooms, sporting arenas and cafeteria's) and provide brief reflections on their participation in class, commenting on their performance, and providing a gauge on their progress over time such as from the beginning of the semester. Informal feedbacks may offer more comfort to students and can minimise the panic that may be generated by formal feedbacks. A student may also be more receptive to friendly feedbacks as these can be taken as part of the casual conversation with the teacher.

To correctly understand feedback, some scholars have sought to deconstruct feedback in attempts to point out the primary purposes of it. For example, Hattie and Timperley (2007),in their noteworthy study, attempted to differentiate between four types of feedback: task, process, self-regulation, and self. In defining these, task feedback is seen as emphasising information and activities to clarify and reinforce aspects. Hattie and Timperley (2007) state that the process feedback focuses on what a student can do to proceed with a learning task and how a student can monitor and evaluate the strategies he or she uses.

On a final note, failing to provide feedback can also work against the process of gaining knowledge and skills. Learners may feel that everything is fine as far as their learning is concerned and so they may put efforts for continuously improving themselves. Failure of learners in providing feedback may create a wrong sense of impression for teachers as they may not be able to gauge the strength of their efforts or the extent to which they can challenge their students.

3. Feedback to Students Who Achieved Competency

One may assume that feedback is generally given to students who are falling behind in terms of their assessment progress. However, students who succeed in their studies and meet the desired levels of competency as judged by their teachers also deserve feedback. Some of the feedbacks that may be given to students who have achieved competency are discussed as follows.

3.1 Recognition of Students Achievements

The first valuable feedback is to explicitlyrecognisestudents' efforts towards their accomplishments in a particular course or unit of training. This recognition should be factual where the teacher informs the student on a range of indicators of performances such as tests, projects, assignments, class participation and presentations. Students achievements can also be benchmarked against his/her cohorts and student can be informed of his/her ranking among his group. As part of this, it would also be useful to notify the student of the changes in performance at various levels of assessment as well as from students previous efforts. A discussion of the trends in student performance over the term or semester and how it all changed over time allows the student to get a sense of performance trend in a set period. Positive praiseworthy comments from the teacher to the student can also be worthwhile.

3.2 Identification and Communication of Students Strengths

The success of the student is not only guided by assessment performance. The teacher is in a better position to identify students strengths within the area of study as well as capabilities

outside the perimeters of students course and communicate this. For example, a student may have shown exceptional strengths in one of the areas such as numerical and analytical skills, writing skills, presentation and public speaking skills, team player, computer skills, skills obtained in other disciplines which were put to great use. These forms of strengths should be communicated to the student. Also, providing some feedback where these strengths could be utilised further.Students may possess skills and talents in areas outside their normal study pathways and learning areas.In such circumstances, teachers are likely to be in a better position to identify this and student should be informed of their rare skills and to explore further for their long-term benefits in future.

3.3 Identification and Communication Of-Of Student Weaknesses

It can be generally assumed that students who have achieved competency are all excellent and well. Despite their accomplishments, students may have defects. It would be useful for the teachers also to identify weaknesses of successful students and positively communicate them. It can be the case the student's assessment performance has been exceptional,but there were areas of deficiencies. Pointing out these weaknesses and suggesting ways to overcome their shortcomings would be highly useful. A successful student may not even realise that there were weaknesses too, and if they were successful,theycould also succeed in overcoming their shortcomings.

3.4 The Way Ahead

Students who have achieved competency also needed to be given some guidance in terms of their future path,and this also needs to be communicated effectively. Teachers are in an excellent position to provide information to students on what to do next. It's even a wise idea to work with students in getting their opinion what they want to do next. Both the student's and teacher's plans for the future can be forged together and discussedand

options worked out for students. Students will also have a sense of feeling that their educators do care about their future and not only their presence in classrooms.

3.5 Reverse Feedback

While providing the feedbacks mentioned above to the students who have accomplished, it would also be a convenient time for the teacher to get students feedback (the reverse feedback) on a range of issues. While the conversation between the teacher and the student engages the student, it would also mean that the student is listening and paying attention as well as thinking of things that could have been improved or those aspects of learning that were good. This will give the teacher some sense of appreciation for their work as well as areas where further improvements could be instituted.

4. Feedbacks on Students Not Achieving Competency

Providing feedback to students who have not achieved competency can be met with difficulty as students may be emotionally sensitive and may not feel comfortable with the teacher. Although this from the teacher's point of view is considered as a positive impact of constructive but responsive feedback, as noted by Shortland (2010), students may become defensive and adverse. Hence, before any input is to be given, it becomes imperative on the part of the teacher to first create an environment where effective communication can be made between the teacher and the student who has failed to meet the required competency. It becomes the teachers' responsibility to ensure the necessary comfort for the student before any communication on this matter begins. The physical environment can always be the classroom, and the communicator is the teacher as both parties are familiar with each other as well as the classroom. The teacher is also the perfect person to instil a sense of comfort with the student. The teacher and the students need to establish an open relationship for honest reflections to occur as this will significantly influence the sense of vulnerability felt by both parties. Once this is determined, the teacher can communicate to the students a range of issues as discussed below.

4.1 Students Performance on Their Learning

Failing to achieve competency means that student may not have met the required level of performance achievement and so assessment results would be below that pass mark. Hence, it would be wise to tell the student the standard assessed, the assessment criteria for the standard or standards tested. This should all be reflected in the syllabus as this forms the formal contract between the student and the teacher in terms of assessments and results. At the sametime, the Faculty ought to have a deep understanding of student-centred learning (Sabah and Du, 2018). The clarity to be provided to the student in terms of indicators for evaluation criteria. If rubrics were used, they must be shown and marks allocated as per rubrics to be made transparent. The student should also be made aware of errors he/she made, as well as correct answers (praises for this) and relevant solutions to incorrect answers. Information about how the correct answer was arrived at as well as guidelines and any strategies to improve should be communicated.

4.2 Self-Assessment By Students

Closely allied to point 4.1 is to talk about self-assessment by students and allow the student for self-assessment. The involvement of the student in appraising their work will make them feel that they are in an assessors (teachers) position, which they can comfortably relate to their weaknesses. In such circumstances, it would be a wise idea to check students understanding by getting a response to a question such as "does this all make sense."Allowing self assess can also means that the student in this process is an active participant, and this gives a sense of ownership of the assessment process to the student.

4.3 Constructive Suggestions For Improvement

The third part of this feedback would give positive comments on how to improve and succeed in the student's desired field of learning. One way to positively work on this is to make the students feel that their mistakes and failures can be turned into opportunities. Students may find this as motivation,and this can create a sense of enthusiasm to learn and improve performance. At the same time, exploring with the students their opportunities and what is possible for them and affirming them with the student can help in their learning. Lefever (2012) argued that understanding students sense of belonging on the campus mattered for their success. In their recent study, McPhee and D'Esposito (2018) observed that understanding students social class and educational background mattered for their success.They ought to be given clear and focused feedback on how they can improve their work. To successfully come across this point with the student, teachers use of language becomes fundamentally important. The use of proactive communication, as well as constructive and encouraging comments, will create a sense of positive feeling with the student to work towards improvement.

4.4 The Reassurance of the Teaching Environment

It may seem less valuable to the student not meeting the competency,but the reassurance of their teaching environment can create a difference in the ability to improve. For example, telling students that the classroom is the place to empower and not a place to pass judgement on achievements and failures will make students realise the value of learning. The emphasis on the classrooms are there to provide a learning environment and not a place of judgement can eliminate any negative feelings about the learning environment. The teacher's role is to empower, encourage and affirm the student to make them succeed. As part of the focus on the teaching environment, the teacher should allow the student respond to modify the topic of discourse as well as allow the student to express views, opinions, agreement as well as disagreement freely on the teaching environment.

4.5 Additional Resources to Aid Future Learning

Improvements are not possible unless other resources are made available to support students in future education. Students need to be informed on additional resources as an aid

to future learning. For example, the teacher can tell that student: "If you would like to learn more about the subject material, consult the web page: http://www.abc.com". It would be useful that the teacher can highlight some of the online tools available for additional learning materials, self-testing, and improving performance. At the same time, bring to students attention, the network of available supports – friends, online content, tutors, and student study groups. Teachers ensuring students that support is in place to help students improve their performance can assist in enhancing students learning and achievements.

5. Conclusion

To enhance students learning aboutthe environment and improve their performance, providing feedback is essential, and it should be effectively communicated to the receiver.The absence of input from the teachers to the learners means a vacuumis created between the two parties,and this gap could adversely affect students assessment performance such as poor grades, lack of focus in their work, lack of motivation and trailing on an unknown direction in their study environment. Failure to notify students on their performance through feedbacks means leaving students on a lost path, where they are unable to understand their weaknesses in performing better and the relevance of their learning. Feedback should be part and parcel of the entire assessment process and student learning and can be rooted as part of effective communication from both parties – the teacher and the student. Feedbacks don't cost more except merely dedicated time from the teachers. The benefits of feedback to the students as well as teachers are more than the costs,and so it should be a regular part of the curriculum that is taught.

References

i. Alexander, R., 2013. Improving oracy and classroom talk: Achievements and challenges. *Primary First*, vol. 10, pp. 22-29.

ii. Andrade, M. S., 2011. Managing change – engaging faculty in assessment opportunities. *Innovative Higher Education*, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 217-233. [Online] Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10755-010-9169-1.

iii. Arani, M.R.S., Shibata, Y., Sakamoto, M., Iksan, Z., Amirullah, A.H., Lander, B., 2017. How teachers respond to students' mistakes in lessons: A cross-cultural analysis of a mathematics lesson, *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 249-267, [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLLS-12-2016-0058.

iv. Black, P., & William, D., 1998. *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment*. London: Nelson Publishing Company.

v. Cabezas, C.B., Acurio, C. V., Merlyn, M-F., Orbe, C. E., and Riera, W. L. (2018). Variables affecting positive faculty-student relationships in an Ecuadorian University, *Journal ofApplied Research in Higher Education*, 10, 570-582. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-03-2018-0041.

vi. Espasa, A. and Meneses, J. 2010. Analysing feedback processes in an online teaching and learning environment: an exploratory study. *Higher Education*, vol. 59, pp. 277–292. [Online] Available at: DOI 10.1007/s10734-009-9247-4.

vii. Evans, C., 2013. Making sense of assessment feedback inhigher education. *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 83, no. 1, pp. 70-120. [Online] Avalable at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0034654312474350

viii. Garwe, E. C., 2015. Student voice and quality enhancement in higher education. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, vol. 7, pp. 385-399. [Online] Available at: https://emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/JARHE-05-2014-0055.

ix. Hattie, J., & Timperley, H., 2007. The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 77, pp. 81–112. Available at: doi:10.3102/003465430298487

x. Lefever, R. 2012. Exploring student understandings of belonging on campus, *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, vol. 4, pp. 126-141. Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/17581181211273075.

xi. Ley, K., & Gannon-Cook, R. (2014). Learner-valued interactions: research into practice. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, vol. 15, no. 1, p. 23.

xii. McPhee, I. and D'Exposito, M.E.W., 2018. Student asset in higher education: embargo or empowerment? *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education,* vol. 10, pp. 155-169. [Online] Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jocn.14492.

xiii. Muhonen, H., Pakarinen, E., Poikkeus, A-M., Lerkkanen, M-K., Rasku-Puttonen, H., 2018. Quality of educational dialogue and association with students' academic performance. *Learning and Instruction*, vol. 55, pp. 67-79.

xiv. Oliver, B., Tucker, B., Gupta, R., & Yeo, S., 2008. EVALUate An evaluation instrument for measuringstudents' perceptions of their engagement and learning outcomes. *Assessment and Evaluation inHigher Education*, vol. 33, no. 6, pp. 619–630. [Online] Available at: doi:10.1080/02602930701773034.

xv. Olteanu, C., 2016. Reflection and the object of learning. *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 60-75. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLLS-08-2015-0026.

xvi. Ovando, M.N., 1994. Constructive feedback: a key to successful teaching and learning. *Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 19-22. [Online] Available at: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED404291.

xvii. Ramaprasad, A., 1983. On the definition of feedback. *Behavioral Science*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 4–13.

xviii. Rogers, J. and Smith, M. 2011. Demonstrating a genuine interest in students needs and progress: implications for student satisfaction with courses. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, vol. 3, pp. 6-14. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/17581181111150865.

xix. Sabah, S. and Du, X. 2018. University's faculty's perception and practices of student centred learning in Qatar, Alignment of gap? *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, vol. 10, pp. 514-533. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-11-2017-0144.

xx. Sadler, D. R., 1989. Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. *Instructional Science*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 119–144. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00117714.

xxi. Shortland, S., 2010. Feedback within peer observation: Continuing professional development and unexpected consequences. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, vol. 47, pp. 295–304. [Online] Available at: doi:10.1080/14703297.2010.498181

xxii. Tai, J., Ajjawi, R., Boud, D., Dawson, P., Panadero, E. 2018. Developing evaluative judgement: enabling students to make decisions about the quality of work. *Higher Education*, vol. 76, pp. 467–481. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0220-3

xxiii. Tigelaar, D. E. H., & Beijaard, D. 2013. Special issue: formative assessment and teacher professional learning. *Teachers and Teaching*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 109-114. [Online] Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13540602.2013.741840.

xxiv. Van Halem, N., Goei, S. L., and Akkerman, S. .F. 2016. Formative talk in teacher assessment during lesson studies. *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 313-328. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLLS-11-2015-0041.