

# FEEDBACK IN HIGHER EDUCATION AN OVERVIEW

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## FEEDBACK IN HIGHER EDUCATION AN OVERVIEW

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Teachers in higher education would be glad to provide learning environment which will create opportunities to support and motivate students to get involved in learning activity. These will eventually lead them to have a strong curriculum in which develop the students knowledge on the subjects learned as well as their personal development. Teachers are pleased to provide personalized feedback, taking good care over the words written in their feedback so as to encourage and motivate students and assist them develop their knowledge and understanding. Teachers would be delighted to be sensitive to individual differences including their needs and expectations, cultural background and characters. But the changing in the environment of higher education has risen a dilemma. This has caused the staff and student ratios to be steeply increasing of 27:1, 35:1, 50:1 or even much more than that. This massive numbers of students with a limited number of teachers has been one of the causes to hinder the opportunity of providing a balance feedback to the students. Besides, the pressure burdens the teachers with all sort of regulations which demanded teachers and university staff to take part in doing research have even worsen the condition. Those factors contribute the chances of providing feedback for students to drive them to have better achievement aside from those of autonomous learners to be decreasing and even rare. There is a need to have the priority of providing feedback for the betterment of the quality education, no matter how complicated is the situation, teachers are demanded to set their time and effort to provide the right feedback for their students as Liu and Carless (2006) urge that the endowment of feedback has been a great challenge in the rapid workload and tight time management teachers faced in their everyday tasks. To be precise when they are demanded to provide improvement in the quality of works as well as feedback, they are required to have them consistently and in good quality. For this reason, feedback has been an essential part of increasing quality education in any levels of educational institution.

Balance quality of feedback for the students to drive them to be better in their learning. This is aimed to derive the students to get the greatest benefit from the feedback given to them. Teachers as the agent of change in the learning process have to be able to face the challenges to provide the right feedback for their students. There are lot of challenges facing teachers when considering to use feedback and other factors to ponder into their practice, from the responsibilities they have that not all teacher owns special moment aside from their duties. This was aside from their workload to signify positioned on the duties and response as well as how these will link to the experience the students have in their learning. In real life, we have all experienced feedback in many different ways whether to give or receive one. For example, as parents we are faced with our children's attitude and performance, we are demanded to talk to them wisely to convey our message in accordance to their acts or performance. In workplace, feedback can be in the form of appraisal or even complaints for our employer or colleagues; in other situation such as coaching, we are put in scrutinizing deed or act and designating enhancement. The capabilities and practices required are not much different from the skills needed in providing feedback in higher education. To be precise, it is parallel in the learning environment in higher education.

In higher education, one of the essential aspects of the roles of a teacher is to provide feedback to the students. As Orrell (2002) considers feedback as the “cornerstone of all learning” which means that feedback has been the foundation of learning; learning will not be notified without feedback. Learners need to be made aware of their progress; they require notion to trigger them to learn better as Mutch (2003) views feedback as the central instruments for “the development and enhancement of learning”. It is suggested that the quality of feedback and timeliness of feedback are key features in the student learning process and in the teacher/student relationship. Related to learning, Hounsell et al (2006) mentioned that feedback has long been acknowledged and is accepted in academic circles as Woolf (2004) and Weaver (2006) have added. The notion that qualified feedback will be able to promote better performance, has made it a strong supposition that feedback become significant mainly due to the bound between those two; feedback and performance; high quality feedback can be used to improve performance, which means giving the right feedback can arouse learners to have a better performance in their learning. As Bloxham and West (2007) state that the mechanism which made the students improve over time with their performance is the feedback. Holmes and Papageorgiou (2009) have found out that feedback has been put as the most important element in students’ progress and understanding throughout their learning. Feedback has three main roles. The first is that feedback denotes to what extend performance is considered as acceptable or is desired as Millar (2009) defines it to be clarification of what is expected the students to do with their performance in learning. It means that qualified feedback can give a clear yet precise clues on what behavior or performance needs to be done. Moreover, feedback could create an indulgent for both teachers and students (Holmes and Papageorgiou, 2009). This implies that feedback can help teachers and students to revise what they have done for a better performance in their teaching and learning. Providing feedback can help teachers to understand how much the students have been able to comprehend and understand with what they have learnt. This also help students to behave accordingly as what has been expected by the teachers. Second, to determine the gaps in knowledge and understanding, feedback as essential role (Handley et al, 2009). For this reason, it is suggested that knowledge and understanding would be the main goal of any feedback activities (Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). This can help teachers to find out to what extend the students have already been good at and to what extend they need to improve their performance in learning. The last is that, through feedback, students performance is improved because feedback mediate improvement of learning capability; as it is assured that feedback can somehow boost the students to make adjustment in their learning style (Barrow, 2006). As the students receive feedback from their teachers, they know what to do with the things they need to improve and make their own adjustment in the route of learning to achieve the desired learning goals.

### **What Feedback Means in Learning**

In broader sense, feedback refers to mechanism in alternating students behavior into a better performance in their learning; hence, it has an effect on their own strengths to reach their own goals of learning. In reality, each student has their own uniqueness for they have their own intentions and motivation in learning, therefore they will demand differently in the things that they get from feedback (Hayland and Hayland, 2001). Providing the right feedback can help students to get encouraged and motivated in their learning. Yet, giving feedback requires teachers to be able to understand their students profile in order to provide the right feedback which will stimulate learning environment (Koka and Hein, 2003). This will serve to promote students performance for now and

later in the future (Weaver, 2006). One of the main behavioral alteration which could be foster through feedback is to realize independent learning where the students become capable of having self-reflection as well as self-development; Bone (1999) added that this would be achieved when the feedback is given promptly, constructively, rationally and encouragingly to the students. It means that in providing feedback, teachers need to be quick in terms of period, as soon as the students need to be given feedback, teachers are required to do so, it needs to be precise. Moreover, the feedback given should be in a way that encourages the students to have behavioral changes in positive manners for their performance in both present and future. To do so, the feedback needs to be constructive and rational in terms of the expected behavior changes.

Helping students to do beyond what they do is the essential element of feedback. This can be done through constructive dialogue. To be sure, feedback can cause both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to the willingness in learning, whereas the extrinsic motivation refers to the need in learning. To have these, feedback needs to be provided by teachers through series of actions and interferences, including informal interactions, classroom situations, and one-to-one teaching. These are done to realize what we call as encouraging learning environment. Each activity share chances for feedback and is able to support development in learning for the students. This also signifies that feedback is not only derived from teachers and students, but also from their peers as well as their supervisors and colleagues. Those who involve in higher education, have responsibility to stabilize the expectation and demand in their work; these cover the responsibility to teach, to do the research, to develop themselves, their pedagogical competences, their roles in the educational institutions such as how to do the program leading, admission, and placement of the students. Besides, they also need to maintain the university roles, bureaucracy, and assurance of quality, meet the professional body expectations and, all in all is, personal development. Student expectation is the key consideration which is directly affected by the type, and quality of feedback encounter by the students. For example, one teacher gives clear written feedback which informs which parts they have done really well and which parts they haven't; also the teacher tells what should be done to improve their performance including some references they can address to as resource materials. Having this feedback, will allow the students to do what they require to do for a better performance in the future. Another teacher provides different type of feedback which is not really clear of what should be done for the students to improve their performance. All the feedback given seem to be similar, without any detailed information telling the strengths to be maintain and weaknesses to be improve. This eventually leads the students into confusion of what they have to do to have a better performance with their learning. The more effective type of feedback will lead the student to a better learning performance which will lead them to desired learning outcome. All in all, these feedback can help students to have good knowledge as well as good understanding. This demands teachers to always provide effective feedback for the students throughout their learning in higher education. Teachers awareness of the students profile will be the most important element for teachers to set the appropriate feedback. This is regarding to the varied in numbers, abilities, cultural background as well as their expectation in learning. Therefore continuous and dynamic feedback is highly recommended.

Some might have doubted about the essence of feedback and urged that there are other ways for them to learn better. Some might also assure that it is impossible for teachers to spend their time to provide any appropriate and constructive feedback for their students with their bunch of responsibilities to do for their professional development. Moreover, others will assume that students



do not need any feedback in their learning, all they want is just scores for what they have undertaken. In fact, they do not take the feedback the teachers have provided for them; all they care about is a number within the scores from the subjects they enrolled; they do not know what to do with the feedback when they received; they define the feedback given differently from the teacher's expectation. The last point implies an opportunity for teachers to communicate the purpose and meaning of the feedback to the students needs to be considered to assure that they know exactly what to do with their learning. This is aimed to assure that the feedback given is understood and clear for the students in order to help them with their learning.

Building good rapport between teachers and students can actually be a good way to bridge the opportunity for teachers to provide the appropriate feedback for the students. This feedback is then responded accordingly by the students. The students know what to do with the feedback; and they know what changes they need to make with their behaviors in learning in order to perform better in their learning; moreover they no longer care only with the number they get for the scores, they value feedback as one motivative statement or support from their teacher to a better learning outcome. Hence, both teachers and students have all understood what they expect in education.

Different individuals react differently toward feedback given to them; they also demand different amount of feedback. However, several studies resulted some common roles. Students may perceive feedback differently when the delivery of the feedback they receive is of course not positive. They might feel being intimidated with the feedback. When the teacher delivers the feedback in a way in which it seems the teacher takes the control over the students work, they might respond it negatively; they might feel as if they made a huge mistake on the work they did that they do not have any authority of what they did. Falchikov (1995) states that there are two properties of feedback. The first property is called informational component, it refers to component which enables the students to change, adjust and boost their performance. The next property is called as hedonistic component. This component affects the motivation of the students in learning. The second property may lead to two possibilities for the students after the feedback has been delivered to them: when the positive feedback helps students to be more motivated, likewise, the negative feedback can cause students to be discouraged and less motivated in learning. When both, positive and negative feedback is given, its conveyance and order both have essential role. As Falchikov (1995) emphasises that negative feedback can lead to rejection which derived from the purpose of the feedback itself. In addition, she also assure verbal feedback which is addressed negatively may affect students anxiety. High anxiety may lead the students to feel insecure in learning, and this is not a good condition to support learning itself. Higgins (2000) also states that "receiving feedback is also an emotional business". It implies that in learning, not only cognitive, behavior and intuition are activated but also emotional aspect of learners. For instance when teachers give written feedback on students writing assignment, this can intensely be a personal feedback; however, the effects of the given feedback may lead to puzzle which will cause the students to feel insecure with their performance. This eventually lessens their confidence and lead them to unexpected performance in learning. This might be due to the personal feedback given to each individual. Once the feedback is "negative" in sense, it may cause students to be insecure and anxious in learning. Later on, when students relate the evaluation from the teacher toward their assignment to their performances, they might feel discouraged since the teacher perceives them to be unskillful person in learning.

What is crucial about feedback is on its delivery (Falchikov, 1995). The way feedback is communicated to the students will affect the way the student perceiving it. Delivering feedback in

positive manner will help students to increase their self-esteem; it will also decrease the students anxiety toward learning. Moreover, it provides positive learning environment. For the teacher as the one to deliver the feedback, it will add their credibility as the deliverer (Falchikov, 1995). On the delivery of the feedback, it is advised that feedback should be provided immediately after the given task has been completed. It is also suggested that students are given chances to revise their work by having their work revised and re-submitted after the feedback (Chalmers and Fuller, 1996). **Written feedback is indeed different from verbal one. It is persistent in time and resistant to faulty memory (Falchikov 1995).** It means that written feedback tends to be confusing since the communication performed is one way; the students are not able to confirm their understanding directly to the teacher who provides the feedback. Moreover, when the language written is not really clear and precise in meaning. Confusion and anxiety of the students may worsen their performance in learning for the message delivered through the written feedback is not successfully understood and comprehended by the students. Comment such as 'good' won't do; it is not feedback for it does not explain to what extent one has been good at. In other words, clarity of written feedback is necessary to assure that the message addresses will be understood by the recipients of the feedback. This can then lead to the expected behavior changes the teacher wanted the students to have in their learning.

#### **How Should Feedback be Addressed**

A lot of obstacles are ahead of us as teachers in providing the right feedback to the students. Even if the intention is right, it doesn't mean it is going to be easy to maintain. Having large classes with a lot number of students might be one of the biggest obstacles teachers have to deal with. Moreover, the time available for teachers to provide the feedback needed is relatively limited; this even desperately lessens the chances to provide required feedback to the students. The complexity of the task given to the students also the other factor teachers need to consider when providing feedback. If possible, feedback should be given in time the tasks have been completed and then the students have enough time to revise the task and hand it back to the teachers. This might be one effective way to provide the feedback needed. However, not all classes are possible to be treated this way; class size and the types of tasks also the factors teachers need to consider. One of the ways might be through group feedback; this feedback is given to a particular group based on the most common incorrect responses and weaknesses or deficiencies. Even it is not as advantageous as individual feedback, but it is better than a complete absence of feedback.

Considering the language used in providing feedback is another important point for the teachers. Assure that the language given in the feedback will be understood by the students is very crucial, for it will lead the students to the desired changes that they need to take after the feedback is given to them. Providing the clear and concise explanation on the feedback which explains the students what they ought to have done is indeed important (Falchikov 2005). Explaining what should be done is not always good enough to address the feedback to the desired expectation to the students. Further communication is required as the consequences of the feedback, as the feedback is a process of communication. The way of communicating the feedback is advised to be in two ways communication which allows teachers and students to have interaction to clarify and negotiate the message they get from the feedback (Higgins et al., 2001). This two ways feedback delivery is expected to help both teachers and students to get mutual understanding and respect in performing a better learning achievement.

## Conclusion

As one important aspects of learning performance, feedback needs to be provided effectively. The feedback can have three major importances in learning for both teacher and student. First it has developmental function which will allow students to realize their own strengths and weaknesses so that they are able to perform better in learning. Providing the right feedback can benefit the learning of how and why something was considered to be good , or bad. Providing the clear explanation and guidance on what is called to be good about or the other way around. A context is important to help students finding the notion of becoming a better learner. The second is instrumental function which means setting the students awarness toward their own mastery and capabilities to help them to perform better in learning. Some students get the benefits of feedback as they improve their works which then affect in thet better grades. The third function is called as inspirational function. It means that self-convidence of the students is arouse through feedback when they are insecure about their performance. This can be employed when the students are not or having little experience with the task they are about to deal with. This inspirational function of feedback also reflects that positive encouragement through feedback can significantly be helpful to dig up students self-esteem in learning.

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