

The Impact of University Students' Semester End Module Feedback on Tutors' Change of Teaching and Learning Environment in Paro College of Education

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ABSTRACT

This study was intended to investigate the impact of university students' semester end module feedback on their respective module tutors at Paro College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan. It was intended to find if and how end of semester feedback changes the learning environment of the students. The total population sample of 539 student teachers from Paro College of Education was targeted for the research. For that, a mixed method comprising of both quantitative and quality was used for this study. Research tools such as survey questionnaires (quantitative) along with a few open-ended questions and interviews (qualitative) were used to collect the data. The findings from this study tend to reveal that although; the student teachers are in favour of the feedback system in the college, they do not seem to observe its impact strongly on the module tutors. As a result, a very less chance of changes for improvement taking place in various programme of the college. The benefit of this study was expected to be very relevant for the authorities to count the values of the students' feedback for the effective development of the programme in the college. Further, the outcome of this study was also aimed to determine the importance of students' feedback in the history of Bhutanese education context.

INTRODUCTION

Seeing the importance of collecting feedback from the students, colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) have introduced this system for the past few decades. Across all the colleges of RUB, students' feedback for all the modules delivered is collected at the end of every semester. The main purpose was intended to ensure that students have high quality experiences that lead to understanding and learning in whatever field they have chosen. Moreover, feedback mechanism is considered as one the best and core approaches in the 21st century classroom teaching to bring changes in teaching learning styles and nature of assessment forums (Cohen, 1980; Marsh & Dunkin, 1992; and Brennan & Williams, 2004; Ferguson, 2011, cited in Ahea, Ahea & Rahman, 2016). However, based on the anecdotal evidences, students under Royal University of Bhutan, seem to have failed to experience any consequences of the feedback that impacts the delivery of modules by the respective tutors. Therefore, this study was intended to investigate

the reality of the situation and create awareness accordingly.

In particular, this study was intended to examine the impact of the semester ends students' feedback on the module delivery by the respective tutors. To start small, we have decided to investigate in one of the colleges under RUB. It was based on the convenient of the researchers and the finance point of view, as colleges under RUB are located far apart from each other. Since, both the researchers are based in Paro College of Education, this college was found to be more convenient in terms of the location and the number of participants chosen for this study.

Mixed method research approach was used to collect the data for the execution of the study (knowing the importance of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the study). Research tools adopted were, the survey questionnaire including open-ended question at the end and interviews. The main purpose of adding open-ended question was to triangulate the genuineness of the response given to the five point Richter scale short type questions. Around

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539 participants returned survey questionnaires and participated. In addition to this, ten participants were requested for interviews from various levels of programme in the college.

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The findings from this study were aimed to be significant, as it will be the first of its kind in the history of Bhutanese education context. Focus was mainly on the issue of module delivery and teaching learning environment at various levels of programme in the chosen college under RUB.

Furthermore, it was intended to create awareness among Bhutanese academics and the module tutors while opting and planning the modules based on their competencies and wisdom. On the other hand, the study was also aimed to be significant from the perspectives of students to understand the importance of feedback forum in the history of teaching and learning process. It was also expected to help open more avenues for future research studies related to the improvement of the quality course delivery in the context of Bhutanese colleges and school levels. More so, it was also expected to contribute in strengthening the quality of module delivery research as a whole and support findings of the past studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was intended to find out how and if the end of semester student feedback really changes tutor practices and improves the learning environment of the students. This is mainly because, students' feedback in teaching profession, is considered as one of the important factors for the teachers to change the nature of delivering the concepts at various levels. Feedback on teaching practices is important for four reasons based on the findings from the past studies and each of them is presented in sequence:

Improvement in Teaching and Learning Process

One of the main consequences of the feedback is intended to help improve the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Likewise, several comparable studies were conducted by

various researchers have strongly considered feedback plays a vital role to facilitate students' development as independent learners in classroom teaching and learning. Hattie and Timperly (2007), have pointed that giving feedback is an important skill for lecturers in higher education and has a major influence on the quality of the students' learning process (cited in Ahea, Ahea and Rahman, 2016). This finding was also supported by the studies conducted by Chawla and Thukral (2011) where they presented that the feedback provided by the students to their teachers could add positively to their classroom effectiveness. Beside this, feedback system is said to be in the position to serve various purposes to achieve a set goal (Ferguson, 2011, cited in Ahea, Ahea & Rahman, 2016).

Similarly, this definition was supported by the studies done by the Dublin City University, Ireland (n.d), where it asserted that feedback is a critical and core teaching activity undertaken to aid learning and provide information to students that can enable to identify what knowledge, skills and competencies they can and need to demonstrate, and to identify directions and pathways for improvement. Since student ratings are reflected as a primary measure of teaching effectiveness (Chen & Hoshower, 2003) and considered to be one of the most important mechanisms by which students could inform teachers about their experiences in a course/ module that they teach in the class and are better judges of classroom atmosphere, pace of instruction, and clarity and organization of the classroom materials (Ragupathi, n. d.; & Kelly, 2012). Therefore, as argued by Hattie and Timperly (2007); Rowe and Wood (2008); and Kelly (2012), the feedback provided by the students, if used appropriately can support and scaffold students' learning and lead to substantial learning gains.

Enhancement in Teaching Profession

The consequences of the students' feedback are expected to have a multiple impact on the receiver. For instance, receiving feedback from the students is expected of not only help in the improvement of teaching and learning process but also enhance the teaching profession of the module tutor. Students' feedback decides the faculty members to choose and teach modules which are according to their profession, as it provides imminent thinking for the faculties to select and teach the students without failure. In a

way, feedback is about giving information that encourages the recipients to accept it, reflect on it, learn from it, and hopefully make changes for the better quality in teaching profession (Tower, 1999). As argued by Hattie and Timperly (2007), and Tower (1999, cited in Akkuzu, 2014), feedback is the information provided by an agent (e.g. teacher, peer, student, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding that reflects upon the adequacy, quantity or quality of the teaching performance.

Similarly, Smith and Welicker-Pollack (2008) proposed that the educators have a generally positive attitudes towards student feedback of their teaching, that the educators have a believe that their students were capable of assessing their teaching and responded honestly, and that the educators took their feedback they received seriously and applied it in a formative sense to their own practice, that is to say, as a source of professional development (as cited in Kelso, 2013, p. 85).

Assessment and Evaluation System

Feedback also plays critical role in the field of quality teaching, assessment and evaluation for learning. As Chen and Hoshower (2003) argued that, since student ratings are used as the primary measures of teaching effectiveness, active participation and meaningful input from students are critical factors in the success of a teaching evaluation system. A feedback mechanism that informs teacher practices is considered an essential approach in the 21st century classroom teaching to bring changes in teaching learning styles and nature of assessment (Cohen, 1980; Marsh & Dunkin, 1992; and Brennan & Williams, 2004). Hence, feedback is considered as an essential component of assessment for learning, which if used appropriately can support and scaffold students' learning and lead to substantial learning gains (Hattie and Timperly, 2007; Plank, Dixon & Ward, 2014).

Improvement in the Overall Programme

One of the main intentions of this study was to bring improvement in the overall programme of the college through the means of collecting feedback from the students on various programme of the college. As suggested in several studies conducted in the past, the application of student feedback in schools is a positive tool in improving teaching, learning and

whole school performance as part of wide evaluation (Department of Education, 2015). Further, Chapman and Sammons (2013) noted that student feedback, as part of teaching evaluations; have often been developed in schools as part of a wider school self-evaluation programme as a means of achieving school improvement.

Controversial Over the Feedback

Having discussed several advantages of receiving feedback from the students, there is also seen some controversial issues side by side. As argued by Murray (2005), the majority of faculty members agreed that students' evaluation of teaching had led to improved teaching. But, on the other hand, this view was contrasted by the research findings of Seldin (1993) stated that, students, because of their limited background and experience, should not evaluate the instructor's knowledge of the subject matter and the materials used in the classroom.

The concern of providing constructive or undesirable feedback by the students' to their tutors also impacts the teaching-learning environment over time. As pointed out by Losadal (1999), who described constructive feedback as showing support, encouragement, or appreciate, and undesirable feedback as showing disapproval, or even sarcasm (as cited in Voerman, et la., 2012). As giving of feedback was a fear by students of a negative response to it or harm their teachers, which might harm their relationship (Plank, Dixon & Ward, 2014). Hence, the provision of positive or negative feedback by the students for their tutors may also form an adversative or discouraging relationship between them.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A mixed method comprising of both quantitative and qualitative were used for this study. The research data were retrieve firstly through a survey questionnaire that included closed and open questions and secondly through interviews. The main purpose of an adding open-ended question to the survey was expand on and corroborate the responses given to the five point Richter scale short type questions. Quantitative survey questionnaires were used mainly because the study was aimed to gather the views of a large population of students in the chosen college. A simple random sampling approach was used for survey questionnaires,

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except for the first years. The reason for leaving out the first year students was mainly because they were not much into the system of providing feedback at the college level. Side by side, qualitative interviews were conducted to gain in-depth information from a few college student samples using convenient sampling approach due to the constrained time pressure. The data collection for this study was conducted in three stages.

Stage 1 involved the distribution of survey questionnaires to approximately 600 student teachers from Paro College of Education (PCE). The survey questionnaires were intended to include both male and female, from different programme levels and programme types, except for the first year level. This was considered to be important in order to explore the holistic views of the students related to the impact of students' semester end feedback on the delivery of modules by the respective tutors. Of the 600 questionnaires distributed, about 539 were received with a response rate of about 95%.

The questions included in survey were basically comprised of likert type short responses followed an open-ended question, requiring narrative responses to triangulate with the way they respond to the earlier questions. The data generated by survey questionnaires was analysed and interpreted using statistical tools mainly the descriptive statistics, supported by SPSS Software. Descriptive statistical (mainly percentage) for semester end feedback was intended and compared in terms of gender, programme level and programme types using SPSS software for the likert type responses.

Stage 2 involved in analysing those open ended questions included at the end of survey questionnaires using some form of content analysis such as colour coding. The main reason for adding those open-ended questions were to cross check the consistency and trustworthiness of the participants in answering the survey questionnaires.

Stage 3 involved interviews with a group of students (approximately 10 with equal

participation from male and female population) selected from a various college programmes through convenient sampling approach except the first year as intended for survey questionnaires. Interviews were guided by using semi-structured questions. The transcribed interviews were then analysed using similar approach used earlier for analysing open-ended questions.

The main intention of conducting interviews was to seek deeper insights into the understanding and experiences of student participants with the concept and conduct of providing feedback to module tutors. Moreover, it was intended to explore constraints and affordances in regard to the impact it created on the conduct of module tutors as a consequence of receiving feedback from the students. Having done that, the findings from those data were corroborated with the findings collected from survey questionnaires and those open-ended questions. The overall findings were triangulated discussed further in the following section (discussion and findings). Ethical issue approval was sought from the concerned authorities of the college, prior to the data collection of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the overall findings of this study, which is based on the research questions designed and stated earlier. Prior to the discussion on the findings of the research questions, brief information on the demographic of the participations is presented in regard to its gender and structure. The main portion of the discussion will be carried out under the three stages of data collection as stated earlier under methodology section.

Demographic Details of the Participants

Of the 539 returned questionnaires, the participations involved were from the following gender and demographic background. The details of the gender are presented in Table 1 and the demographic details in Table 2.

Table1. Gender of the participants

Gender	Diploma	B.Ed (Pry)	B.Ed (Sec)	B.Ed (Dz)	PGDE	Grand Total	Percent
Female	6	193	21	36	24	280	46.9
Male	16	119	29	58	31	253	51.9
Missing	1	3	1	1	0	6	1.5
Total	23	315	51	95	55	539	100

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As shown in the Table 1, compared to the male, female participants are slightly more by 30 plus heads, indicating more number of students are comprised of female in the college.

Table2. Demographic details of the participants

Programme	Frequency	Percent
Diploma	23	4.3
B.Ed Primary	337	62.5
B.Ed Secondary	41	7.6
B.Ed Dzongkha	90	16.7
PGDE	39	7.2
Missing	9	1.7
Total	539	100

As indicated in Table 2, there were respondents from six different programmes, of which, the majority (62.5%) of the participants were from B.Ed Primary and only 4.3% were from Diploma being the smallest programme in the college. The discussion on the findings of the data presented in Table 2 was based on the research questions designed and presented earlier 'how does semester end students' module feedback changes the teaching learning environment of the college? This was the main question, which was further divided into the following three sub- questions:

- What are students' perceptions of semester end module feedback to the construct of feedback?
- What are students' perceptions of semester end module feedback to the module tutors?
- What are students' perceptions of semester end module feedback to the outcome of feedback on college and her programme?

The findings for the above listed questions were presented in the following three sections:

Students' Perceptions of Feedback and its Construct

This section presents the overall findings of the students' perceptions of feedback and its construct based on their understanding and experiences. The main intention of including this section was to explore students' understanding of the concept and its purpose in providing feedback to their respective module tutors. Table 3 presents the results based on the returns of the survey questionnaires. Of the five items included under this section, the most prominent item, which is closer to the definition of the concept 'feedback', was stated as 'the

information provided to modify or improve the future action'.

Table3. Feedback as 'the information provided to modify or improve the future action

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	9	1.7
Disagree	11	2.0
Not sure	51	9.5
Agree	258	47.9
Strongly agree	202	37.5
Missing	8	1.5
Total	539	100

As indicated in Table 3., eighty five percent of the respondents have supported either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'. It was further supported by findings from open-ended question as quoted " student can share both positive and negative thoughts about the respective modules as well as the tutors...it helps students to point out their opinion about the tutors which they cannot share in open audience...therefore feedback system is worthy and should be continued". In this regard, the majority of the participants are aware of the concept and its importance of introducing a system of collecting feedback from the students at the end of the semester. Hence, this finding tends to answer positively the first research sub-question: *What are students' perceptions of semester end module feedback to the construct of feedback?*

Students' Perception of Feedback and its Impact on Module Tutors

In this section, presents students' perception of feedback and its impact on their respective module tutors. In Table 4 & 5, results presented were solely from the responses received from survey questionnaires. Table 4., presents feedback as a way to help module tutors reflect on their teaching, where as Table 5., presents feedback as having little impact on module tutors' teaching practice.

Table4. A way to help module tutors reflect on their teaching

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	10	1.9
Disagree	22	4.1
Not sure	46	8.5
Agree	266	49.4
Strongly agree	190	35.3
Missing	5	1.5
Total	539	100

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Table 5. *Having little impact on module tutors teaching practice*

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	18	3.3
Disagree	36	6.7
Not sure	125	23.2
Agree	277	51.4
Strongly agree	76	14.1
Missing	7	1.3
Total	539	100

As shown in Table 4 & 5, the participants seem to have mixed feelings about feedback in terms of its impact on module tutors. For instance, Table 4., presents respondents' perception on feedback as 'a way to help module tutors reflect on their teaching', to which, 85% of the participants have responded to either 'agree' or 'strongly agree', indicating their understanding of feedback as a way to help their module tutor. Further, this point is being supported from the open-ended responses as quoted "it helps tutors to realize what they are teaching...helps tutors to know how they should teach their students to make their learning comprehensive, effective and understandable way". This finding aligns with the view of Moses (1989), who argued that "there is no doubt that students can give valid feedback that can help teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies" (as cited in Kelso, 2013, p. 20).

However, the result presented in Table 5., suggests that students are disillusioned with the consequences of them providing feedback. Perceptions of feedback as 'having little impact on module tutors teaching practice, to which, 66% of the respondents have either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement. This result tends to indicate respondents' post experience of the feedback observed after having provided their feedback, with hardly seen any changes for improvement taking place. More than a half of the participants have expressed their observation in terms of negative impact in terms of module delivery and its approach based on feedback provided in their previous semesters. The same point has been strongly supported from the open-ended responses. According to their response, no changes for improvement is seen taking place despite their feedback provided earlier as quoted from one of the respondents, "some tutors just come to the college for attendance without thinking much about the students' learning...giving feedback is time wastage only as it brings no positive impact on learning...student don't find changes in tutors

after they give feedback, which is disheartening".

Further, as shown in Table 5, most of the tutors tend to be not very keen on the feedback provided by their students. It is reflected in some of the participants' open-ended responses as quoted "feedback need to really dig out and do further research for the benefits of effective teaching on learning in the college". Unlike the findings for the question (sub-research question 1), there seem to be two different answers for this question: *What are students' perceptions of semester end module feedback to the module tutors?* While answering the five points Likert Scale, majority of the participants tend to have strong support indicating a positive impact on module tutors.

However, the findings from the open-ended responses indicated that some of the module tutors are not at all serious about the feedback provided. It tend to show that although, the students are in favour of arguing that the feedback should have an effect on tutor practices but the in reality there is a strong belief that the tutors are not responding to the feedback. This finding was in contrast to Chawla and Thukral (2011), who exposed that, the feedback given by the students, their teachers add positively to their classroom effectiveness. With these findings, the second sub research question is being answered as a mixed opinion based on their observations.

Students' Perception of Feedback and its Impact on College Programme

This section was intended to explore whether the system of collecting students' feedback at the end of every semester has any impact on overall college programme.

Table 6. *Improve the quality various programme in the college*

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	18	3.3
Disagree	25	4.6
Not sure	104	19.3
Agree	242	44.9
Strongly agree	146	27.1
Missing	4	.7
Total	539	100

As indicated in Table 6, 72% of the participants have responded to either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement. This tend to indicate the beliefs of the participants that if taken seriously

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on both the sides 'students' in providing feedback and 'module tutors' reflecting on the given feedback and improve for better accordingly. Similarly, some opinion shared by respondents in open ended responses as quoted "effective in sharing students' views/comments can also help the college programme for the future students...bring improvement and modification in various programme offered by the college. These responses aligns with Chapman and Sammons (2013), who reported that student feedback, as part of teaching evaluations; have often been developed in schools as part of a wider school self-evaluation, program as a means of achieving school improvement.

Under this, although, there is a strong support indicated from the survey questionnaires (five point Likert scale) as shown in Table 6, there seem to be no concrete findings from the open-ended responses other than assumption. The assumption made is mainly in regard to the striking of balance as discussed earlier between the students and the module tutors. Having addressed this, the most of the participants tend to feel that the outcome of the feedback would be of great beneficial to the college programme as a whole and therefore is the respond to the third research sub-question: *What are students' perceptions of semester end module feedback to the outcome of feedback on college and her programme?*

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that although, the majority of the participants tend to have a strong understanding of the concept 'feedback' and also its intention of introducing in the college system, they seem to have some reservation in terms of its impact on some of the module tutors. The majority of the participants have an opinion that there should be a balance between the way feedbacks is provided by the students and the seriousness shown from the module tutors. Having strike this balance could contribute tremendously to the college programme as a whole. This point is being strongly supported by the several studies in the past, where, feedback is considered as an essential component of assessment for learning, which if used appropriately can support and scaffold students' learning and lead to substantial learning gains (Kelly, 2012; Hattie and Timperly, 2007; Plank, Dixon & Ward, 2014).

As discussed earlier, the overall findings tend to indicate that the college management has to take some measures on how to improve the seriousness of the system. According to the findings from the participants, they failed to observe any find any changes upon providing their past semesters' feedback. The feedback system in the college seems to remain same as usual. As a result, feedback was given for the sake of completing the formality and nothing else. Therefore, participants were with an opinion that giving feedback could be just a fill in the blanks, if there is no implementation. Therefore, to bring conducive and improvement in the system, implementation is needed. Both tutors and students should follow the feedback system seriously for further improvement of the college programme as a whole.

LIMITATIONS

The following bullet points represent some of the limitation emerged in the process of conducting this study:

- The exclusion of 1st year student teachers' perception on semester end module feedback for tutors limits the certain perceptions and understanding of the study and findings;
- Due to a large number of program levels and types across the RUB colleges, the study is limited only to the Paro College of Education. This might impact the overall study of feedback system across the colleges within the RUB;
- Since our subject specialization is not in Dzongkha studies, we could not framed and have the printed copies of survey questionnaires in Dzongkha medium, which also constrained the deeper understanding of nature of study from the Dzongkha student teachers' perspective;

The financial status of the research could not make the study possible far and wide in other colleges under Royal University of Bhutan. As some of the colleges are spread in the distant areas with different nature of compass location.

RECOMMENDATION

The following a few recommendations are made for the future study and also for the benefit of the college programme:

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- The future studies need to express on some other college students with similar programs and types, so that the findings could be studied and discussed for better information on semester end module feedback for tutors across the colleges of Royal University of Bhutan;
- Some of the participants are of view that, it is important to have two modes/ways of giving feedback to the tutors, one in the middle of the semester (after two months of teaching) and other at the end of the semester. So, the provision of feedback in the middle of the semester might be helpful to the students and could see the changes as well.

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