

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK TO YOUR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discussed the issues in providing effective feedback to students, in general. Issues like students' acceptance, understanding and readiness to change are very important in ensuring the effectiveness in providing feedback while keeping things in perspective. Lecturers or instructors must take serious attention and consideration in the course of providing feedback to identify areas where students can improve their performance as well as prepare themselves for future opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

All lecturers or instructors have the responsibility to ensure their students or learners are successful in the studies. Often we heard lecturers complaining that they had to explain a number of times the mistakes that a student made but the person keep on doing the same mistakes over and over again. Sometimes the lecturer had to call the student personally into his office and provide personal coaching in assisting the weak student to improve but it seemed that the effort had gone down the drain. This may cause frustration and demotivation to the lecturer.

Lewis (2004) defined feedback as the return of a portion of the output of a process or system to the input especially when used to maintain performance or to control a system or process. It represents information about the status and performance of the system.

In the communication process, feedback is a course of verifying messages and the receiver's attempts to ensure that the message he or she decoded is what the sender really meant to convey (Lewis, 2004).

In this paper, feedback focused mainly on advice or criticism about how successful something is. It is the return of information about a process or activity. Feedback can also be an evaluative response from an instructor to a learner. Butler and Winne (1995) defined feedback as information a learner receives about his or her learning processes and achievement of its outcomes.

Student is referred to as a person who enrolls or attends classes at colleges or universities. He or she will also be referred to as learner.

Effective means having an intended or expected effect. Provide is referred to as "to furnish" or "to make available".

WHEN A FEEDBACK IS NECESSARY

The lecturer or the institute can provide feedback to a student who does not achieve performance as per standard predetermined. It is also necessary to provide feedback when the lecturer notices that a particular student did not keep up with his study. This can also be disclosed through either tests, quizzes or participation in the classroom.

An instructor needs to communicate the feedback when his student behaves in a inappropriate or unacceptable manner. For instance, a student who is always late for classes or does not wear proper attire in a particular occasion as specified by the institute; should be advised accordingly.

A lecturer can also provide feedback when a student seeks it. For example, a student may ask the lecturer about his or her performance. In this case, the request for such lecturer's opinion and suggestion on improving the learner weakness or study is beneficial. It is always helpful to ask the students if they would like feedback rather than impose it.

WHY FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT

As a lecturer, you are responsible and accountable for your students' achievement. Offering and providing effective feedback to the students is an essential element in the learning process. Through communication feedback, the lecturer can discuss strength and weaknesses as well as identify areas where students can improve for their self-development.

Both the lecturer and student can share information through their open discussion, keep things in perspective during a highly emotional time and avoid conflict. Feedback will also enable the students to discover their deficiencies with coaching of a lecturer. Hence, the same mistakes or misbehaviors will not be repeated.

The advantage of providing feedback is to ensure that students are made known what is expected of them. They will also learn to improve themselves and achieve a better performance. Through feedback the student will understand standards set for them so as to develop their best potential.

Feedback designed to nurture a positive student affect can establish a relationship between learner and instructor that will decrease the psychological distance between instructor and student. In addition, certain assignments and the instructor feedback they allow can precipitate a sense of connectedness between both parties (Ley, 1999).

Furthermore, providing meaningful feedback can help the lecturers in enhancing their interpersonal skills, improve individual and team performances as well as promote continuous improvement.

However, one of the drawbacks of providing feedback is the feeling of insecure. The student may feel that everything he does is wrong and being watched. He will be demoralized if he is informed on his 'handicapped'. He will become demotivated and perhaps his performance will be lower than before. In other words, he feels as if he is a total failure. Sometimes, the student will disagree with the lecturer's feedback or become obviously upset. This will result in an argument or no improvement will be achieved.

HOW TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK EFFECTIVELY

Feedback should be provided immediately. A lecturer or instructor shall communicate with the student when he discovers the student's mistake or misbehavior instantaneously. Do not wait until the student nearly forgets the events in which the mistake occurred.

All feedbacks should be offered with the positive intent of helping. If a student fails badly in a certain test, the lecturer must be open and honest but tactful and focus on the student's performance and what ought to be done to develop his skills and study method. Do not blame the student upfront on his failure. Consider feedback sessions as an early dispute resolution opportunity.

It is also important to establish an environment where both the lecturer and student would share information that is positive, objective, constructive, realistic and futuristic oriented. The lecturer shall use good communication competency including listening skills, remain calm and advice objectively may help the student realize his positive intention.

Sometimes the student needs to be pointed out the effect of their behavior for them to accept the feedback. For example, if the student comes late to class, he will distract other members and lecturer in the class. He may also miss the important points or lesson given by the lecturer. If this misbehavior is practiced until the student enters their working world, his employer may not be delighted with his performance and he may be sacked.

Choosing the best place, best time, best climate and communication skill determines the effectiveness of providing feedback. Make sure the place that you choose is comfortable and suitable for discussion. A supportive classroom or office climate fosters fuller developments of a student's positive self-image and enhances self-concept. In addition, when students are free of disruptive anxiety, fear, anger or depression, they are more likely to make desirable cognitive and affective gains (Cooper and Simonds, 2003).

Make sure that the student is ready to hear your feedback. Do not force him to receive your feedback or it may lead him to be a defensive or uninterested to understand your advice. Feedback is given to help the student become more self-aware and to improve his effectiveness in relating to other people.

FORM OF FEEDBACK

Whenever practicable, the feedback should be face-to-face. This is a more personal approach and allows us to concentrate in specific areas of significance such as test results, group discussion and misconduct. Face-to face is the richest channel of communication because it provides maximum amount of information to be transmitted during the feedback session. It offers multiples information cues (words, postures, facial expressions, gestures, intonation), immediate feedback (both verbal and nonverbal) and the personal touch of "being there" (Robbin, 2003).

If not possible due to distance, feedback may be given over the telephone, notes on the student's answer script, e-mail and any other communication channel. Technologies offer extraordinarily rich ways to capture people's attention (Davenport and Beck, 2000). Table 1 offers more forms of feedback.

Table 1 : Forms of Feedback

FORMS OF FEEDBACK	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Verbal Face-to-face	Immediate and instant feedback Clear instruction Allow seeking input or response More personalized	Embarrassing and change of facial expression Student avoid seeing lecturer
Telephone	Immediate and instant feedback Allow seeking input or response Personalized	Problem in explaining if the issue to discuss is complex
Notes on student's paper work	Personalized Able to indicate the mistakes Clear instruction	Student may ignore the notes. No reaction for improvement since the student does not face the lecturer. Learner may not understand the notes shown
Email	Personalized Allow seeking input or response	Student may ignore the email. No reaction for improvement since the student does not face the lecturer. Learner may not understand the feedback given
Short Message Services (SMS)	Personalized Allow seeking input or response	Student may ignore the SMS No reaction for improvement since the student does not face the lecturer. Learner may not understand the feedback given Limited message can be sent

STRUCTURING THE FEEDBACK

Feedback session should be structured so as to allow the student in accepting the feedback easily and without negative emotion which could be disastrous. It is recommended that the feedback be framed as can be found on the following page: -

1. Provide full explanation about the student's performance and how it is rated against the established assessment standards. Describe the impact and consequences of the current behavior.

2. Prepare all the facts that you are going to discuss. Giving feedback or criticism tend to be the most difficult challenges for many people although for a good reason. A well plan feedback will act as a foundation for action instead of blame.
3. Review the student's strength and potential against the established standard, knowledge, experience and competencies. Let the student realize the mistake that he makes. Perhaps, we need to cite the specific behavior of what he actually said or did (or did not say or do) rather than personal traits or habits.
4. Identify the areas and opportunities for improvement. Includes a particular example of where and how the student may adopt change for alternative behavior. Describe the current behavior that you want him to reinforce and redirect to improve situation.
5. Discuss techniques and strategies to overcome deficiencies. Demonstrate your sincere interest and confidence that the student's behavior can be change. Sharing of personal experience and knowledge will help the student to develop and enhance desired skill (Lye, 1999).
6. Focus on the final stage of feedback on how the student did overall or what you see as their strength and potential for future enhancement. Help them to develop options for alternative behavior and/or actions to improve the situation. The lecturer must identify what he expects to see in the student's answers and work for each task or assignment given.
7. Be prepared of a negative response, disagreement or defensiveness. Wrong feedback may cause agonizing and can erode people's spirit. Be careful with the words you use and not to forget your body language.

The following shows tips on giving feedback.

- i. Carefully plan what you are to going to say by preparing the facts and reviewing related documents. Make your messages clearly your own by saying "I" and "my".
- ii. Offer honest feedback and show your interest with positive intent of helping
- iii. Provide feedback on the positive aspects of the student's performance and improvement
- iv. Be open, specific and objective. Avoid judgments, evaluation, subjective or generalization.
- v. Let the student review his or her performance or behavior. The student is entitled to his or her results such as tests, quizzes and assignments.
- vi. Ask for feedback concerning the way your messages being received. Ensure the student understands, by asking him or her to interpret what meaning he or she attaches to your messages.
- vii. Do not overload the student with your feedback. This will reduce the chance that he or she will use it.
- viii. Listen actively by using attentive body language. Your verbal and non-verbal message must be congruent. You may also show your empathy to share the feelings and accept the learner's emotion values.
- ix. Offer encouragement and express genuine delight at seeing the student's succeed. "Enthusiasm is contagious"

CONCLUSION

Providing effective and meaningful feedback to university students are challenging tasks to the lecturers. It is also a part of teaching and ongoing process of guiding as well as developing the students. It is important for the lecturer to describe current behaviors that they want to reinforce or redirect in order to improve situation.

The lecturer must identify specific situation where they observe such behavior. The behavior can be student's inability to perform as the predetermined standard set on them. This can be measured through tests, quizzes, examination or exercises during class. The undesirable behavior can also be referred not only on academic achievement but also on student's discipline.

Lecturer or instructor must describe the impacts and consequences of current behavior that will obtain the student's attention. Finally, identifying the alternative behavior and action will help the student change to the desired state level of performance and achievement. A lecturer should practice an effective communication style during feedback process to ensure his effort is successful in developing the student's skills, academic achievement and personality improvement for their future undertakings.

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