

Students' and Faculty Perspective about the Challenges in Feedback Process in an Outcome Based Education System

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ABSTRACT

Background: Effective Feedback process is the running blood for learning in an outcome based teaching system and is a powerful tools for improving the future performance of the medical students. Currently almost all medical institutes seem to grapple with the feedback process but the desired results in form of students' improvement are not considerable. Keeping in view the aforementioned mismatch a structured evaluation of the challenges in its way is necessary.

Objectives: The aim of study was to identify the challenges faced by medical students and faculty in feedback process and to compare the discrepancy between students' and faculty's perspective about the factors that impede the process in college of medicine Majmaah University KSA.

Materials and methods: This was an observational questionnaire based study conducted in 2020-2021 upon students and faculty of medical college of Majmaah University. The participants filled their response about the barriers they face during the feedback process. The data was scrutinized and analysed on SPSS ver 28. Pearson Chi-square and Fisher Exact tests were applied to compare the different responses between faculty and students. A Bonferroni adjusted p-value was reported for multiple comparisons. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

Results: It was found that 62% participants said students are afraid of negative comments, 70 % said that students don't consider the process important, 72 % said it's a time consuming process comments. Statistically significant results were found in responses between faculty and students about the four variables namely feedback is not taken important, time consuming, increased work load and language barrier.

Conclusions: The most significant hurdles in the process of effective feedback in our setup are uninterested pupils, fear of being judged, weak staff skills, time and work constraints, and a language barrier.

Key Words: Feedback, Challenges, Barriers, Medical students, Faculty

INTRODUCTION

In an outcome based medical education system, feedback process serves as a backbone to assess the students' performance. It is referred to as running blood for the learning course. A substantial number of literatures have proved that magnitude of an effectual feedback in improving the students' performance is a well established fact¹. Moreover feedback if given effectively helps the students achieve the preferred learning outcomes and vice versa². Data shows that the constructive and clear feedback is the fifth most important influencer out of a list of over 100 factors which cause a substantial impact on the students' achievement³. Hence feedback improves self understanding and has a noticeable impact on students' professional development as a lifelong learner⁴. Effectual feedback has to be specific, focused and should be based on firsthand observations. Faculty members are obliged to offer frequent feedback to their students and residents in any undergraduate or postgraduate educational system.⁵ It is emphasized that feedback is unproductive unless it results in a constructive and effective change in students' behavior.⁶ Several impediments have been brought into the light by faculty members while providing feedback, as well as by students when receiving feedback.⁷

The process of providing relevant feedback is not always trouble free and undemanding as it appears to be. Many obstacles and challenges often crop up during the mutual process that must be taken into account. Students may not recognize the material they get as feedback as one of these issues.

Furthermore, the timing, location, and language utilized while delivering feedback, as well as student apprehension, staff confidence and skills in offering feedback, concern of being judgmental and unjust to the student, and other associated interpersonal and situational factors, may all affect the feedback process' performance.^{8,9}

Faculty reports that they provide their feedback timely and clearly to the students. Furthermore they also state that students don't follow the improvement points mentioned and take the remarks as personal comments which cause failure in improvement by the students. Whereas the students believe that they receive either very less or negligible effectual feedback on their performance. Also many students refer to the process being biased, unclear and judgmental^{10,11}. The literature states that there is a discrepancy between faculty and students point of view about the feedback process. The students seem to appear dissatisfied with the amount and type of feedback they receive, while much of the faculty time and effort is consumed in this process^{12,7,8}. This mismatch stimulates the urge to examine the challenges and barriers in the process of effective feedback provision and implementation. In our local set-up, there is a paucity of available statistics about the difficulties faced by the students and faculty members during the process of feedback. Keeping in view all the mentioned facts the current study was started with the goal to identify the barriers and challenges faced by medical students and faculty in the process of feedback and to compare the discrepancy between students' and faculty's perspective about the factors that impede them from receiving and providing adequate feedback.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was an observational, cross – sectional and descriptive study which was conducted in college of medicine Majmaah University KSA in the academic year 2020-2021 on male and female medical students and faculty members of the college. The study was completed in one and a half year (six months extra were taken due to COVID- 19 lockdown restrictions which affected the data collection procedure). Feedback is a regular feature of Majmaah University at the end of each module.

All medical students enrolled in MBBS program and Faculty members of college of medicine were included in the study. The

sample collection method was convenient sampling technique in our study. The total number of the male and female students in college in all years was 324 while the total male and female faculty members were 99. Out of this 249 (76.8%) students and 91(91.9%) faculty members participated in the study.

A standard pre – structured, self-reported questionnaire was used to collect the data from the participants. The questionnaire contained 15 questions in total out of which 04 were about the demographic details and 11 were asking about the most common difficulties and challenges which they faced during the feedback process. The questionnaire was constructed in simple English language to make it easily understandable for all the participants. First a pilot project was conducted to check the understanding and workability of questionnaire on a small group of students (25 students) and faculty members (10 faculty members). After successful pilot project the questionnaire was distributed among all the students and faculty members. Prior written and verbal consent was taken from all participants and only the voluntary participants were included in our study. All the participants (Group A students and Group B faculty) were given a detailed explanation about their role in the study, the purpose and impacts of study. The questionnaire was filled during the break time to avoid any academic loss. The anonymity of all the participants was ensured at every step of study. After data collection the questionnaires were scrutinized thoroughly and the questionnaires which were incompletely filled or had double options ticked were excluded from entering the SPSS software version 25. The responses of all questions were recorded on a scale of 1-4, where 1 was the always, 2 meant sometimes, 3 meant never and 4 referred to don't know.

The data obtained from 02 groups, A (students) & B (Faculty), was entered and analyzed using IBM SPSS 28. Categorical variables (demographics, faculty, and students' perception about the feedback) are expressed as frequencies and percentages. Pearson Chi-square and Fisher Exact tests were applied to compare the different responses between faculty and students. A Bonferroni adjusted p-value was reported for multiple comparisons. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

A prior approval from the IRB of the university was taken before the start of the study with Ethical approval No. MUREC-OC.22/COM-2020/4-6.

RESULTS

Respective responses of faculty & students' of Majmaah University were recorded for 11 variables and the following results were interpreted.

Table No.01 shows the demographic details of the study population. Total number of participants was 340 (N) out of which 249(73.2%) were students with age range from 18 to 26 years and 91 (26.8%) were faculty members with ages between 30 to 60 years. There were 231 males and 109 females in all. Among the students 57 were from 1st year, 46 from 2nd year, and 60 from 3rd year, 46 from 4th year and 40 from 5th year.

Table No. 02 represents the frequency and percentage from the overall response of both groups about the challenges and barriers that they face during the feedback process. In response to the variable students are always afraid of negative comments, out of total 340 participants 20 % think always, 42 says sometimes, 33% said never and 3% said they don't know about this reason. From total of 340, 22% said that the feedback is always a time consuming process, 51% said sometimes, 22% said never while 4% opted for don't know option. Among the participants 17.4% study population said that students were always afraid of negative comments, 51.5% said sometimes, 28% said never about this variable. When asked about the lack of training of staff 15.9% said always, 58.2% said sometimes, 18% said never and 7.6% said they don't know about this variable being the barrier in the process of feedback. About 71% of the participants said that faculty is not actively involved in giving the feedback. Around 72.5 % study

population identified increased workload as a barrier in the way of effective feedback process. 66.5% said that the comments provided are difficult to understand while only 27.4% said its never the problem with them. 65% participants said that feedback is given after a long time. 63% said that they face difficulty in finding proper place and time while 28% said that it's never the problem with them. About language barrier 58% label it as the cause while 33.5% never find it as a problem.

Table No. 03 describes the comparison between students (Gp A) and faculty (Gp B) responses about the challenges and barriers they faced during feedback process.

There was a statistically significant disparity between the responses of two groups with faculty having the opinion that students don't think that feed back was important for their learning whereas the students had the opposite opinion with p value <0.001.

Moreover, after applying Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons of responses from the same groups, a significant difference was observed between the responses of faculty about this variable. Most of the faculty members thought that the students always (25.3%) and sometimes (56%) take feedback as unimportant process in comparison to only 17.6% staff who think the opposite with a p value 0.012 and 0.001 respectively. Similar statistically significant difference was found among the students where only 18% always think feedback being important while 39.4% said that it was never important for them showing p value 0.012.

The response about feedback being a time consuming process showed statistically significant results with faculty referring the process time consuming while students did not agree to the same and showed a p-value <0.001. The Bonferroni results among faculty showed significant disparity where 26% said it always took up much time and 62% said sometimes in comparison with only 8.8% faculty members who thought that providing feedback was never time taking with p-value <0.001. Same goes with students where in 20.5% said always and 27% said sometimes the process is time consuming in comparison to only 27.7% who said it's never time consuming having a p-value <0.001.

A significant number of faculties labelled the increased workload being the difficulty in the feedback process while maximum students had the opposite opinion hence the variable showed a statistically significant result with p-value 0.039. Bonferroni adjusted post-Hoc comparison among faculty showed disparity with only 8.8% members thought workload always being a barrier in comparison to 62% who thought sometimes (p-value 0.007) and 24.2% said it was never the cause (p-value 0.001). Students' responses showed that only 20% considered the increased workload as a challenge in comparison with 51% who thought about it being the reason sometimes (p-value 0.007) and 20% considered it to be never the cause (p-value 0.007).

Table 1: Socio-demographic and anthropometric characteristics of participants (N= 340)

Sr. No	Demographic details	Number of participants in each group (n)	Total percentage in %	
1	Age	18-26 years	249	73.2
		30-60 yrs	91	26.8
2	Gender	Male	231	67.9
		Female	109	32.1
3	Academic Status	Faculty	91	26.8
		Student	249	73.2
4	Year of Study	1 st year	57	16.8
		2 nd year	46	13.5
		3 rd year	60	17.6
		4 th year	46	13.5
		5 th year	40	11.8

In response to difficulty in finding proper time and place a statistically significant result was seen. The faculty was of the view that most of the time they had problem in finding place and had

less time whereas most of the students stated the opposite with p-value <0.001. Bonferroni adjusted post-Hoc comparison showed significant difference among faculty with only 3.3% said this variable was always a barrier in comparison to 56% and 37% faculty members who said that this was sometimes and never the challenge respectively (p-value 0.020 and 0.001 respectively). Among the students 16.5% said that they always find this variable as a challenge which significantly differs from the response of 53%

students who take it as sometimes and 21% say this is never the cause of difficulty (p-value 0.020 and 0.001 respectively).

The language barrier also came out as statistically significant between faculty and students with p-value 0.009, where in only 4% faculty said language was always a problem and 40 % said sometimes while 12% students thought it always and 52% said sometimes the language was a challenge for them.

Table 02: Response of all participants about challenges in feedback process (N= 340)

Items	Always n(%age)	Sometimes n(%age)	Never n(%age)	Don't know n(%age)
Students don't think feedback is important for their learning	69 (20.3)	146 (42.9)	114 (33.5)	11 (3.2)
Feedback is a time consuming process	75 (22.1)	174 (51.2)	77 (22.6)	14 (4.1)
Students are afraid of negative comments	59 (17.4)	175 (51.5)	96 (28.2)	10 (2.9)
Lack of training of faculty	54 (15.9)	198 (58.2)	62 (18.2)	26 (7.6)
Faculty is not actively involved in feedback process	61 (17.9)	183 (53.8)	75 (22.1)	21 (6.2)
Increased workload	62 (18.2)	185 (54.4)	74 (21.8)	19 (5.8)
Comments are difficult to understand by students	38 (11.2)	188 (55.3)	93 (27.4)	21 (6.2)
Students find it boring, irrelevant and long	48 (14.1)	164 (48.2)	107 (31.5)	21 (6.2)
Feedback is given after a long time	43 (12.6)	179 (52.6)	95 (27.9)	23 (6.8)
Difficulty in finding proper place and time	44 (12.9)	184 (54.1)	87 (25.6)	25 (7.4)
Language barrier	34 (10)	165 (48.5)	114 (33.5)	27 (7.9)

Table 03: Comparison between Students (Gp A) and Faculty (Gp B) response about challenges in Feedback process (N=340)

Items	Always n(%age)		Sometimes N (%age)		Never n(%age)		P value
	Faculty	Students	Faculty	Students	Faculty	Students	
Students don't think feedback is important for their learning	23 (25.3) ¥	46 (18.5) ¥	51 (56) ¥	95 (38.2) ¥	16 (17.6)	98 (39.4)	<0.001*
Feedback is a time consuming process	24 (26.4) ¥	51 (20.5) ¥	57 (62.6) ¥	117 (47) ¥	8 (8.8)	69 (27.7)	<0.001*
Students are afraid of negative comments	15 (16.5)	44 (17.7)	49 (53.8)	126 (50.6)	23 (25.3)	73 (29.3)	0.667
Lack of training of faculty	13 (14.3)	41 (16.5)	57 (62.6)	141 (56.6)	15 (16.5)	47 (18.9)	0.805
Faculty is not actively involved in feedback process	16 (17.6)	45 (18.1)	46 (50.5)	137 (55)	24 (26.4)	51 (20.5)	0.717
Increased workload	8 (8.8) ¥	54 (21.7) ¥	57 (62.6) ¥	128 (51.4) ¥	22 (24.2)	52 (20.9)	0.039*
Comments are difficult to understand by students	7 (7.7)	31 (12.4)	60 (65.9)	128 (51.4)	19 (20.9)	74 (29.7)	0.116
Students find it boring, irrelevant and long	13 (14.3)	35 (14.1)	52 (57.1)	112 (45)	22 (24.2)	85 (34.1)	0.190
Feedback is given after a long time	7 (7.7)	36 (14.5)	45 (49.5)	134 (53.8)	34 (37.4)	61 (24.5)	0.075
Difficulty in finding proper place and time	3 (3.3) ¥	41 (16.5) ¥	51 (56) ¥	133 (53.4) ¥	34 (37.4)	53 (21.3)	<0.001*
Language barrier	4 (4.4)	30 (12)	37 (40.7)	128(51.4)	39 (42.9)	75 (30.1)	0.009*

* Statistically significant at 5% level of significance

¥ =Bonferroni adjusted post-Hoc comparisons (exact p-values are mentioned in the text)

DISCUSSION

In medical education the feedback process plays a pivotal role in building up the knowledge, skills, attitude and hence the professional competence of the students and the tutor as well.¹³

Hence feedback is an excellent technique for learning provided both the teacher and the student work efficiently as one unit and the learners' best interests are protected.¹⁴

The study found out that most of the students don't take feedback as an important entity for their learning as a faculty perspective. Added on it was also found out that students also think the process unimportant for their professional development. Similar finding were observed in another study by Hardevella et al in 2017 which stated that students often are uninterested in the feedback process.¹⁵ Another study done in 2018 by Wang & Kogan described that when it comes to the students who are at the receiving end they must have an optimistic approach and take the comments with an open heart to improve their learning.¹⁶

Our study found out that most of the participants (both faculty members and students) said that students were afraid of getting negative and corrective comments by the tutor during the feedback which makes the process of feedback being challenging. Similar observations were found in other studies which showed that students become uninterested and disrespectful of the teachers when getting remedial feedback, according to teachers. Corrective comments sometimes meet a negative reaction from pupils, resulting in the input being ignored.^{17, 18, and 19}

Also study by Hardavella et al., in 2017; Wang & Kogan in 2018 stated that from the standpoint of the feedback provider, proper skills and education about the goals of feedback is needed

to make the process constructive, effective and corrective so that students can easily digest the positive as well as negative comments. Feedback given must be eloquent, un-biased and based on firsthand observations.^{15, 16}

When it comes to the students who are at the receiving end they must have an optimistic approach and take the comments with an open heart to improve their learning.¹⁵

The study also revealed that during the process of feedback lack of staff skills to communicate their points is also found out to be among one of the important challenges making the process difficult and non effective. Corresponding results to our findings were also found out in other research products where it was stated that inadequate skills and training and sometimes being less aware of the process of feedback among the faculty members become a difficulty in the process.^{20, 21}

Another study conducted by the medical students in Riyadh region about the difficulties they experience in the feedback process revealed untrained faculty, poor skills and students fear of being judged as few of the barriers.²²

Our project found out that most of the participants labelled the process being always or sometimes a time consuming process. Moreover the increased workload was also added as a barrier to feedback process. We also found that lack of proper place and time was also mentioned by most of the study population as a big challenge in the process of effective feedback process. Our results are also supported by other data which showed that the time constraints imposed by clinical and teaching activity causing excessive workload also the non availability of proper place cause a significant impediment to meaningful feedback.^{20, 21}

In a review of the literature, Wilkinson et al. found that a number of factors can influence the process of providing useful feedback. These factors were categorized as follows: a) environmental factors, such as feedback frequency, location, and timing; b) interpersonal factors, such as the preceptor's and resident's personalities and styles, as well as their relationship, which can be barriers if not properly considered; and c) situational factors, such as feedback content.²³

Language barrier was also found out to be a challenge in the way of effective feedback delivery process by many participants in our study. A study done in 2020 in Chinese Medical College also stated the similar findings where it was found that language barrier poses a lot of difficulties in the learning process of their foreign students.²⁴ In our setup a considerable number of faculty members are not natives so the same problem is faced by the students sometimes.

CONCLUSION

To sum up it was found that the process of feedback provision in college of medicine Majmaah university in faculty and students' perspective is not trouble free. Un interested students, fear of being judged, poor staff skills, time and work constraints and language gap are among the most important challenges in the process of effectual feedback.

Limitations: small sample size was one of limitations due to which results cannot be generalized to all population. Inclusion of more medical colleges to increase the sample size and a qualitative approach can help further to generalize the findings.

Recommendations: Proper staff and students training are required to emphasize the importance of feedback. For all assessed activities specific time must be allocated for proper one to one feedback process. Communication gap is needed to be overcome to avoid any language barriers.

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