

Research Article

Types of feedback and faculty examination of importance and usage

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Abstract

Feedback is an important part of the educational, teaching and learning process. Currently, in Learning Management Systems, instructors are endeavoring to engage, support, correct students, and promote higher-order thinking in their online classes. Feedback either via grades or comments regarding assignments, is one way to foster student learning. The problem is to ascertain what type or types of feedback are more useful and efficacious in this regard. Many students are eager to receive numerical feedback, some want writing feedback and still others want some validation as to their efforts. Ascertaining what type of feedback is most often used and what type of feedback is most important is imperative. This research will employ a questionnaire model using Qualtrics. Participants were college/university faculty. Qualtrics internal mechanisms were used to analyze the data. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively and discussed. The results of this very preliminary exploratory study were reviewed. In this brief study, the authors examined the literature regarding feedback and how feedback is defined. The authors requested that faculty provide information on how substantial these various forms of feedback are and how often they utilize each. The results were reviewed and analyzed and some implications derived. Some recommendations for future study were examined and explored.

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Introduction

Faculty feedback is an essential part of the learning process. However, the types of feedback to students in an online environment can vary. Shaughnessy (2022) points out 30 different types of possible feedback that can be given to assess student learning in an online environment.

An investigation by Li et al, (2020) found that faculty feedback has the potential to impact students' performances positively. They state, "... when given effectively, feedback can improve the learning experience of students" (p. 2). They also point out that more feedback is not necessarily better. It depends on the type of feedback given. In addition, Pan and Shao (2020) investigation provided positive insights into faculty feedback and its effect on student motivation and learning engagement. They suggest that students' perceptions of feedback can have a positive and negative impact. They propose that teacher online feedback (TOF) should be interactive, positive, varied, and timely. Since COVID-19, many instructors have had to learn Blackboard, Canvas and other LMSs (Learning Management Systems) to deliver instruction. Other instructors have been teaching online, using and providing feedback to their students for years.

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However, there are different forms and types of feedback which shall be discussed, and this research will delve into the relative importance and usage of these different forms of feedback.

Students need feedback to understand their grades and the weaknesses of their work. Faculty must provide feedback to assist students in grammar, punctuation, syntax, sentence structure, and APA format. Spelling errors should also be indicated, so students know their errors and understand that words must be spelled correctly. There are different types of feedback that have been suggested by Rabidouix and Rottman (2017) one suggestion is Vocaroo. A brief description follows:

“Vocaroo allows instructors to provide verbal feedback through an audio podcast. For example, Vocaroo allows instructors to record comments concerning the student’s submission in an audio podcast format, and then place the recording link for playback with the assigned grade.”

Rabidouix and Rottman (2017) suggest that taking an online class is quite different than a face to face class. They indicate there is a loneliness, an anonymity that instructors have to address so that students at a distance feel that they are part of the class and can take part in the classroom instruction and that their contributions are valued.

Another option referred to as Jing is below :

“Jing allows instructors to combine screen capturing and verbal feedback in a video format. There are several ways online instructors can utilize this program to provide feedback to students. For example, Jing allows instructors to screen capture students’ submissions and provide verbal feedback. Instructors can also screen capture written feedback and provide additional verbal feedback that elaborates on the written comments. Once the feedback is completed, a feedback video link is provided to students with their assigned grades.”

The authors also suggest that Zoom is another palatable alternative. This is superior in that one has a “face with a name” and clarification is immediate. Rapport and a relationship can be established and tone of voice can be captured. When one reads feedback- one does not always get a sense of support or encouragement- even though the words may be there. Zoom is also helpful in terms of time management. Some students need to be reminded however as to show up on time and in a presentable format and that distractions- for example a barking dog- has to be addressed.

Gaudreau and Liu (2016) have discussed 9 types of feedback options which will be cursorily reviewed here. First appreciation- students need to feel appreciated and that their work is acceptable and meets standards and that their efforts are acknowledged. Some students appreciate links to various resources for further study, This enables students to delve into additional realms or aspects of a topic. Questions are another way to clarify or support student learning, The Socratic Method is still with us and some questions can be global and general and some need to be exact, specific and precise. Some instructors will share personal experiences- for example, the fact that they too had difficulty in a math class- be it algebra, trigonometry, or calculus or physics. Providing “next steps” in the course may help with time management, providing encouragement should be part and parcel of every course and the connecting of students to one another- for example students who may share personal experiences or interests may facilitate the learning process.

There have been many tangential issues explored in relationship to this issue. Conrad and Donaldson (2012) have written about how to engage the online learner. Since instructors cannot see and immediately interact with online learners (who may be taking their classes in the middle of the night in another time zone) this is a real provocative challenge. Getman (2005) has discussed the importance of assessment in online learning and the interaction between teacher and learner may be an important factor in the learning process. John Hattie and Timperly (2007) have written cogently about the importance of feedback. Kahai and Cooper (2003) investigated feedback immediacy. This is a central concept to this investigation.

Woods and Baker (2004) also looked at immediacy in online learning as well as teacher to student interaction. Not all students are keen to interact with the instructor. Some students want to do the bare minimum to get the highest grade possible or they may be inundated with family, personal and other issues.

Mehrabian and Weiner (1967) did foundational work in the realm of communication. In online learning the instructor must be clear exact, specific and precise as to the requirements of the course and their feedback. In the current zeitgeist students may not be receptive to feedback and thus positive remarks must be made first so that corrective feedback is absorbed and hopefully appreciated. In terms of the instructor student relationship Velez (2008) examined the realm of instructor communication behaviors and the realm of classroom climate.

This study has attempted to at least preliminarily investigate this issue using Qualtrics.

Method

Research Model

A questionnaire was developed and sent to approximately 100 faculty members in a small southwestern university. Qualtrics analyzed the data, and the data were reviewed by the three authors and discussed

The following survey questions were sent to faculty at a small southwestern university. Subjects: 34 faculty members responded: 16 males, 17 females, and one declined to respond. In terms of rank, six held the rank of Full Professor, 12 were Associate Professors, 10 were Assistant Professors, and six were Instructors.

Results

The answers of the participants to the interview questions are presented in tables.

Table 1. Participants view about interview questions

Interview Questions/Themes	Codes	f	%
Theme 1. Organization Q1. In what order do you grade your assignments?	As Submitted	13	39.3
	Alphabetical	12	36.3
	Random	7	7
	Selective student	1	3
Theme 2. Priority Q2. How do you grade assignments?	Submission in 1 Block	11	32.3
	As They are Turned in	6	17.6
	Any Combination Listed	16	47
	By Selective Student	1	2
Theme 3. Time Orientation Q3. When do you grade assignments?	Before and After Due Date	16	48.4
	Only After Due Date	13	39.3
	Before Due Date if Submitted	5	15

After receiving preliminary the preliminary data above, the Qualtrics survey defined each type of feedback and asked respondents about its importance. A 5-point Likert scale was used for each aspect.

Table 2. Participants response 5-point likert scale

Items	Opinions	f	%
Elaborative Feedback: Is asking students to provide more about theory, names and details. How important do you think this type of feedback is:	Not at all Important	0	0
	Slightly Important	3	8.8
	Moderately Important	9	26.47
	Very Important	16	47
	Extremely Important	6	17.65
Item 1. How often do you provide elaborative feedback to your online students?	Rarely	0	0
	Sometimes	3	8.82
	Occasionally	5	14.71
	Frequently	15	50
	Quite Frequently	9	26.4
Item 2. Supportive/Reinforcement feedback is defined as: You are doing a good job" "Keep up the good work" "Good" Great" Excellent, "Well Done." How important do you think this type of feedback is to online students?	Not at all Important	0	0
	Slightly Important	2	5.8
	Moderately Important	8	23.5
	Very Important	16	47.0
	Extremely Important	8	23.53
Item 3. How often do you provide Supplemental/Reinforcement Feedback?	Rarely	1	2.94
	Sometimes	1	2.94
	Occasionally	6	17.65
	Frequently	16	47.0
	Quite Frequently	10	29.41
Item 4. Validation feedback is defined as "You are right on target or correct." How important do you think this kind of feedback is to online students?	Not at all important	0	0
	Slightly Important	2	5.86
	Moderately Important	7	20.59
	Very Important	16	47.06
	Extremely Important	9	26.47
Item 5. How often do you provide validation feedback?	Rarely	0	0
	Sometimes	2	5.88
	Occasionally	10	29.41
	Frequently	11	32.35
	Quite Frequently	11	32.35
Item 6. Spelling feedback or typos is defined as "You have a few typos and spelling errors." How important do you think this type of feedback is to online students?	Not at all important	2	5.89
	Slightly Important	3	8.82
	Moderately Important	11	32.35
	Very Important	9	26.47

	Extremely Important	9	26.47
Item 7. How often do you provide typos and spelling feedback?	Rarely- 2.	2	5.89
	Sometimes 4.	4	11.76
	Occasionally7	7	20.59
	Frequently-11.	11	32.35
	Rarely- 2.	2	5.89
Item 8. Writing feedback is defined as comments on APA formatting, Writing Style and Punctuation. How important is this type of feedback to online students?	Not at all Important	0	0
	Slightly Important	3	8.82
	Moderately Important	7	20.59
	Very Important	18	52.94
	Extremely Important	6	17.65
Item 9. How often do you provide feedback on writing skills?	Rarely	1	2.94
	Sometimes	3	8.82
	Occasionally	5	14.71
	Frequently	15	44.12
	Quite Frequently	10	29.41
Item 10. Insight is defined as "You clearly understand the assignment or the question." How important do you think this type of feedback is?	Not at all Important	2	6.06
	Slightly Important	3	9.09
	Moderately Important	12	36.36
	Very Important	11	33.33
	Extremely Important	5	15.15
Item 11. How often do you provide insight feedback to your online students?	Rarely	3	8.82
	Sometimes	6	17.65
	Occasionally	18	29.41
	Frequently	11	33.35
	Quite Frequently	4	11.76
Item 12. Application feedback is defined as "I see as a teacher that you are using these types of theories or ideas." How important is application feedback to your online student?	Not at all important	1	3.03
	Slightly Important	7	21.21
	Moderately Important	8	24.24
	Very Important	10	30.30
	Extremely Important	7	21.21
Item 13. How often do you apply application feedback to your online students?	Rarely	4	11.76
	Sometimes	4	11.76
	Occasionally	11	32.35
	Frequently	9	26.47
	Quite Frequently	5	14.70

Item 14. Corrective feedback is defined as "You are in error "or "You are mistaken." How important do you think corrective feedback is to online students?	Not at all Important	1	2.94
	Slightly Important	4	11.7
	Moderately Important	8	23.53
	Very Important	12	35.29
	Extremely Important	9	26.47
Item 15. How often do you apply corrective feedback to online students?	Rarely	5	14.71
	Sometimes	4	11.76
	Occasionally	5	14.71
	Frequently	14	41.18
	Quite Frequently	6	17.65
Item 16. Suggestive/Consideration feedback is defined as suggesting additional readings and or asking students to look for more in-depth answers from authors or theories. How important is it to use suggestions/consideration feedback to your online students	Not at all Important	0	0
	Slightly Important	1	3.03
	Moderately Important	17	51.52
	Very Important	12	36.36
	Extremely Important	3	9.09
Item 17. How often do you use suggestive/considerations feedback to online students?	Rarely	1	3.03
	Sometimes	4	12.12
	Occasionally	16	48.48
	Frequently	11	33.33
	Quite Frequently	1	3.03
Item 18. Clarifying feedback is defined as "You are close to the correct analysis but you need to clarify a few points." How important do you think clarifying feedback is to online students?	Not at all Important	0	0
	Slightly Important	2	6.06
	Moderately Important	10	30.30
	Very Important	15	45.45
	Extremely Important	6	18.18
Item 19. How often do you use clarifying feedback?	Rarely	1	3.03
	Sometimes	2	6.06
	Occasionally	10	30.30
	Frequently	15	45.45
	Quite Frequently	5	15.15
Item 20. Summative feedback is defined as your overall assessment of the assignment, such as "You have summarized, integrated and synthesized well." How important is it to you to use this type of feedback?	Not at all Important	0	0
	Slightly Important	1	3.03
	Moderately Important	12	36.36
	Very Important	13	39.39
	Extremely Important	7	21.21
	Rarely	0	0

Item 21. How often do you give summative feedback to your online students?	Sometimes	1	3.03
	Occasionally	10	30.30
	Frequently	14	42.42
	Quite Frequently	8	24.24

In general, most instructors wanted more elaboration. Students seem to need more specificity and perhaps instructors need to be more clear, exact, specific and precise as to what they want in terms of a response. Broad general questions may lead to broad general answers that are not quite specific. Faculty do employ a good deal of reward and reinforcement to students and they apparently believe it important. Overall, faculty paid less attention to typographical errors and spelling errors. Validation feedback was also seen to be important though less so. It was of interest that almost 75 % of the faculty indicated that writing skills apparently were in need of feedback and clarification. This is of interest and an issue that bears further examination as to whether students are prepared to write in a grammatically correct format and in a clear concise manner or whether they need some type of assistance or remediation. Many colleges and universities have facilities whereby students can receive some assistance information and clarity and precision of thought. Summative feedback was also seen as an important element in the improvement of student responses. This is the “big picture” so to speak about a student’s overall work and endeavor.

These findings show some pervasive themes and trends but also show a lot of diversity it should be noted that not all online classes are the same. There are introductory class, graduate and undergraduate classes and some more theoretical and some quantitative in nature

Conclusion and Discussion

In general, the respondents to this survey utilize feedback and are aware of its importance but not every faculty member surveyed uses each type of feedback. Several faculty members began the survey but did not complete it. They may have felt that this information was not important or imperative in terms of enhancing instruction and improving student learning. There is no way to gauge the impact of each type of feedback on the minds of their students. Further research on faculty feedback is needed to explore the prioritization and usage differences in types of feedback. Potentially the use of faculty interviews would delve deeper into why some faculty members value certain types of feedback more than others. Additionally, do particular disciplines or courses lean more or utilize specific types of feedback, and for what reason?

This preliminary research builds on the theorizing of Shaughnessy(2022) and the work of Pan and Shao (2020) and Li (2020) and coworkers in their attempt to promote student participation in online classes. For some instructors this remains a problem. It should be noted that there is a dearth of research in this realm and this should be seen as a preliminary exploratory study .

The work of Rabidoiux and Rottman (2017) adds another layer to this realm of feedback- the face to face personal touch via ZOOM and the degree of specificity that one can receive via other less well known modalities. The work of Gaiudreau and Liu (2016) focused more on the interpersonal and rapport aspects and the emotional realm and this was not addressed in this study. There may be male female issues in this realm,

When faculty use an alphabetical approach to provide feedback, there is a potential impact on the quality and quantity of the feedback not identified by this study. Examining fatigue factors and unintentional comparisons between student performance requires additional investigation. The order in which student work is graded could be impacted by competition and comparison among students instead of focusing on growth and learning.

It is essential to examine the grading system's potential impact, including the order used by faculty as different grading systems may lead to different results and interpretations. Additionally, issues of optimal timing and frequency of different types of feedback in an online learning environment need to be researched. The study is limited to faculty members at one southwestern university in the U.S. The study should be duplicated with a larger sample size to increase the generalizability of these findings. Also, there should be comparisons among courses regarding weighting. Do instructors provide more feedback for Discussion Boards versus major papers, or are things equally distributed? Likewise, are there differences between undergraduate and graduate courses that need to be examined?

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