

FEEDBACK ON FEEDBACK: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF ONLINE FACILITATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THEIR FEEDBACK PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Received: 06/04/2024 **Accepted:** 26/08/2024

ABSTRACT

Feedback is one of the most powerful tools for teaching and learning. Providing meaningful feedback to students is of particular importance in an online context as it is a direct way for the facilitator to engage with their students and to provide them with individual, tailored support. This study sought to explore the perceptions of online facilitators (OFs) regarding meaningful feedback in a Higher Education (HE) online learning environment. Using a qualitative exploratory case study design, 45 OFs affiliated to a South African based private higher education institution (PHEI) were approached participate in this study to share their understanding of what they believed constitutes meaningful feedback. Data were collected through focus groups and analyzed using content analysis. It was found that whilst each of the OFs who participated in this study sincerely believed their feedback to be meaningful there were aspects of their practice that did not align with what the literature suggests about the nature of meaningful feedback. Their understanding of meaningful feedback is feedback that emphasizes students' processes and strategies rather than personal attributes. They perceive meaningful feedback as detailed, specific, and focused on task requirements and strategies, ensuring that students understand their successes and areas for improvement. Implementation of feedforward practices, despite an understanding of its importance, and the use of different methods and platforms to provide feedback were found to be areas for development. It could be concluded that the way in which the participants viewed the quality of the feedback that they provided to their students was not always in keeping with the benchmark criteria as set out in the research. In response to these findings the researchers have made suggestions that future research and professional development initiatives should focus on addressing these barriers and finding practical ways to provide accessible feedback to students more meaningfully and efficiently.

Keywords: Meaningful feedback, higher education, open distance learning, online facilitators.

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, as part of its annual internal audit process, a South African based private higher education institution (PHEI) initiated a stand-alone teaching and learning audit project for the purpose of ongoing quality assurance. This institution elected to focus on the development of practice from the perspective of their lecturers and their perceptions regarding the development initiatives provided to them by the institution. Although it was understood that perceptions are, by definition, not neutral, the institution still believed that there was value in being able to better understand how these developmental initiatives were interpreted and received by their lecturing team. To gauge these perceptions an online survey was distributed to the full

academic body numbering approximately 1 200. For this qualitative case study, however, the researchers have elected to specifically focus on the data collected from those facilitators who were associated with the institution's distance mode of delivery to interrogate these perceptions more closely within an Online Distance Learning (ODL) context.

86% of the Online Facilitators (OFs) completed and submitted the survey. Of particular interest to the researchers was the data collected on the notion of feedback to students, and the fact that 100% of the OFs indicated that the feedback they provided to their students was 'meaningful' in nature. This assertion inevitably raised the question of how the institution's OFs understood the concept of meaningful feedback and how their practice mirrored these perceptions. To interrogate the data further, the OFs who completed and submitted the survey were invited to participate in focus groups to discuss the ways they provide their students with feedback and what, according to their understanding, made their feedback meaningful.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As Carless (2006) suggests, lecturers within a Higher Education (HE) setting spend an inordinate amount of time compiling feedback on the work submitted by their students, most of which is in the form of written comments or annotations. Over the years, there has been ample research to support the idea that feedback is one of the single most powerful contributing factors to the academic success of students (Carless and Boud, 2018; Hattie, 2009; Jensen, Bearman and Boud, 2021; Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie, 2020).

Traditional Feedback Practices

In traditional learning environments, feedback is often provided in a monologic way whereby the lecturer provides feedback and comments on students' assignments. Ajjawi and Boud (2018) conclude that this form of feedback is limited as students often do not understand the feedback or know how to implement it. Furthermore, students may have moved on to new learning units and content by the time they receive the feedback. This suggests the need for sustainable and dialogic feedback, as advocated by Carless (2016) and Williams (2024), where students play an active role in seeking, accessing, and using feedback to close the feedback loop.

Online Feedback Practices

With the increase of online learning, the development of Learning Management Systems, AI tools and ChatGPT, and other online educational teaching and learning tools and taking into account the technological and social learning styles and needs of Generation Z students (Seemiller and Grace, 2018), a dialogic feedback method has been proposed as a suitable fit (Ajjawi and Boud, 2018). Lecturers have access to platforms such as Journals and Discussion Forums, which makes such feedback possible. In addition to feedback provided by the lecturer, peer and self-evaluation tools have been advocated for the modern online classroom to develop 21st-century workplace skills of self-reflection, critical thinking, and collaboration (Brookhart, 2017). However, the question arises if and how various methods and platforms are used by Online Facilitators (OFs) to provide meaningful feedback to students.

While the importance of feedback in an educational context is certainly not a new topic for discussion, a review of the literature suggests that most studies have focused on feedback as it is provided and received in face-to-face settings (Arts et al., 2021; Drikkx, Joosten-ten Brinke, Arts, and van Diggelen, 2019; Storai and Salvadori, 2023). As noted by Rockey and Saichaie (2020), whilst online classes and tools for instructional purposes have developed, there is a gap in empirical research on feedback in courses that are offered via an online mode of delivery. The current study aims to address this apparent gap by engaging with OFs tasked with guiding the learning process in an Online Distance Learning (ODL) setting to determine their current feedback practices and whether these align with what is suggested by the literature.

Lecturers' Perceptions of Feedback

Previous studies conducted into perceptions of feedback focused on schoolteachers and lecturers from contemporary higher education institutions. In these studies, participants viewed feedback positively and as being valuable (Williams, 2024). However, Williams (2024) states that teachers found it challenging to engage students with their feedback and guide them on how best to use their feedback for future learning. Thus, Williams (2024) concludes that there is a need to explore the relationship between students' and teachers' feedback literacy and their perceptions of assessment and feedback quality.

The proliferation of studies that have interrogated the nature and impact of feedback across a range of academic settings has inevitably led to a substantial number of definitions of the concept. For this study, however, the researchers have selected the definition by Henderson, Molloy, Ajjawi, and Boud (2019:15), who define feedback as “a process where the learner makes sense of the performance-relevant information to promote their learning”. The reason for selecting this definition is the suggestion that feedback in this context is a forward-looking process rather than simply a means to justify a grade (Henderson et al., 2019). This future-focused idea of feedback aligns with Gen Z and online learning, leading the researchers to select this definition and Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model as the theoretical framework for this study.

Theoretical Framework

A Model for Feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007)

According to Panadero and Lipnevich (2022), there are numerous pedagogically oriented models that focus on the various ways in which feedback can be delivered for maximum effect. Among these are the models of Mason and Bruning (2001), Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), and Carless and Boud (2018), to name just three. It is, however, the work of Hattie and Timperley (2007) that has served as the foundation for the theoretical framework upon which this study is based. The reason for this is twofold, firstly it is one of the few models that includes the notion of feedback as having a feedforward function (Lipsch-Wijnen and Driks, 2021), and secondly, the model includes an additional perspective that differentiates between feedback that is delivered on the task, the process, self-regulation, and the self (Panadero and Lipnevich, 2022). What is significant is that by adopting this perspective each of these levels may be categorised as both the content and the function of feedback (Panadero and Lipnevich, 2022). An example of this would be where feedback that is self-regulatory in content is intended to increase the self-regulation of the student. As Panadero and Lipnevich, (2022) explain, the Hattie and Timperley (2007) model highlights how content and function are interrelated. In other words, “the function could be considered the main purpose of the feedback, whereas the content is the manifestation of that purpose” (Panadero and Lipnevich, 2022:10). The figure below is based on the work of Hattie and Timperley (2007) and illustrates the framework of meaningful feedback used for this study.

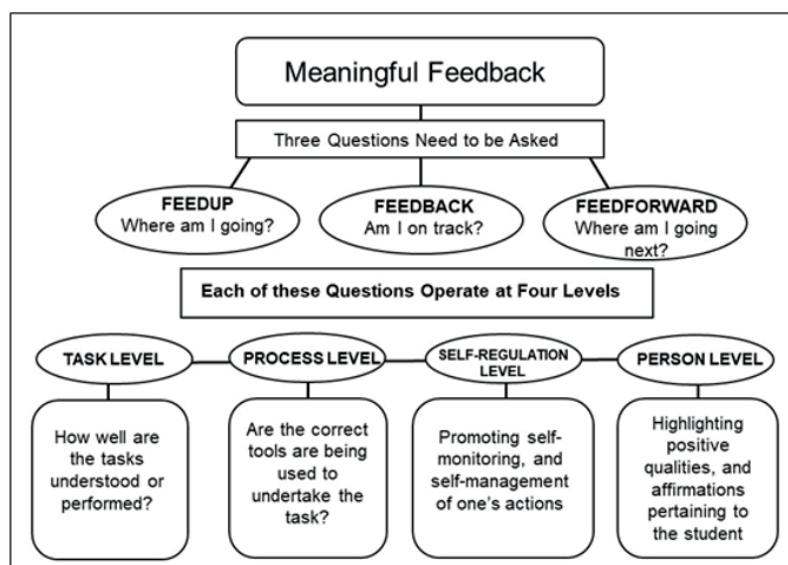


Figure 1. A Framework for Meaningful Feedback – based on the model of Hattie and Timperley (2007).

Although not specifically developed for an online learning environment, the Hattie and Timperley (2007) model has been applied to several studies conducted in higher education settings (Egelandstal and Krumsvik, 2020; Storai and Salvadori, 2023; Winstone and Carless, 2020; Wisniewski, Zierer and Hattie, 2020), as such the researchers believe that the premise of this model remains relevant to this study as it speaks to the fundamental criteria upon which meaningful feedback is based regardless of the mode of delivery in which it is provided.

Three Questions Applied at Four Levels

Three questions

Underpinning the Hattie and Timperley (2007) model is the “assumption that the purpose of feedback is to drive student achievement, thus supporting the learner in reaching their learning goal” (Mandouit and Hattie, 2023:np). Following the Hattie and Timperley (2007) framework, meaningful feedback begins with three critical questions:

- What are the goals?
- Am I on track?
- Where am I going next?

The first question addresses what the intended learning goals are and is referred to as feedup. The second question relates to how the student has managed thus far and is referred to as feedback. The third question looks to the next step in the journey and what needs to be done in order to achieve future goals. This is referred to as feedforward (Lipsch-Wijnen and Driks, 2022; Sadler, Reimann and Sambell, 2023; Xerri Agius, 2020).

Feedup allows the student to understand what is expected of them, providing guidance and direction, while feedback should offer students a clear insight into their current level of performance and how it can be improved upon (Sadler, Reimann and Sambell, 2023). As the term suggests, feedforward is about looking ahead to the next task or assessment and how the lessons learnt from previous iterations of work can be leveraged for success (Sadler et al., 2023). According to Lipsch-Wijnen and Driks, (2022:2), “feedforward is a positive aspect of the model because it focuses on growth or progress”. To provide students with a clear sense of direction and purpose, feedup, feedback, and feedforward practices need to be used combination rather than in isolation (Lipsch-Wijnen and Driks, 2022).

Four levels

The Hattie and Timperley (2007) model recognises four distinct feedback levels:

- Feedback on task
- Feedback on process
- Feedback on self-regulation
- Feedback on the person

Task feedback is concerned with how well a student has understood and/or performed the task, while feedback on process will address strategy, or perhaps whether the correct tools have been used to complete the task. This level of feedback, one that poses questions and raises the possibility of alternative solutions, is where “deep learning” has the potential to take place (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, cited in Lipsch-Wijnen and Dirks, 2022:3). The third level of feedback relies on self-monitoring, or self-direction. As Lipsch-Wijnen and Dirks (2022) explain, feedback on self-regulation looks at the choices students have made that have shaped their own learning, using their prior knowledge to inform how they have approached a learning task. Finally, feedback on the person is associated with a student’s personal qualities and providing positive affirmations, such as complimenting them on their turn-of-phrase, or perhaps commending their attention to detail.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was thus to explore OF's understandings and perceptions about the nature of meaningful feedback. The aim of this study was, therefore, to explore any gaps that may exist between the participants' notion of what constitutes meaningful feedback and what the literature shares on the topic. By identifying these gaps, the researchers hope to use any gaps in understanding, and investigate and implement possible interventions to support the OFs with providing meaningful feedback to their students. This study sought to address the following key research questions:

1. What are OFs understanding of meaningful feedback?
2. How do OFs perceive meaningful feedback?
3. What gaps, if any, exist in OFs understanding of meaningful feedback?

METHOD

For this study, a qualitative exploratory case study approach was adopted. This approach was selected because it is best suited to explore real-world subjects for the purpose of gaining in-depth insights into the phenomenon that is being investigated (Arghode, 2012). As the OFs affiliated to this PHEI are representative of a group that are bound by a specific context, space, and time (Hancock and Algozzine, 2017), using a case study approach was deemed most feasible, and because the researchers were interested in the process, meaning, and understanding that would be gained through engaging with these OFs, a socially constructed approach that was descriptive in nature was adopted (Creswell, 2021). By engaging with OFs affiliated to this PHEI, the researchers were able to gain insights into their perceptions regarding the notion of what constitutes meaningful feedback and how they provide same to their students.

To collect data for this study, an initial online qualitative survey was administered to entire population of OFs. Using content analysis, the data from the surveys were reduced and analyzed. Thereafter the researchers used purposive sampling to identify participants for this study. In this way they were able to identify participants who possessed the required characteristics and experiences, such as age, gender and tenure to make them a fit for the study. The final group of OFs who participated in the study numbered 45 (which was 69% of the total population), with 34 female and 11 male participants. Tenure among the participants ranged from one to seven years. To gain in-depth insights into their experiences and perceptions of feedback, and to allow for interaction among the participants, they were invited to participate in any one of three focus groups. Both researchers were present at the focus groups but they were facilitated by one researcher so as not to overwhelm the participants. All focus groups took place fully online using the Microsoft Teams platform; to accommodate the fact that the participants resided in different parts of the country. It also allowed for these sessions to be recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis.

After transcribing the focus group recordings verbatim, content analysis was used to analyze the data (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Thus, data was reduced using codes and those codes were used to generate themes. Each researcher completed this analysis independently, and after meeting to discuss the themes that were generated, the analysis was conducted again independently to assist with clarification and defining and naming themes. In this way the validity of the study was enhanced through crystallization (Ellingson, 2017) before presenting the consolidated key findings (Gill, Steward, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008). Ethical clearance was obtained from the PHEI in question and informed consent was sought from each participant. Names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the focus groups, participants were asked to share how they approached the provision of feedback to their students and why they believed their practices resulted in feedback that was meaningful. From these engagements and the subsequent analysis of the data, the following themes emerged:

- Praise the process not the person
- Task and process take precedence

- Feedforward is understood but not practised
- Aligning with traditional views of providing feedback

Theme 1: Praise the Process Not the Person

According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), person level feedback is an opinion pertaining in some way to the characteristics of the student by the individual providing the feedback. An influential body of work conducted by Dweck and several of his colleagues during the late 1990s and early 2000's posits that feedback of a personal nature falls into two categories, namely praise of the person and praise of the process (Kamins and Dweck, 1999; Dweck, 2007), with Dweck (2006) suggesting that process praise has the potential to lead to a greater sense of mastery among students and encourage their ability to learn through application. During the focus groups participants were asked to share whether they were in favour of including person level feedback to students. While a significant number did support including this level of feedback, most indicated that when they did so their comments were in relation to how the student had approached a task, rather than offering comment of a more personal nature. This can be seen in the two excerpts that follow:

Tenille: I don't believe that a comment like "awesome job" is of any real benefit. If I am going to get personal, I would rather refer to the strategy they have used, like "you have built an excellent argument here", or something like that.

Noma: "I do offer personal comments sometimes, but I tend to focus on something they have done well, not about who they are as a person. I think you get into dangerous ground if you do that".

These comments align with a recent study by Mardiah (2020:45), who suggested that when praise feedback focuses on a student's capabilities, rather than on their personal attributes, it can assist the student in identifying a link between "the effort that they invest in a task" and the potential to "improve their academic or behavioural performance". An earlier study by Skipper and Douglas (2012:np) found a similarly positive response to praise which was levelled at the process rather than the person, however, the study also found that feedback "worded in terms of effort" rather than in terms of personal evaluation was possibly just as effective in engendering a positive response in students. This reference to person praise of a more emotionally neutral, or objective, nature was also found in this study and is highlighted in the excerpt below:

Penny: I am a little wary of feedback of a personal nature, especially in this mode, because we never meet our students and don't really know them in the same way you would if they were in your [contact] classroom. So, I try to qualify any feedback like this by referring to the effort I can see they have put into their work.

While many similar comments and sentiments were shared regarding person level feedback there was a clear emphasis on the importance of providing students with feedback that addressed the task itself, and / or the process that had been adopted to execute that task. This gave rise to the second theme.

Theme 2: Task and Process Take Precedence

Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie (2020) explain that while task level feedback revolves around surface information, such as the content or facts pertaining to the task, feedback at a process level addresses the strategies that have been deployed in completing that task. During the focus groups conducted in this study, most of the discussion revolved around the importance of providing students with detailed feedback on whether they had successfully completed the task, as well as using examples from the submitted work to illustrate why an approach or strategy was either successful or lacking, as three participants shared:

Michael: My students want to know what went right, and what went wrong. For me to do this I have to unpack the requirements of the task itself, where they met these requirements, or where they fell short. But they also want the 'why', ... and that talks to how they went about doing things.

Taylor: I really try and focus on making my feedback as specific to the [task] as possible. I want them to understand exactly why they did well, or where they went wrong.

Thomas: I really believe that if they understand why an approach worked, or didn't work, then they can repeat that performance again next time.

These and other comments from the participants suggested that they gave priority to feedback pertaining to the task at hand; whether it had been understood, how well it had been performed, and whether the tools used to undertake the task had been the most appropriate. While there was certainly reference to the importance of sometimes posing questions in the feedback, rather than simply providing students with the correct answer, these questions were also predominantly at a task and process level: "Why do you think providing more current examples would have improved your mark?", or "This question required you to apply the theory to a scenario, where do you think you fell short?"

What appeared to be missing from the anecdotal examples provided by the participants during the focus group sessions was any reference to feedforward practices, namely providing comments that would relate to future tasks and how a student can go about building on their previous experiences to improve (Dirkx et al., 2019). OFs in this study appeared to understand the mechanics of this level of feedback but had, for a range of reasons, elected to not to implement this approach in their practice. This led to our third theme.

Theme 3: Feedforward is Understood but Not Practiced

As explained by Lipsch-Wijnen and Dirkx (2022), feedforward encourages the student to look ahead, focusing on growth and progress. Feedforward "gives the student perspective, direction, and is motivating". A study conducted by Walker (2007) found that even when faculty had been specifically trained on feedforward practices, they found it challenging to implement. When discussing the notion of feedforward with the participants in this study, the majority seemed to be aware of the concept, but reluctant to implement it in practice:

Daniel: Oh, I understand the idea behind it, but it really just takes too much time. My students want feedback that pertains to 'right now', not 'tomorrow'.

Penny: I love the idea, but I am not convinced it will work in our space. Maybe with my Post Grad students, but not with my first years.

Kenneth: They don't even pay attention to the basic feedback I provide; it will take some convincing to get them to invest in this level of engagement, so I won't even waste my time.

This dearth of feedforward is echoed in a study that Arts et al. (2021) conducted at a teacher training college in the Netherlands. Here they found feedforward practices to be totally absent, while the Dirkx et al. (2019) study only found feedforward comments being used in assessment rubrics, with almost none being recorded as in-text comments.

When compared with definitions such as those of Henderson, Molloy, Ajjawi, and Boud, (2019) and models such as that of Hattie and Timperley (2007) there is a definite misalignment between how the OFs in this study perceive meaningful feedback to be and what the literature suggests it ought to be.

Theme 4: Aligning with Traditional Views of Providing Feedback

Most OFs responded that they were cognizant of the importance of feedback. Words such as “meaningful”, “effective”, “positive” and “constructive” were used throughout the three focus groups. They also expressed the need to be mindful not to be too harsh or demotivate the students with negative feedback. However, when the process and method of feedback was delved into, it became apparent that they were using mostly the traditional methods. For instance, Thomas explained that he reads through the entire submission first to get a sense of the student and then starts adding comments and uses a rubric during the second reading. At the end of that process, he provides feedback on the submission as a whole. Other participants indicated that they did similar with slight variations such as the omission of the initial reading of the submission, or not adding comments as the rubric had specific comments. Penny indicated that the process took a very long time, so she often only used the rubric and then sent a voicenote to the entire group to provide overall feedback. Apart from this, none of the other participants used any other platforms or methods to provide feedback.

As can be seen this is aligned with what the literature suggests about the challenge of time (Williams, 2024) and unfamiliarity with using alternate feedback methods and platforms (Ajjawi and Boud, 2018; Brookhart, 2017) to suit Gen Z students and online learning environments. The participants’ feedback was more aligned with traditional monologic feedback using an online platform. This could be attributed to the lack of understanding and knowledge of alternative feedback methods and platforms to provide meaningful feedback to their students.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the current practices of online facilitators (OFs) regarding feedback provision to their students. Four key themes emerged from the focus group discussions: praising the process rather than the person, prioritizing task and process feedback, the understanding but lack of implementation of feedforward practices and aligning with traditional views of providing feedback.

The first theme aligns with the theoretical framework proposed by Dweck and colleagues (1999, 2007), who emphasize the importance of process praise over person praise. The participants in this study echoed this sentiment, highlighting a preference for feedback that focused on students’ approaches and strategies rather than personal attributes. This is in line with Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) distinction between person-level feedback and process feedback, with the latter being more conducive to fostering a growth mindset among students.

Tenille’s and Noma’s comments underscore the preference for process-oriented feedback, reflecting a belief that such feedback is more beneficial in helping students understand their learning processes and improve their academic performance. This is supported by Mardiah’s (2020) findings, which indicate that feedback emphasizing student capabilities and effort can help them draw connections between their efforts and academic outcomes. Skipper and Douglas (2012) also highlight the effectiveness of feedback focused on effort and strategy, further corroborating the preference for process praise observed in this study.

The second theme emphasizes the importance of task and process feedback. Participants highlighted the necessity of providing detailed, specific feedback on students’ performance related to the task requirements and the strategies employed. This approach is consistent with Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie’s (2020) differentiation between task-level feedback, which addresses content and factual information, and process-level feedback, which focuses on the methods and strategies used to complete the task.

The emphasis on specificity and clarity in feedback, as articulated by Michael, Taylor, and Thomas, is crucial in helping students understand both their successes and areas for improvement. This focus on task and process feedback ensures that students receive actionable insights that can guide their future efforts, thereby enhancing their learning outcomes. However, the participants’ feedback examples revealed a gap in feedforward practices, which leads to the third theme.

Despite an understanding of the concept of feedforward, participants in this study rarely implemented it in their feedback practices. Feedforward, as described by Lipsch-Wijnen and Dirkx (2022), is intended to

provide students with forward-looking guidance that can help them improve future performance. However, the reluctance to adopt feedforward practices, as expressed by Daniel, Penny, and Kenneth, suggests several barriers, including time constraints and doubts about its effectiveness for certain student groups.

The challenges associated with implementing feedforward are not unique to this study. Walker (2007) found that even with specific training, faculty members struggled to incorporate feedforward into their feedback routines. Similar findings were reported by Arts et al. (2021) and Dirkx et al. (2019), indicating a broader issue within educational practices.

This reluctance and the resulting misalignment between current practices and the theoretical models of effective feedback, such as those proposed by Henderson et al. (2019) and Hattie and Timperley (2007), highlight a significant area for development. Addressing these barriers and finding practical ways to integrate feedforward into feedback practices using different platform and methods could enhance the overall quality and effectiveness of feedback provided to students.

CONCLUSION

In a time where online learning has become an integral component of higher education learning and teaching, and considering the pivotal role that feedback plays, especially in online learning environment, in improving student performance, there exists a necessary focus on providing students with feedback that is truly effective. As stated by Hattie and Timperly (2007), there is a greater chance of feedback being considered meaningful when it not only addresses the task that was undertaken and the tools or strategies used to undertake that task, but also provides the student with logical connections for the improvement of future tasks.

All the participants in this study communicated a confidence in their ability to provide their students with meaningful feedback. While their commitment to the feedback process may be commendable it can be concluded that there was nonetheless a clear disconnect between their intentions and the benchmark criteria as set out in the framework which guided this study. As with the Lipschen-Wijnen and Drikk (2021) study, this study evidenced an unclear understanding of feedback as needing to be a combination of feedup, feedback, and feedforward practices. Instead, these levels of feedback, when implemented, were approached as stand-alone options. These findings provide the perfect opportunity for training and to conduct further research into strategies regarding the use of the Hattie and Timperley (2007) framework as the foundation for modelling best practice in an ODL setting.

What are OFs' Understanding of Meaningful Feedback?

They understand meaningful feedback as feedback that emphasizes students' processes and strategies rather than personal attributes. They understand meaningful feedback to be comments, rubrics and overall feedback provided by the OF. A shift in understanding is needed so that feedback is better suited to Gen Z students and online teaching and learning.

How do OFs' Perceive Meaningful Feedback?

Meaningful feedback is perceived as detailed, specific, and focused on task requirements and strategies, ensuring that students understand their successes and areas for improvement. They use the correct terminology when describing what feedback should entail but due to time and other constraints their practice does not always align with their beliefs about their practice.

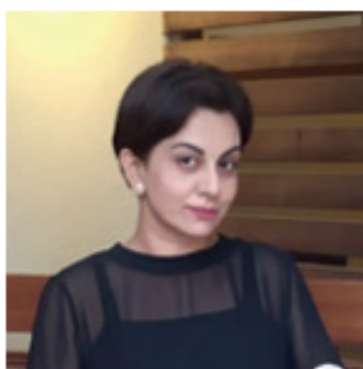
What Gaps, If Any, Exist in OFs' Understanding of Meaningful Feedback?

A significant gap exists in the implementation of feedforward practices, despite an understanding of its importance. Barriers such as time constraints and doubts about its effectiveness hinder its adoption. A further gap that exists is in relation to how shift from monologic to dialogic feedback and to providing feedback using different platforms and methods.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Motivated by the findings of this study and the assertion of Lipsch-Wijnen and Dirks (2021) that, particularly within an ODL context, there exists a need to conduct further research that interrogates how a model like that of Hattie and Timperley (2007) can be applied in practice. Adding to this, this study foregrounded the urgent need to design and implement training and support for the OFs. As such, the researchers will embark on a follow-up study wherein interventions will be explored and implemented and OFs will be invited to share their thoughts and experiences of these interventions intended to support them in the provision of meaningful feedback. Another consideration for further study is to give voice to the students to gain insight into their perspectives and experiences about feedback. Inviting students to participate in such studies could allow them to comment on how they experience the feedback that their OFs provide. This student input will enrich the discussion and serve to illuminate the way forward regarding the nature and type of feedback that ODL students find most meaningful in their context. A further area of study could be the exploration of how the advancement of ChatGPT and AI tools can be effectively leveraged to make the feedback process more effective in terms of quality and time.

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