The Value and Effectiveness of Feedback in Improving Students' Learning and Professionalizing Teaching in Higher Education

Md. Mamoon-Al-Bashir, AHEA
Doctoral Researcher, Norwich Business School, University of East Anglia, UK &
Associate Fellow, Higher Education Academy, UK

Md. Rezaul Kabir, AHEA
Assistant Professor, Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka &
Associate Fellow, Higher Education Academy, UK

Ismat Rahman
Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Dhaka

Abstract
There is a great importance of feedback in improving learning experience for the students. This has also significant effect in professionalizing teaching in the higher education level. However, feedback is considered as a difficult issue in this arena. Most of the lecturers are still continuing with the tradition form of feedback. This form of feedbacks often unable to satisfy the students in improving their learning experience. It is high time for the lecturers to re-think about the feedback providing process. They should avoid traditional way of proving feedback towards the students. This paper comes with some modern and technology based way of proving feedback which can eventually help students in improving student learning experience. This can also help in professionalizing the teaching of lecturers in higher education.

Introduction
 "Assessment theories and academics alike espouse the importance of feedback on performance assessment tasks for supporting improvement and progress in student learning achievement."

Janice Orrella, 2006

Feedback is considered as a difficult issue in higher education arena. Although it is acknowledged as an essential element of improving the learning process of the students. National surveys, both in the UK (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2011) and in Australia (James, Krause, and Jennings 2010) endorsed the aforementioned statement. Considering feedback and its value and effectiveness in student learning, a substantial and growing body of research in higher education environments can be found. Feedback is considered as a vital approach to facilitate students' development as independent learners in order to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning (Ferguson, 2011). The impact of feedback on future practice and the development of students' learning were highlighted by Eraut (2006):

> *When students enter higher education . . . the type of feedback they then receive, intentionally or unintentionally, will play an important part in shaping their learning futures. Hence we need to know much more about how their learning, indeed their very sense of professional identity, is shaped by the nature of the feedback they receive. We need more feedback on feedback. (p. 118)*

Although there is a large indication supporting the usefulness of feedback to promote student learning however, different student surveys across the world have also emphasized that students are dissatisfied with the feedback they receive on their course works (David Nicol, 2010). Student claim a lack of adequate, timely feedback and their teachers claim that students fail to apply the advice given (Janice Orrella, 2006). It is high time for the lecturers to re-think about the feedback providing process. They should avoid traditional way of proving feedback towards the students. Keeping this aforementioned problem in mind, some suggestions have been made to make feedback more effective and valuable in terms of student learning:

- **Make students understand what good performance or goal means:**
It will be easy for the students if they can only achieve learning goals if they understand those goals. They also need to feel some ownership of them, and can understand the self-assessment process (Sadler, 1989). In higher education, there should be a reasonable degree of similarity between the goals set by students and the goals originally set by the teacher. This is rationally vital given that it is the students' goals that serve as the criteria for self-regulation. Nonetheless, there is substantial research evidence showing significant mismatches between tutors' and students' conceptions of goals and of assessment criteria and standards. (David J. Nichol and Debra M. Dick, 2006).
- **Simplifies the improvement process of self-assessment or reflections in learning:**
Last few years there has been a growing interest in self-assessment or reflections in higher education sector (Boud, 1995). As it has been mentioned earlier, an effective way to improve self-regulation process in

Journal of Education and Practice
ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper)   ISSN 2222-288X (Online)
Vol.7, No.16, 2016
www.iiste.org
IISTE

students is to provide them the opportunities to exercise regulating characteristics of their own learning and to reflect on that practice. Students are usually involved in monitoring gaps between internally set task goals and the outcomes that they are generating (David J. Nichol and Debra M. Dick, 2006). Developing self-assessment can make feedback more effective.

- **Providing quality information to students about their learning:**

The teachers have a vital role in increasing their students' own ability for understanding the self-regulation process. They are also an essential source of external feedback. Traditionally, feedback from teachers has been a source where students can evaluate progress. The students can also check out their own internal progression by the feedback given by the teachers. Furthermore, teachers are usually more effective in detecting mistakes in students' work rather than themselves. As a result, providing quality information to students is very important to ensuring student learning.

- **Allowing peer dialogue in understanding the feedback:**

An approach of increasing the value and effectiveness of feedback and the likelihood that the information provided is understood by students is to conceptualize feedback more as dialogue rather than as information transmission (David J. Nichol and Debra M. Dick, 2006). Feedback as dialogue means that the student will not only get written feedback information but also has the opportunity to have discussion about that feedback afterwards. In this circumstances, in order to make feedback more effective and valuable it should be understood by the student before it can be used to make productive improvements.

- **Inspiring positive motivational beliefs:**

Motivation can play a vital part in learning and assessment. Studies on motivation and self-esteem are significant as they help students to understand self-regulation where they often fail. In teaching, it is recommended that motivation and self-esteem are probable to be improved when a course has many low-stakes assessment tasks. While feedback provides evidence about progress and achievement, rather than high stakes summative assessment tasks where evidence is only about success or failure or about how students compare with their peers (David J. Nichol and Debra M. Dick, 2006).

- **Providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance:**

After discussing feedback from a motivational perspective in the previous sections, in this section it has been discussed how feedback can provide the students the opportunity to close the gap between current and desired performance of them. For self-regulation it should be considered how feedback effects the academic work that is made. Feedback offers a chance of closing a gap between current performance and the performance expected by the tutor. Boud (2000) notes the following regarding this:

> *The only way to tell if learning results from feedback is for students to make some kind of response to complete the feedback loop* (Sadler, 1989). *This is one of the most often forgotten aspects of formative assessment. Unless students are able to use the feedback to produce improved work, through for example, re-doing the same assignment, neither they nor those giving the feedback will know that it has been effective.* (Boud, 2000, p158)

We can analyse Boud's statement in different sections. First is: closing the gap is about supporting students while being involve in writing a course-work. Another one is: about providing opportunities to repeat the same task after getting submission by allowing resubmission. Feedback should be supporting in both the cases.

- **Effective feedback can provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching:**

Good feedback practice can not only provide useful information to the students in improving their learning, but also can offer decent information to teachers which is eventually improve the learning experience for the students. Yorke (2003) argues the following regarding this issue:

> *The act of assessing has an effect on the assessor as well as the student. Assessors learn about the extent to which they [students] have developed expertise and can tailor their teaching accordingly (Yorke, 2003, p482)*

While producing relevant and informative feedback in meeting the students' demand, the teachers themselves need to have fair idea about the students' progression. They eventually become more involved in reviewing and reflecting on students' performance which drives them to make better learning environment.

- **Giving positive feedback**

At the time of providing feedback it is important that after reading that a student should have a positive feeling about that feedback (Piccinin, 2003). This is considered as a process of motivating the students to utilise the feedback they have received. Feedback should not be discouraging the students at any cost. Obviously, it is vital to draw the student's attention to the less successful parts of a coursework, however the teachers should be cautious in providing "negative feedback" of this kind. Thus teachers can improve students' learning environment by presenting the feedback in a positive way.

- **Choosing the right moment**

Sometimes it has been observed that teachers overburden students with feedback. One important issue modern day lecturers need to understand that they should limit the amount of feedback they are providing (Brinko, 1993; Ende, 1983). Or else the teachers may find their students uninterested and bored with the feedback they are getting. Similarly, teachers should not set up too many criteria. They should limit the number of criteria to the most important aspects of a coursework and giving feedback on them (Sadler, 1985)

- **Adopting various E-Feedback techniques:**

Now-a-days a number of E-Feedback techniques have been developed to improve the students learning process. These E-Feedback techniques can be adopted by the teachers to improve the feedback for the students.

- ➢ **Email Feedback:**

Email is a simple but effective way of providing students the feedback. There can be different kind of email feedback. Some emails can basically provide generic comments to a whole group of students especially when one lecturer is teaching large group. On the other hand, other form of e-mail feedback is sending electronic versions of the feedback forms of individual feedback to a particular student.

- ➢ **Audio & Video Feedback:**

MP3 players have been widely-used for few years. Recently, that has been exploited in providing feedback to students. It is widely known as podcast inn academic arena. Often this is used in amalgamation with other types of feedback. The lecturers who use podcasts to provide feedback find them an easy technique. It helps to provide a good quality feedback very quickly, rather as they would in a physical meeting with a student.

- ➢ **Screencasts:**

Screen casting is a new grown technology which leads teachers to exhibit to students how things should be done. A screencast records the activities on a computer screen, so it is predominantly beneficial for demonstrating, for example, how to write or use software, or steps in a calculation, as it demonstrates the process by which something is done. It can also deliver a model answer for a particular kind of problem. Several students can access a screencast at a time as a result it can be used in providing useful feedback on common problems which students encounter in course works.

- ➢ **Recycling written comments:**

Individualised written feedback can be important in helping students to learn. However, it is a time-consuming process. If the number of student are very high, it puts more stress on teachers' time in producing these comments. This section describe methods of "recycling" comments that lecturers find themselves repeatedly making on common matters in student course works. In some cases comments can be recycled using specialised soft-wares, and in others standard word-processing packages.

Conclusion

The paper throws a light on improving the feedback process in higher education. It shifts the focus firmly away from the old delivery models of feedback to modern, effective and more valuables ones. Giving feedback is an important skill for lecturers in higher education and has a major influence on the quality of the students' learning process (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). With some guideline provided within the paper it has been tried to contribute to a general acceptance of different feedback practices as important learning tools in higher education. It is clear that this is high time when lectures should re-think about the feedback process to improve the students' learning. The paper tried to provide some key principles of good feedback practice that can address a wide spectrum - the cognitive, behavioural and motivational aspects of reflections.

Reference

Boud, D. (1995) Enhancing learning through self-assessment (London, Kogan Page).

Boud, D. (2000) Sustainable assessment: rethinking assessment for the learning society,Studies in Continuing Education, 22(2), 151-167

Brinko, K.T. (1993) The practice of giving feedback: What is effective? The Journal of Higher Education, 64 (5), 574-593

Ende, J. (1983) Feedback in clinical medical education. Journal of the American Medical Association, 250, 777-781.

Eraut, M. Feedback (2006) Learning in Health and Social Care. 5:111–118

Ferguson, P. (2011). Student perceptions of quality feedback in teacher education. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 36(1), 51-62.

Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. (2007) The power of feedback. Review of Educational Research, 77 (1), 81-112.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2011). The National Student Survey: Findings and Trends

2006–2010. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England.

James, R., K.-L. Krause, and C. Jennings (2010). The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from 1994–2009. Melbourne: Centre for Higher Education Studies: University of Melbourne.

Nicol, D. (2010). From monologue to dialogue: improving written feedback processes in mass higher education. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35(5), 501-517.

Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane‐Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self‐regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. Studies in higher education, 31(2), 199-218.

Orrell, J. (2006). Feedback on learning achievement: rhetoric and reality. Teaching in Higher Education, 11(4), 441-456

Piccinin, S. J. (2003) Feedback: Key to learning. Halifax, NS: Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Sadler, D. R. (1985) Evaluation and the improvement of academic learning, Journal of Higher Education, 54(1), 60-79.

Sadler, D.R. (1989) Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems, Instructional Science, 18, 119-144.

Yorke, M (2003) Formative assessment in higher education: Moves towards theory and the enhancement of pedagogic practice, Higher Education, 45(4), 477-501.