

The Research of the Disparity Between the Provision of Feedback Opportunities and the Clarity of Feedback Implementation for Business and Management Students at the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton

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Abstract: This research delves into the disparity between the provision of feedback opportunities and the clarity of feedback implementation for business and management students at the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton. Employing a qualitative constructivist approach, the study aims to uncover the barriers to student feedback integration and propose solutions for enhancing university responsiveness. The investigation reveals significant differences in feedback implementation rates and the perceived value of student opinions, with implications for teaching quality and student satisfaction. The study employs questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups to gather insights from students and staff, emphasizing the need for transparent communication and actionable feedback loops. The findings suggest that universities must prioritize student voices to foster a positive learning culture and improve institutional practices.

Keywords: Student Feedback, Higher Education, Qualitative Research, Feedback Implementation

1. Introduction

In recent years, student feedback has got significant attention at universities worldwide. Universities are using student feedback to assess their performance as part of an effort to improve their administrative practices, teaching quality and organisation strategies. [1] This report is going to compare the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton in terms of business and management courses, based on UNISTATS.

According to statistic data, it could be found that there is a huge disparity between opportunities to provide feedback and specific on how feedback has been used among the two universities. This along with reasons such as the faculty teaching quality, curriculum encouragement policy and support services.

This research is going to identify why this discrepancy exists. Trying to find out the barriers to implement student feedback, generating possible solutions how universities could be improved when feedback is not feasible and how could communication between both parties could be improved when feedback is not implemented.

Table 1: The survey results of student satisfaction at the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton. (Appendix 1)

	the University of Sussex	the University of Brighton
Have had the opportunity to provide feedback on the course	87%	71%
Staff value student's opinions and views	76%	77%
Feedback provided by students has been implemented	64%	55%
The student union represents academic interests of students effectively	52%	58%

The finding results of this research could give all the universities that have similar issue insights into treating and using feedback more effectively. Besides, the research could give information to lecture and course convenors on improving their instructional practices and as part of performance appraisal[2] . It also provides the opportunity for students to know whether their needs are fully met and help them choose university. Furthermore, government education board who cares student satisfaction is able to guide universities leaders engage in the gathering of student feedback for meaningful and deep level change through this report. The research could be used as a platform for universities to reform the feedback process in the future.

2. Literature review and theory

As Richardson defined that, student feedback is a formal process to gather information from students about their opinions of teaching quality and the effectiveness of educational program. Collecting and responding to feedback is essential for enhancing student experience.[3] Armann and Stockham also stated that except for improving rapport between teachers and students, feedback could provide valuable insights about assessment and teaching process. [4] Hence, for universities to be successful should find what students consider high important and incorporate such feedback into their priorities. [5]

At the same time, as Santhanam, Lynch and Jones argued that, more and more universities are beginning to use student voice as a marketing tool to attract prospective students and retaining current students. [6] To some extent, this has prompted increasing requirement in ensuring students are informed of the outcome of their feedback.[7] Watson concluded that students reluctant to complete surveys when they think their feedback have little impact on the broader university.[8] Consequently, universities need to increase student engagement in the survey process, improving institutional transparency and implementing student feedback.

Despite the practice of getting student feedback is well established in higher education level, further investigation of using student feedback systematically and how to respond to this information is required. Generally, as Beattie mentioned that, the partnership between youth and adult in school transformation are uncharted territory. [9]Thus, further research to identify whether the collecting feedback leads to improvement and how to support university in responding to feedback is required.

[10] There is a gap in knowledge as few studies have focused on the obstacle to implementing student feedback.

Qualitative data could be highly reliable if the researcher is skilled in the field of study. [11] While as Hattie stated that students consider qualitative comments include more information than quantitative rankings. [12] Based on extensive psychometric studies, close-ended student surveys may not include issues that are really important for students, as they may reflect the teacher-centric framework that therefore contributes to overall student satisfaction.

The above literatures indicate the importance of collecting student feedback and responding to them. For this study, we would use qualitative research to address the problem and generate solutions to improve when feedback is not feasible.

3. Qualitative methodology

Qualitative research with a constructivist approach is statistics driven and it is objective about the findings of the research. The qualitative data analysed to address the issue would be collected by the format of interview and focus group. The sample population was drawn from current and former students and staffs from the two universities.

The most efficient way to gathering student feedback for the purpose of leveraging on-going reflection in a secondary setting was clarified as through using questionnaires. [13] We are going to contact the convenor of business and management in two universities, with the help of them letting the student complete feedback questionnaires. Based on the results of these questionnaires, random sampling would be used to recruit students with size of 100 ranged from year one to year three. For current students, the context of interview would be face to face, whereas phone interview would be adopted for former students. Results would generate by using a semi-structured technique, since this technique seems to provide more useful data and allow thematic analysis of the data. [14]

For the interview, we would prepare the general structure by deciding in advance the main questions. Questions would relate to their perception of what aspects of the university has supposedly been improved. More detailed open-ended questions would ask when they emerged during the interview.

Focus group would then be formed with 20 staff and 50 students, some were from the interviews and some who were not interviewed. Students are mainly selected from head of department and course representatives. Staff also participate in a focus group to have the opportunity to expand further on their responses. Additionally, there are certain discrepancies we anticipate may lead to the problem, for instance, the senior leader of university may believe the feedback has been implemented, while the change may dilute the further down the chain and most students feel the difference hardly. Or the feedback has to put off, as it against the general teaching policy for the time being. To address issue like these, we consider it would be a great proposal to put students and staff together to the focus group, giving them chance to communicate with it. Therefore, there will be three focus groups, one is students, one is staff and one is combined with students and staff.

We would use preliminary information from interviews and questionnaires to revise subsequent questions and address essential concepts whilst using the critical incident technique to determine which problem is the most relevant to the issue.

The whole process would about 2 hours in length, both the interviews and the focus groups would be recorded with written consent for each interviewee and participant of the focus group required before commencing and transcribed after the completed of each. And the communication process will assist by at least one member from us to lead them debate over the gap between feedback, what students consider should be implement and what has actually been acted on.

The process of whole research might be costly in terms of tape recorders and printing fee requires. And we would prepare drinks for participants. We estimate the total cost will around 150£. We tend to get funding from the business school of Sussex.

By combining statements of participants with open-ended questions, the research developed for this study provide students with the opportunity to create and elaborate an accurate snapshot of their feedback experience, whilst allow us to analyse whole group responses.

4. Ethical review

Before the research is conducted, it is important to address ethical consideration aspect of the research in an effective manner. It is important to adhere ethical norms, since it promotes the aims of research and minimise error, promoting value which is essential to collaborative work and ensuring participants could be accountable for the results.

CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Title of Project: <Insert Title>
Name of Researcher and School: <Insert Name and School>
C-REC Ref no: <Insert ER no.>

	Please tick box	
	YES	NO
I consent to being interviewed by the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to allowing the interview to be photographed / filmed / audio-recorded/reported on UoS A&S Teams/GoS Zoom and stored within UoS servers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to making myself available for a further interview should it be required	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before being included in the write up of the research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I have given my approval for my name and/or the name of my institution, and / or the name of my workplace to be used in the final report of the project, and in further publications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for information which I might disclose in the focus groups / group interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have read the information sheet, had the opportunity to ask questions and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my personal data will be used for the purposes of this research study and will be handled in accordance with Data Protection legislation. I understand that the University's Privacy Notice provides further information on how the University uses personal data in its research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET TEMPLATE

"The participant information sheet, covering letter or leaflet should be printed/ or provided on paper featuring the University of Sussex logo, with full contact details of the lead researcher, and should normally contain the following information:"

"PLEASE DELETE THE SECTIONS OF THIS TEMPLATE WHICH ARE NOT RELEVANT TO YOUR STUDY:"

STUDY TITLE
"The title should be simple and self-explanatory to a lay person."¹

INVITATION PARAGRAPH
"This should explain that the individual is being asked to take part in a research study. The following is an example of how this may be phrased:"
"You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully."

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?
"The background and the aim of the study should be given here. You should say how long the study will run and outline the overall design of the study."

WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?
"You should explain how the individual was chosen to take part in the study and how many other people will be asked to participate."

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?
"You should explain that taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. For example, you could say: -
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason."
"If your study involves the recruitment of students or pupils you must explain that by choosing to either take part or not take part in the study will have no impact on their marks, assessments or future studies."

¹ If the lead researcher is a student, contact details of the supervisor shall be provided. Staff applicants should either give contact details of the Research Governance Officer (rgoffice@sussex.ac.uk) or the Chair of the approving C-REC (rpb@rhmc.sussex.ac.uk/researchgovernancecontact_sussex_committee).

² The Participant Information Sheet should be clear and unambiguous and written in jargon-free language appropriate for all potential participants

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I TAKE PART?
"You should explain your methods of data collection, including what the individual will be asked to do and how much time will be involved."

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF TAKING PART? (WHERE APPROPRIATE)
"You should describe any disadvantages or 'costs' involved in taking part in the study, including the time involved."

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?
"You should outline any direct benefits for the individual and any other beneficial outcomes of the study, including furthering our understanding of the topic."

WILL MY INFORMATION IN THIS STUDY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?
"You should explain that all information that enables the individual to be identified ('personal data') will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) and describe how confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.
If you will be processing any personal data, the participant should be informed about how their data will be used, who it will be shared with, how long it will be kept for and what safeguards will be in place to ensure it is secure. You will need to provide as much detail as possible if you are processing **special category personal data**.
Even where the outputs of the research will be anonymous (i.e. any personal data will be removed), this information must still be provided to participants and all the requirements of the **data protection legislation** will apply to the processing of their personal data."

If your research project involves the use of a UoS approved video conferencing platform then you need to include the following statement - This research project involves the use of UoS MS Teams and/or UoS Zoom. Details of the platform's privacy notice can be found here: MS Teams Privacy Policy/Zoom Privacy Policy ["delete as appropriate."] All data collected will be stored securely on a University of Sussex managed system."

"If it is a condition of your research funding that the research data must be shared and stored in a repository, you must explain how the data will be stored (for example with the Economic and Social Data Service or the UK Data Archive) and explain it will be anonymised."

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I WANT TO TAKE PART?
"Explain exactly how the participant should provide their consent to participate in the study."

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY?
"You should tell the individual what will happen to the results of the research. Will they be used in your dissertation or thesis? For what degree? Will they be published? How can they obtain a copy of the published research? How long will any data be retained after collection?
[If not defined by the funder or other relevant stakeholder, the University's Records Management Policy and Master Records Retention Schedule should be used for reference.]"

"As a researcher, two principles are important here. Firstly the 'Common law duty of confidentiality' by which all participants, unless specifically informed otherwise can expect that the researcher will treat what they have received with confidentiality. Secondly, the requirements of data protection legislation that apply to all types of personal data that are processed. Failure to act in accordance with the principles and requirements of either may be considered research misconduct."

Figure 1: Participant Information Sheet Template (Appendix 2)

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, according to literature, using qualitative research method to identify why there is the discrepancy between opportunities for feedback and clarity on how feedback is implemented could contribute to develop collaboration and establishing a positive learning culture within the university. [15] With a deep level of analysing the collected feedback, the university could plan appropriate strategies to address the problems and generate solutions when feedback is not feasible and improving communication between both parties when feedback is not implemented.

Qualitative research method helps us enhance comprehension in the process. It helps collect in-depth perceptions from the participants feedback and that seeks to interpret meaning from these responses that help us to understand the problem more clearly. Moreover, open-ended and semi-structured questions leave the room for generating variety of responses and discussion, compared to a specific question with a targeted question where the answer is narrow. The participants are flexible to give their perspectives and insights in this most convenient way.[16] Besides, the information could be highly reliable through opportunity provided for students and staff to communicate in the focus group.

However, our qualitative research method might have certain limitations. The interview might be time consuming during analysis. [17] Furthermore, interviewee may easily be affected by each other, since they will hear opinions of others. Additionally, we anticipate authority bias may arise in the process, students afraid to complain in front of the staff or easily be influenced by their opinion. Thus, we decide to collect student feedback before the combined session then use these topics to start communication with staff for each university. Above all, since our study is limited to two specific universities, the result cannot be generalised. Other universities that cares about this problem needs to combine their own circumstance and their unique context to address the problem.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Discover Uni Dataset (2020) <<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/tools-and-downloads/unistats>> [Accessed 7th March 2020]

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet Template and Consent Forms (2020) <<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/apply/ethicsreviewforms>> [Accessed 7th March 2020]