



# Pakistani Higher Degree students' Views of Feedback on Assessment: Qualitative study



Muhammad Kashif<sup>a,\*</sup>, Attiq ur Rehman<sup>b</sup>, Zaida Mustafa<sup>c</sup>, Sara Basharat<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Assistant Professor of Marketing, GIFT University, Business School, Gujranwala 52250, Pakistan

<sup>b</sup> Centre of Organization Development, Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>c</sup> Associate Professor/Dean, Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, UNITAR, Malaysia

<sup>d</sup> MBA Alumnus, GIFT University, Business School, Gujranwala, Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore Pakistani higher degree students' views regarding feedback delivered on assessment by course instructors. The researchers followed a naturalist-paradigm as a research design to investigate the feedback on assessment phenomenon in a moderately collectivist and high risk avoiding society. Qualitative data is collected through conducting four focus groups with 18 higher degree students, enrolled in the last years of their degree programs. The sample of students has been selected using purposive sampling technique from a private sector university located in the province of Punjab, Pakistan. Thematic analysis revealed eight themes: satisfaction with feedback, scope of the feedback, demand for feedback, continuity of feedback, mode of feedback communication, timing of the feedback, competence of instructors, and student–instructor relationships & feedback. It has also been notable that role of instructors is considered imperative in enhancing the impact of feedback provided on assessment. This research is a pioneer study in the Asian context of Pakistan and contributes significantly to raise the standards of teaching and assessment in the country. The insights are useful for faculty members, teaching to higher degree students, and striving hard to achieve the desired outcomes of feedback on assessment.

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## 1. Introduction

The feedback on assessment has been a significant contributor to student learning cycle in higher education (Weaver, 2006). The efficiency of feedback on assessment has grabbed attention of many scholars but students' perception of feedback has always been one of the under-researched topics (Strijbos & Sluijsmans, 2010). Before moving ahead with developing our understanding of student perceptions of feedback, it is pivotal to begin through asking an underlying question: why students need feedback? It has been crucial on account of certain reasons. The students need to know about the quality of their work, and the criteria that has been levied by instructor to evaluate their efforts (Higgins & Hartley, 2002). It enables them to enhance learning and achieve better grades (Duffield & Spencer, 2002). The feedback on assessment also bridges the

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +92 3007178806.

E-mail addresses: [kshfsaied@yahoo.com](mailto:kshfsaied@yahoo.com), [kashif@gift.edu.pk](mailto:kashif@gift.edu.pk) (M. Kashif), [attiq787@gmail.com](mailto:attiq787@gmail.com) (A. ur Rehman), [zaida@unitar.my](mailto:zaida@unitar.my) (Z. Mustafa), [sara.basharat@gmail.com](mailto:sara.basharat@gmail.com) (S. Basharat).

gap between instructor and student, ultimately contributing to establishment of strong rapport between the two parties (Faranda & Clarke, 2004). The feedback helps students to develop themselves in order to better perform in their professional life (Hinett & Weeden, 2000). It is also argued that “feedback which helps a person to improve their performance is likely to enhance learning” (Heywood, 2000, p. 152). Given these few reasons, it can be observed that feedback helps in enhancing student learning during studies and success in professional life.

Traditionally, feedback process was emphasized by researchers but the element of aligning the feedback delivery process with student learning and satisfaction was missing. A few researchers (Boud, 1988; Chalmers & Fuller, 1996; Ramsden, 1992) believed that students’ learning is mostly influenced by factors such as assessment methods and academic requirements. It was also believed that mere evaluation and grading students’ work does not significantly impact on student learning, so, it must be centred on the goal of learning advancements (Sadler, 1983). However, contemporary researchers in the field of higher education however have shifted their perspective from feedback and assessment process towards student satisfaction. Although process of feedback is also emphasized but the student satisfaction and leaning have been considered an important element of feedback success (Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell, & Litjens, 2008). The students desire constructive and meaningful feedback on assessment by instructor about the academic tasks performed by them (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001). With the marketization of higher education in recent years, researchers have employed ‘student as customer’ metaphor that signifies the importance of student satisfaction with the evaluation (Ramachandran, 2010). It will help educational institutions to attain good image and growth. It also implies that students’ voice should be given proper attention. However, literature reveals that voice of students, especially in developing countries is almost totally missing and must be investigated with regards to feedback on assessment (Carless, 2006; Mutch, 2003; Pokory & Pickford, 2010; Weaver, 2006).

Although, feedback on assessment provided to students in higher education has remained the topic of interest for many researchers (Sadler, 1989), however, students’ perception of feedback has always been an under-researched topic (Strijbos & Sluijsmans, 2010). The assessment and learning in higher education has been a cultural phenomenon and it is believed that students from different backgrounds have different objectives and preferences towards assessment (Selvarajah, 2006). This is true in essence that Asian culture is characterized by values such as collectivism, low risk taking, and high power distance perceptions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). For example, in Asian culture, family, instructors, and peers strongly affect the learning outcomes in higher education setting (Kashif, Ayyaz, Raza, & Shahid Hamid, 2013). Educational researchers have found that personal autonomy determines expectations and strongly impact students’ satisfaction and performance that vary widely across cultures (Ferguson, Kasser, & Jahng, 2011). A high degree of trust is exhibited on supervisor among Asians that is not much aggressively pursued in other individualistic cultures (Wasti, Tan, Brower, & Önder, 2007). Further to this, perceived risk has been associated differently among Asian and non-Asian people while making decisions (Keh & Sun, 2008). Moreover, literature highlighting assessment feedback in higher education is scarce and must be further investigated, especially in settings other than UK and USA (Paulos & Mahony, 2008; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010). The language, personal and social class perceptions, and instructor-student role perception are different between Asian and non-Asian contexts that make Asia an interesting point to study further (Jackson, 2003). This necessitates the need to conduct a study that represents Asian perspective on account of student feedback on assessment perceptions in higher education. Current study has been aimed to reflect student perceptions about feedback on assessment from an Asian context of Pakistan. The study will be a contextual contribution that would help Pakistani academics, finding ways to enhance student learning and motivation. The research team has envisioned these research questions;

- How Pakistani students explicate and define their experience regarding feedback on assessment?
- How feedback on assessment can be improved?

The next components of this article present literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion sections.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Assessment in higher education

Assessment in higher education has been considered an important component to enhance student learning. The assessment serves four distinct roles: (1) summative (delivery of feedback at the end of course); (2) formative (supporting student development); (3) certifier (helping student to qualify and pass the assessment component(s)); and (4) evaluative (indicator of the success or failure of an overall evaluation system (Hornby, 2003)). Assessment in education plays some other related roles as well such as; assessment helps educators understand extent of student learning (Dochy & McDowell, 1997); and developing an understanding of the student motivation through assessment (Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003).

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of practice (2000) affirms that assessment is normally taken as summative and formative. These two ways of assessment are further defined by the QAA (2000) separately. The formative assessment has been defined as, “formative assessment is designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and inform development, but does not contribute to the overall assessment [grade]”. While the summative assessment has been explained as, “summative assessment provides a measure of achievement or failure made in respect of a learner’s performance in relation to the intended learning outcomes of the program of study”.

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