



## FEEDBACK;

### CHALLENGERS IN PROVIDING TIMELY FEEDBACK TO UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS: FACULTY PERSPECTIVES

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## INTRODUCTION

Providing constructive feedback is important for effective teaching and learning.<sup>1</sup> It is widely recognized that feedback is an essential part of the learning cycle, but both students and teachers frequently express disappointment and frustration in relation to the conduct of the feedback process. Providing feedback is a critical skill which is considered as heart of medical education<sup>2,3</sup> but providing timely feedback to the students is vital for their learning and it motivates the students in the process of competency achievements.<sup>4</sup>

In any undergraduate or postgraduate educational institute, faculty is expected to provide regular timely feedback to the students,<sup>5</sup> but faculty believe that providing appropriate and timely feedback is a difficult task.<sup>5,6</sup> Often

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**ABSTRACT.. Objectives:** To explore perception of Khyber Medical University teachers regarding challenges in provision of timely feedback to students. **Setting:** Khyber Medical University, Peshawar. **Period:** March 2016 to September 2016. **Methods:** A qualitative multiple case study in which seven focus group discussions with seven constituent institutes of Khyber Medical University have been conducted, each institute is taken as one case, selected through purposive maximum variation sampling technique. Each FGD was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, analyzed and themes were identified. **Results:** Total forty faculty members participated in seven focus group discussions. Three themes that emerged were "institutionalization of feedback" indicating need of establishing a feedback culture so that it is taken as a norm both by teachers and students; "Lapses in feedback priority" indicating teachers don't give priority to feedback due time constraints, work overload, lack of training and resource deficiencies; "establishing manageable model of feedback at organizational/institutional level" indicating a need for developing a feasible feedback model compatible to university contextual needs instead of implementing any ideal feedback model. **Conclusion:** The concept of providing and receiving feedback is deficient and its significance with respect to teaching and learning is lacking. Contextual academic workload and time constraints may impact the quality and timing of feedback provided. There is need of collaborations between university administration and faculty so that feedback can be utilized effectively in the learning process.

**Key words:** Feedback, Challenges, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students, Faculty, Perceptions.

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they are constrained by academic, administrative and research tasks, effectively decreasing their interaction time with the students.

It was found in a study that low scorers perform well when they are given high quality feedback about their performance.<sup>7</sup> The type of feedback, as well as the information provided to students about their assignments, can positively impact student learning.<sup>7</sup> Providing students with formative feedback helps them adjust and modify their work.<sup>7</sup>

Three conditions have been identified that contribute to this effect. First, students are provided with examples (exemplars) of a good performance. They know what good performance on the assignment looks like. Second, they are

provided explicit information about how their current performance relates to expectations for a good performance. Third, students are provided with information about how to close the gap between their current performance and a good performance on the task. When these conditions are present there is evidence that students make academic gains.<sup>7</sup>

Up to our literature search, limited research has been done so far in any medical university in Pakistan regarding timely feedback process and challenges faced by the faculty. The issue of providing timely feedback to the students has been raised in Khyber Medical University, the only public sector university in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It has nine constituent institutes and more than twenty five affiliated institutes including undergraduate and postgraduate respectively. The author of this research is a faculty member in KMU and conducted a study to measure educational environment of one of the constituent institutes of KMU in 2015, and feedback was highlighted as one of the weak areas which need attention<sup>8</sup>. Moreover according to teacher evaluation survey analysis and report by quality enhancement cell (QEC) of Khyber Medical University in June 2015, timely and good feedback was highlighted as the priority area which needs to be focused on. Based on above observations, the author felt the need to identify the challenges for provision of timely feedback at Khyber Medical University. Therefore, a study was planned to identify the challenges faced by faculty in providing timely feedback to their students and also explored the proper solution to the identified challenges and barriers.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study comprised seven focus group discussions that were conducted in seven constituent institutes of Khyber Medical University, Peshawar, namely;

1. Institute of Public Health and Social Sciences
2. Institute of Basic Medical Sciences
3. Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
4. Institute of Paramedical Sciences
5. KMU institute of Medical Sciences
6. KMU institute of Dental sciences

## 7. Institute of nursing

There were total 40 participants. Minimum number of participant was five and maximum ten in each focus group discussion. The study was completed within six months after approval from ASRB and ethical board (from 30<sup>th</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016).

The FGD method was used to explore the perceptions of participants on a well defined topic.

Multiple case studies approach was chosen as there are multiple constituent institutes in Khyber Medical University. Each constituent institute was taken as one case, making total of seven cases (excluding IHPE). Case study research involves in-depth analysis of a bounded system (a program or an event or an activity or a process or a group or institute etc). The case study can have intrinsic value or can be used as a mean of gaining understanding of a larger process. One hallmark of case study method is triangulation which is the use of multiple data collection tools or data sources to gain rich insight into study phenomenon from multiple perspective.

Purposive sampling technique was used because specific targets were to be selected for the desired information. Within purposive sampling, multiphase maximum variation sampling technique was used in each FGD. There was variation in participant ranging from lecturers to Professors and both genders.

Faculty members in each constituent institutes of Khyber Medical University were included, while Faculty who were absent on day of FGD or not willing to participate in the study, visiting faculty and contract faculty were excluded. Institute of health education profession was excluded from the study, as there were total 3 faculty members, of whom one was my supervisor and another co supervisor and the third faculty member was internal examiner, due to which FGD could not be conducted with them.

The permission was granted from the Incharge/

Director of constituent institutes. The faculty was also apprised of the purpose of the study and informed consent was obtained from all participants and was ensured about the confidentiality of the responses. The FGDs were moderated and conducted by the principle investigator who is a qualified medical educationist and researcher. Each of FGD lasted 45 min to 1 hour.

All full time faculty members were encouraged to participate in the group discussion, with each FDG having a minimum of 5 participants and maximum 10 participants. Discussion was generated about the faculty's perception of purpose, process and barriers of feedback and the solution to overcome those barriers. All the responses were kept confidential and anonymous. Each focus group met with the same moderator. The FGDs were facilitated by moderator while assistant moderator helped in logistics and writing the key points as memos.

At the start of the session the moderator assured the faculty about the confidentiality. Moderator opened the discussion by posing questions, guided the group, talked about feedback, the challenges and their solutions.

Guiding questions were searched from literature<sup>9</sup> and these questions were authenticated by three experts in Medical Education Department of Khyber Medical University and were piloted before implementing the study. The questions posed by the moderator were;

- What do you know about feedback?
- Have you ever provided any feedback to students at your institute? Any formal or informal feedback?
- What is process of feedback in your institute?
- What experiences have you encountered while providing feedback?
- Have you found any difference in providing feedback to undergraduate and postgraduate students? Please share your experience? (An additional question for the institute offering both undergraduate and postgraduate programs.)
- What do you think are the challenges in giving feedback to the students?

- What are your suggestions as solutions to the challenges stated/identified?

Discussion points were transcribed from dicta phone. Moderator and assistant moderator reviewed all the transcripts after each session and coded the data under various headings.

An analysis of text was done (word repetitions, key-indigenous terms, and key-words-in contexts) using an open coding technique. These codes and themes were then shared with supervisor and co supervisor and any differences were sorted out and agreed upon by consensus.

Any point that needed clarification was used as a guide for the next session. At the end of all sessions, three themes were emerged from this process, which were then reviewed by Moderator, supervisor and co supervisor till a consensus reached on themes. Data collection and data analysis was done simultaneously at the same time.

The final report was written by Moderator, circulated to the participant faculty for confirmation, and was submitted to supervisor and co supervisor for approval.

## RESULTS

First cycle of coding initial analysis was done by Open Coding. Second cycle of coding was done to find out relationships by Axial Coding. Then Thematic Analysis was done to create meaningful patterns. Thematic analysis was performed through the process of coding in six phases to create meaningful patterns. These phases were: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report).

The results of seven FGDs were summarized based on thematic categorizations. The three themes identified as challenges were: Institutionalization of feedback, Lapses in prioritizing Feedback, Establishing manageable model of feedback at organizational/institutional level.

Sr. No.	Representative Quotes from interviews	Codes used by the participants	Abbreviations	Number of Times the code is used by participants
1	There is no feedback system which can be practically applied at organizational and institutional level, so that all faculty follow it in uniform pattern as we usually give feedback informally and haphazardly (Participant 4 in FGD 3) We need proper feedback system at institutional level so that we can manage our time accordingly and avoid extra stress and extra workload. (Participant 5 in FGD 6)	Lack of feedback system	LFS	28
2	So it is the workload and the time constraint and the lack of facilities which affect the timely provision of feedback. Obviously teachers have no time for feedback if they are already overburdened with work, there should be specified teaching hours and avoid work overload (Participant 3 in FGD 2) There be other reasons like workload because we don't have any specified teaching hours and we are already overloaded with lots of work which becomes unmanageable sometimes (Participant 7 in FGD 5)	Time constraints and increased workload	TC& IWL	24
3	If we give priority to feedback, there is no excuse for delaying it, otherwise if it gets delayed; you are not giving it priority. (Participant 3 FGD 1) Faculty is not aware about importance of feedback, that's why they don't prioritize feedback as they think it is something which is not part of academic activities. (Participant 5 in FGD 6)	Lack of priorities	LP	23
4	We are facing lots of resource deficiencies, we don't have enough human resource to distribute work load, and there is also financial resource deficiencies and lack of proper infra structure. (Participant 4 in FGD4) Electronic access is important in providing prompt and timely feedback to students and we have many resource deficiencies on that part. (Participant 5 in FGD 7)	Lack of Resources	LR	21
5	Obviously we have so many students enrolled, we can't get time to give feedback to each and every student (Participant 4 in FGD 2) This high student teacher ratio is one of the biggest barriers in timely provision of feedback to students; we can't manage time for it.	Increased Number of students High Student Teacher Ratio	INS HTSR	19 18
6	In general our faculty is not properly trained in feedback; they don't know how the feedback is given properly. (Participant 5 in FGD 4) Faculty is not trained in feedback, as one needs to give feedback in a sandwich form in which you first highlight the strength and encourage the students then identify weaknesses and then recommend how to overcome those weaknesses. (Participant 6 in FGD 6)	Lack of Faculty Training	LFT	16
7	Actually students are not interested in feedback, their sole purpose is to get degree and they don't bother about identification of their weaknesses or any sort of feedback. (Participant 3 in FGD 6) Our postgraduate students are very busy and doing jobs, they are usually not interested in feedback, moreover they have fixed frame of mind and they are not flexible so they don't absorb feedback easily. (Participant 3 in FGD 2)	Disinterest of Students	DS	12
8	Another thing lack of awareness, on student's part as well as on teacher's part. They don't know about importance of feedback, teachers and students both are not sensitized for feedback. They don't know how important feedback is to improve quality of education. (Participant 5 in FGD 4)	Lack of Awareness	LA	10
9	Sometimes students are not prepared for feedback and they don't take feedback in good way and become aggressive, such negative experience discourage teachers to give feedback (Participant 5 in FGD 6) Mostly positive experiences with feedback but sometimes students get aggressive especially due to repeated feedback or when we identify weaknesses or mark them low in test or midterm. (Participant 4 in FGD 7)	Aggressive Behavior of students	ABS	9
10	Negative experience with feedback occurs when there is communication gap between teacher and student. Teacher does not properly convey the message or communicate the feedback and it is misinterpreted by the student which results into failure of basic purpose of feedback which is to enhance learning and improve performance of the students (Participant 5 in FGD 3)	Communication Gap between Students and Teachers	CGST	7
11	Feedback has never been considered as part of curriculum at our institute and no weight has been given to feedback in academic activities that's why we don't prioritize or give importance to feedback, we think it's an extra activity which brings more stress to our already overloaded work. (Participant 1 in FGD 5)	Feedback is not counted as academic activity	FCAA	6

**Representative quotes for solutions recommended by the participants, codes and abbreviations given to them in descending order of frequency**

12	Unless and until faculty is not trained in feedback they cannot give proper feedback to students. (Participant 7 in FGD 6) Our faculty doesn't know how to give feedback and that is the reason they experienced negative reactions from students sometimes, they need proper workshops or seminar or certificate courses, they need to be aware of importance of feedback. (Participant 5 in FGD 4)	Faculty Development	FD	38
		Create Awareness in Faculty	CAF	37
13	We need a manageable model of feedback as we are already overburdened with lots of work and we need something which we can do easily without any extra stress.( Participant 2 in FGD 2) A manageable model of feedback at organizational and institutional level is mandatory if we want to establish a culture of feedback and want to improve quality of education. ( Participant 3 in FGD 4)	Manageable Model of Feedback	MMF	37
14	High teacher student ratio put us over stressed and we cannot take time for feedback due to work overload, so we need to hire more human resource to distribute the workload, after then we shall be able to take time for feedback. ( Participant 3 In FGD 4) Increased number of students especially at the undergraduate level makes feedback difficult for us as we can't take time out of our busy schedule and give feedback to each and every student, we need more human resource.( Participant 3 In FGD 4)	Address the Human Resource Deficiency	AHRD	35
15	We need top down approach if we want to establish feedback practice routine, our organizational upper management should work on it and make it mandatory for all faculty. ( Participant 3 in FGD 4) Actually we need feedback organizational model which should be decided on strategic level, there should be some rules and policies for feedback at organizational level so that we can follow those policies, so basically steps should be taken at organizational level to make feedback as part of the system. ( Participant 2 in FGD 6)	Top Down Approach	TDA	25
		Organizational Policies regarding Feedback	OPF	23
		Feedback Organizational Model	FOM	23
16	Curriculum should be revised and feedback should be incorporated in it so that faculty gives it due importance otherwise they don't take feedback as part of academic activities and do not give any importance to it. ( Participant 4 In FGD 4)	Incorporation of Feedback into Curriculum	IFC	18
17	Students are not receptive for feedback, they need only degree and they don't bother about feedback or improvement in performance, we need to sensitize them and make them realize the importance of feedback. ( Participant 3 in FGD 4) Disinterest of students discourage teachers to give them feedback, sometimes students react very aggressively as they don't like their weaknesses to be identified , counseling of such students should be done and we need to create awareness in students about importance of feedback. ( Participant 2 in FGD 6)	Sensitization of Students	SS	17
		Counseling of Students	CS	15
		Awareness in Students	AS	14
18	Actually there should be need based investment at organizational level; we need proper infrastructure, proper facilities for students and teachers as well. There should be incentives for teachers so that they are motivated and their hard work should be acknowledged. University should invest more for welfare of teachers and students, only then the organization can flourish. ( Participant 3 in FGD 3)  We have lots of barrier in electronic access which is one of the most convenient medium for providing feedback to large number of students, internet facility at institute is not good and it should be improved. ( Participant 1 in FGD 2)	Need based investment	NBI	12
		Proper Infrastructure	PI	11
		Incentives for Teachers	IT	11
		Address resource deficiency	ARD	10
		Electronic access for feedback	EAF	8
19	There should be a feedback monitoring cell at institutional level, which should specify the schedule for feedback and should monitor the number of feedback given to students by each and every teacher at institute. Unless and until we give feedback its due importance, it will never be practiced the way it should be. ( Participant 3 in FGD 7)	Schedule for Feedback	SF	6
		FB Monitoring Cell	FMC	5
		Monitoring of Feedback System	MFS	5

**Table-I. Representative quotes for challenges identified by the participants, codes and abbreviations given to them in descending order of frequency**



Sr. No.	Themes	Frequency of occurrence	Representative Quotes
1	Institutionalization of feedback	39	“if feedback is taken at institutional level n there is proper monitoring system for it , only then teacher will consider it important, moreover students are not interested in feedback as there is no culture of feedback so it is very important to institutionalize feedback system” “There is need to develop a culture of feedback and it is possible only if it is taken at institutional level”
2	Lapses in prioritizing Feedback	32	“There is lack of priority from faculty side as organization needs to work on employee welfare, provide some incentive and proper training to faculty only then faculty will be able to provide timely and effective feedback, number of teaching hours should be specified and organization should address the human resource deficiencies as well.”
3	Establishing manageable model of feedback at organizational/ institutional level	29	“we need a uniform manageable feedback model at institutional level as we cannot simply follow any ideal feedback model, we need to focus on our circumstances and we need to work within our limited resources, so keeping our limitations in mind we need to establish a manageable model of feedback.”

**Table-II. Representative quotes for themes identified by the participants**

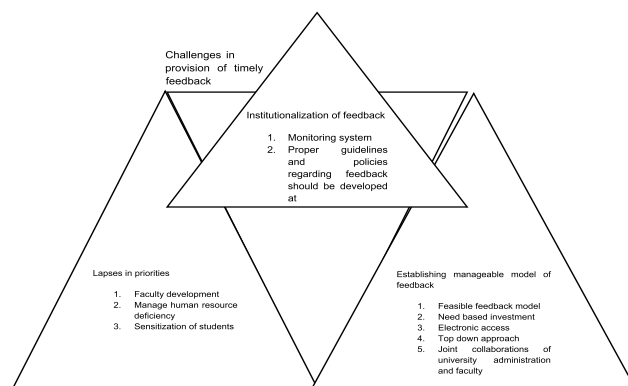
In terms of Institutionalization of feedback, all the seven FGDs spontaneously and unanimously stated that “that institutionalization of feedback was the most important challenge as there was no proper system for feedback at institutional level.” They also identified making feedback as part of institutional culture would improve quality of education. They were of the opinion that if feedback is taken at institutional level and there is proper monitoring system for it, only then teacher will consider it important.

As for Lapses in prioritizing Feedback, Almost all participants were of the opinion that teachers are not familiar with importance of feedback and its value in improving quality of learning, moreover they are not trained enough how to give proper feedback. They said that faculty is facing issues of work overload and time constraints due to high strength of students and human resource deficiency. Majority participants stated that since there is no incentive for the faculty on involvement in educational activities, they are not ready to overburden themselves by providing timely feedback.

When it comes to Establishing manageable model of feedback at organizational/institutional level, all participants voiced their concern that establishing a uniform manageable feedback model at institutional level is one of the biggest challenges

they are facing right now as they cannot simply follow any ideal feedback model, they need to focus on their own circumstances and they need to work within their own limited resources. They pointed out that there is lack of collaboration between faculty and university administration and there are no rules and regulations specified at strategic level specially there is lack of need based investment from university side which hinders in establishing manageable model of feedback.

The solutions given by faculty to challenges identified were noted separately (Figure-1).



**Figure-I. Thematic presentation of feedback challenges identified and solutions suggested by faculty**

## DISCUSSIONS

Professionals from undergraduate and postgraduate medicine agreed that feedback

is important in the development of expertise. Constructive feedback can reinforce good behaviour, allow for the correction of mistakes, and provide direction for improvement. The timeliness of feedback is a key factor in measuring of feedback. A study reported by Al-Haqwi<sup>11</sup> found that low achievers do particularly well when provided high quality feedback about their work.

In my study most of the teachers were of the opinion that there were no departmental policies or guidelines regarding process of provision of feedback, without knowing it, providing feedback was neglected as identified in a qualitative study by Raszka<sup>12</sup> in which it was mentioned that lack of well defined departmental policy was one of the causes of infrequent provision of feedback. Similar finding was highlighted in a study by Haffling A,<sup>13</sup> in which it was mentioned that without organizational/departmental policies it was difficult to establish formal feedback system. Most of the participants in my study agreed on point that feedback system should be incorporated into academic activities as they don't consider feedback important unless it was not taken as part of academic activities. Similar finding was highlighted in a study by Al-Haqwi<sup>11</sup> that Process of feedback should be fundamental component of the curriculum.

In my study, teachers commented that policies for feedback system should be established at strategic level and should be implemented in all constituent institutes. Some of teachers in my study commented that if there are deadlines and proper schedule for feedback, the process would never be delayed. It is highlighted in a study by Fernando N<sup>14</sup> that if there is a culture of feedback at institutional level, only then proper effective and timely feedback can be delivered by teachers and accepted by students.

Participants were of the opinion that there were lapses in prioritization of feedback. Many reasons were explored for the lapses in feedback prioritization. Lack of faculty development in feedback was considered as one of the barriers in provision of timely feedback to students. A qualitative study by Raszka<sup>12</sup> highlighted that

feedback is usually neglected due to lack of faculty training and same challenge was observed in a stud by T.Zehra.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the teachers shared their negative experience of providing feedback to students. Faculty was reluctant to give feedback due to negative emotional reaction and negative effect on teacher's performance evaluation by students. This lack of acceptance of feedback by the student was one of the barriers that hindered the learning process as identified in a qualitative study by Shalini T Reddy.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the teachers in my study who were teaching both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, were of the opinion that postgraduate students were usually doing jobs alongside studies so they were very busy and least bothered about feedback while undergraduate were more in number and it was difficult for teachers to give feedback to all of them.

Most of the teachers were of the opinion there was a need of establishing a manageable model of feedback at institutional/organizational level in a way that suited our circumstances. Some of the teachers commented that there was lack of need based investment from organization side as they needed more human resource and incentives for teachers for motivation and the organizations had totally ignored it. As identified in a stud by T. Zehra, as there was no incentive for the faculty on their involvement in educational activities, faculty are reluctant to take time out of their busy schedule.<sup>15</sup> Moreover teachers in my study were of the opinion that there was lack of collaboration between faculty and university administration in establishing a manageable model of feedback. It was highlighted in a study by Shalini. Reddy<sup>16</sup> that process of feedback should be fundamental part of education system and needed collaboration between faculty and administration of organization. Participants were of the opinion that electronic access would facilitate timely delivery of feedback and it would be convenient for both teachers and students.

The limitation of my study is that this study

was conducted in only one public sector medical university of Khyberpakhtunkhwa and result cannot be generalized to other medical universities in rest of the provinces of Pakistan due to contextual variations especially private sector university where situation of resource constraints may be different from public sector medical university.

Another limiting factor is that only faculty perspective was considered in my study. Opinions of students on feedback could have enhanced the applicability of the perceived challenges.

There is a need for wider application of the contextual environment of providing feedback and to investigate its effectiveness as potential area for further research. Further researches and studies are needed to confirm these barriers and to suggest effective interventions.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study had identified many barriers, which were perceived by medical university teachers that could have significant effect on the process of feedback and decreased its utilization by medical students and hindered their learning. This study showed that the concept of providing and receiving feedback was deficient and its significance with respect to teaching and learning was lacking. There is need of faculty development, management of human resource deficiency issue, collaboration between faculty and administration to establish policies and guidelines for feedback at strategic level, monitoring system to keep a record of number of feedback given, feedback awareness and acceptance by the students, need based investment by university, incentives for teachers and electronic access.

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Participate in life instead of just watching it pass you by.

– Unknown –

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**AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION DECLARATION**

Sr. #	Author-s Full Name	Contribution to the paper	Author=s Signature
1	Naheed Mahsood	NM designed study, collected and analyzed the data, Edited all drafts of paper.	
2	Brekhna Jamil	BJ helped in generation of idea, edited all drafts of paper.	
3	Usman Mehboob	UM developed methodology from data collection and analysis, edited all draft papers.	
4	Zeeshan Kibria	ZK helped in collection of data, edited all draft papers including final draft.	
5	Kashif Ur Rehman Khalil	KR helped in editing of drafts.	