An Analysis of Effective Learner Feedback Mechanism in Higher Education

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Abstract:- At the core of lecturing, there should be a process of getting feedback from the learners to make meaningful conclusions from the attained feedback, so as to continuously improve teaching as a profession. Three methods were used to obtain feedback in this research, the sub-set questionnaire of the "National Survey of Student Engagement" (NSSE) of the United States of America and the "Nominal Group Technique" (NGT) lastly I used the local student appraisal form available for the institution. NGT was used to obtain points from students, which were later analyzed by the researcher to see if the points meet the researcher's expectation, and these points had to be put in practice where applicable. The researcher had to find out if they obtained points which are similar to the ones in the tutor's previous feedback from the localized Limkokwing student appraisal form noting the problems encountered in carrying out all the three methods. The feedback had to be reviewed and implied to Limkokwing University of Creative Technology (LUCT). These methods would be looked at in different parts of the research.

Keywords: Feedback, Learner, Nominal Group Technique, NSSE, Student appraisal form, review.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is a "structured variation of small group discussion methods" [1]. The other author said "The NGT it is a structured procedure for gathering information" [2].

Even though [3] continues to point out skeptics of using student feedback as not effective and not right because it can be biased towards the student grades. In any case students forms a very integral part of the education systems, this is evident as it is stipulated in all the regulating bodies such as the Lesotho Council of Higher Education. This calls for proper structures of student feedback mechanism in institutions across the country and beyond borders.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design approach. This involved documenting real events, recording observations. This report serves to give a detailed account of how to obtain feedback from students. I have performed the exercise of gathering feedback on one of my classes of Software Design, specializing in Software Engineering, by gathering opinions one at a time from my students. The module is run on a full-time basis with a total of 7 students in a class. All examinations are theoretical based except the major assessment. The researcher welcomed all the participants, explained the purpose of the gathering to undergo a study of Feedback, furthermore, the researcher explained that for feedback to be meaningful it should uncover something the researcher did not know and could be of value in improving the LUCT university system. The participants were enlightened about the difference between criticism and feedback. Therefore, feedback in our research in brief can be best described as what took place and what did not take place in terms of goals set at the onset.

➢ *Implementing the Nominal Group Technique*

As mentioned earlier NGT was done with the group for Software Design module.

• *Step 1 – Generating ideas*

First is to explain to the students about the Nominal Group Technique, what it is used for, making them to understand that the whole exercise is for the purposes of getting feedback from students. I gave a question to students in written form and read the question so that they understand the requirements. Students must feel free into jotting down notes about what they like and what they feel ought to be improved about the module, the classroom, and the lecturer. The feedback was categorized bad and good points, good are the ones that affects the participants positively, on the other hand bad points exposes the lecturer. The participants will be instructed to work as quietly as possible and independently for 30 minutes. There were also advised to use short phrases or statements. When I was generating ideas, the participants looked a bit uneasy at this stage which prompted the researcher to give them an opportunity to give anonymous feedback while appointing a coordinator who knows the rules to proceed with the learners.

• *Step 2 – Recording Ideas*

Then it was time for feedback session. Flip charts should be positioned where they are visible to the entire class. Group members should take turns to record each idea from each group member on the flip chart (round-robin feedback session). At this point no debate takes places. The recording of ideas taking turns is repeated until all ideas are recorded. Repeating ideas should be removed, however if the group

member believes the idea has a different emphasis or variation then it is included.

- *Step 3 – Discussing Ideas*

    Each idea is then discussed, group members clarifying their points, or justifying its importance. This step is done in order to provide an opportunity for other members to understand the logic and importance of the item, asking questions if any. The originator of the idea does not have to be the one who defends it; any member of the group can do so. This is done for clarity purposes and each point is numbered.

- *Step 4- Voting of individual ideas*

    Being such a small class, I allowed three votes per person by raising their hands on each item and also, they had the right not to vote when they did not want to. The votes were then tallied in order to find the greatest ideas. This would help in prioritizing points that needs the most attention and best points.

➤ *United States NSSE Questionnaire*

    NSSE Questionnaire is one of the ways of obtaining feedback. The National Survey of Student Engagement includes some questions which are applicable to LUCT, I selected some and not all. The table below shows some questions which I asked my students including their responses.

➤ *The logical basis behind the selection of the questions from the NSSE questionnaire*

- *I considered questions which I felt were relevant to software design module.*

    When going through the first section of the US-NSSE questionnaire it shows that this section is mainly concerned with finding out about the students' engagement in learning and their capability of managing their own work whilst at University and the quality of assessment that are carried out at University. As a result, most of the listed items in this section were selected.

- *I considered questions that were inclined to academic behaviors*

    Section two of the USNSSE deals with how much the coursework has influenced the students' mental activities. I found all this to be relevant to the survey and I included the material.

- *I needed to remove issues which I felt were irrelevant or trivial*

    When looking at sections 7 and section 19 and 22 for example, these sections were not relevant at all to my kind of research and had to remove them totally.

- *I needed to remove questions that led to tribal opinions*

    Section 18 was not considered for this survey as it seemed tribal and dividing.

    The researcher chooses most of the questions on the NSSE. Question one was picked because LUCT uses a teaching and learning methodology by [4] called learning Architecture Based on Collaborative Constructivism (LACC). Question one has used RO on is covered on (a), (b) just to pick a few, in this stage the learner reflects on what's being taught in class through answering questions. There are also questions about the use of technology which is an order of the day for LUCT since it is an institution encouraging technology.

    On the other hand, the NSSE has a lot of questions that are taken from the student charter that is the communication tool between the students, student body and the institution. This NSSE asked a lot of questions under the following sub topics in the student charter, Student charter emphasizes on the importance of student community in the academic world. This is also talked about in some of the questions in question one, which asks questions about being able to do assignments with other students. Encouraging equality and promoting diversity (student charter) - outlines obligations in a diverse community of staff and students, as it encourages students from different economic, and racial and ethnic background, which is very important for the institution as it has a pool of all nations. LUCT student charter advocates for professionalism, courtesy and mutual respect for all the stakeholders involved, teaching, learning, research and assessment has to be adhered to, the NSSE also shows question eleven is applicable to LUCT because it talks about the personal development including employability. Students are also encouraged to vote at any level, this is evident by supporting the Student Representative Committee elections on campus, question eleven.

    The NSSE highlighted issues on student services for example health and welfare, accommodation, community work, sports and clubs, LUCT does that through the Students services department. Question ten (d to f) touches on those. Question 26 takes into consideration the welfare of students. Question 3 encourages that LUCT students are to be encouraged to read as more books as possible to develop conceptual clarity. The learner would acquire knowledge, be able to compare and apply the knowledge in years to come. The students are most of the times given practical questions or assignments which allow them to apply theory learnt in the previous phase into practice, making concepts much simpler and easier to remember.

➤ *LUCT Student appraisal form*

    The Software Design class was also used to come up with feedback by using the LUCT student appraisal form.

➤ *Nominal Group Technique Results*

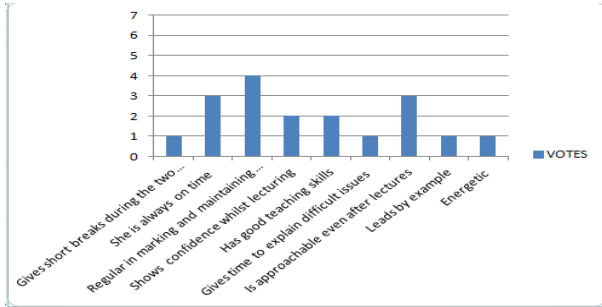   Results from using questions asked about their lecturer

Fig 1:- What the students like about the Software Design Lecturer

From the figure 1 above when analyzing for the item about the Software Design Lecturer 3 votes showed that the lecturer is always there on time and the same voted that the lecturer is approachable even after the lectures. Most of the votes (4) were in agreement that the lecturer maintains the registers on regular basis. The other areas that are notable are confidence when lecturing and has good teaching skills. These got 2 votes each.

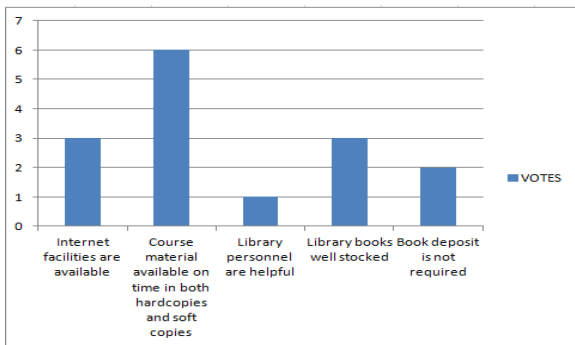➤ *Learning resources (internet, library, availability of course material)*

Fig 2:- What the students like about the learning resources (internet, library, availability of course material)

Figure 2 shows 6 votes were cast agreeing that course material is available on time both in hard copies and soft copies. Internet facilities are also available and library books well stocked received 3 votes each. The least for votes were on library personnel being helpful.
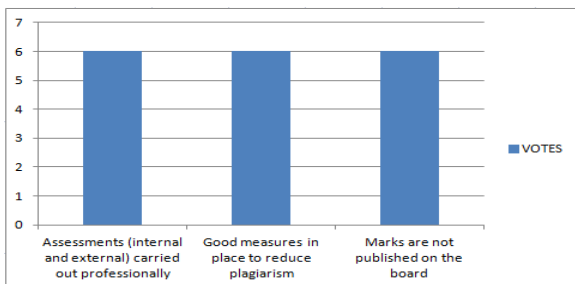
➤ *Assessments*

Fig 3:- What the students like about the assessments

Figure 3 above shows the students are happy about the assessments both internal and external assessments, these are carried out professionally. The idea received 6 votes. Similarly there was overwhelming support (6 votes) that there are good measures in place to reduce plagiarism. 6 votes were also cast in favor of the point that their marks are not published on the notice board. Which literally mean they do not want their marks to be published?

➤ *Discussion on NGT*

Analysis of literature reveals that students' participation and engagement improves significantly when the NGT approach to getting feedback is introduced and monitored effectively. This is because students are left to engage in each element of the whole process. This gives them the opportunity to analyze and formulate ideas that best fit the posed questions. The findings of the current study support such propositions because it has been established that the majority of the Software Design students unanimously agree with ideas that they feel are important to them.

The Nominal Group Technique provides educators with opportunities to capitalize on inquisitive behaviors of students to facilitate effective engagement and learning. Statistics for analysis and discussion are made available immediately after the NGT has been concluded, therefore this approach is very good on the part of the facilitator for quick results immediately. Furthermore, it provides for anonymity and freedom of expression by the participants. However, NGT must be administered with extreme care as it creates a situation where participants can fail to reconcile/converge their ideas. Also, I have noticed that it does not provide for an opportunity for multiple-analysis of points and hence they are higher chances of some limited capacity in this method to cross-fertilize ideas if there is need to do so.

NGT improves student engagement thus increasing interaction amongst the students themselves and between the teacher and the learner. The shy ones are forced out of their shells by participating in group work.

- NGT gives a chance to the learner to say out their feelings. This is a good approach at tertiary learning because we want the learner to develop the required skills and competences.
- NGT enables learners to take charge of their work and it promotes self-authorship, if we use this approach early to our students, then they will develop research skill and become independent research in the future after college.
- Motivation and impact to a change: e.g. if I want to assess how my students are enjoying my teaching style.
- There is more emphasis on the shift from lecturer's to other approaches that make learning interesting: Matching teaching styles with learning styles has positive impact on student academic achievement. Students who recognize how they can immerse themselves into content deeply and

hence be encouraged to take advantages of their abilities and achieve more in relevant class activities. NGT can pick out such issues.

➢ Results from using NSSE

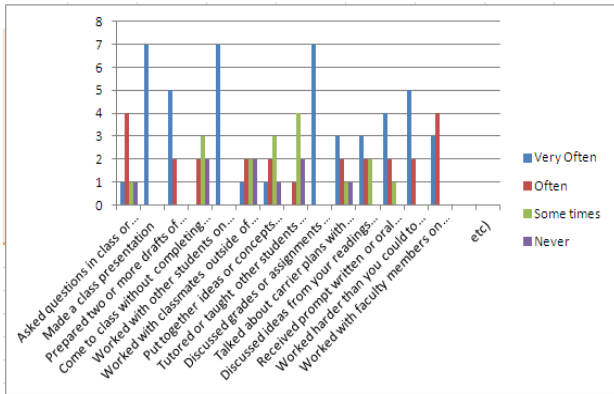Students' views on their learning, teaching and personal development

Fig 4:- Students' involvement in shaping their learning, personal, skills and knowledge acquisition.

When figure 4 is examined, it is seen that most students do not support the view that they have participated in class. Also all 7 students "very often" make presentations in class or "often" make presentations in class. Furthermore, it can be observed that all the respondents have "never" "tutored or taught other students". Also, 5(71%) affirm the view that they "very often" received prompt feedback from the tutor while 2(29%) affirm that they have "often" received prompt feedback from the tutor.
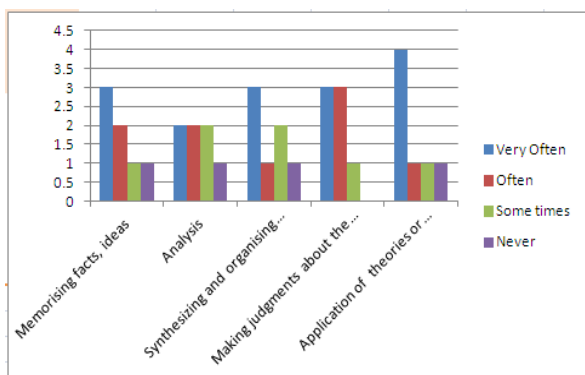

Fig 5:- Students' views on the way activities in class and the quality of assessment have influenced them to engage psychologically

Looking at figure 5, we can see that most students affirm that the activities they are given at LUCT enables them to engage mental activities like memorizing, analyzing, synthesizing and application. Surprisingly, this is the ideal learning/teaching approach which facilitates the students' learning from surface learning (at the beginning of grasping concepts) until towards the end of the course where students

are given problems that enable them to synthesize and apply concepts.

➢ Discussion on NSSE

The findings presented indicate that Software Design students involved have very little enthusiasm on being actively involved in class. However, all students affirmed that they are not involved in class presentations. The contrast shown here seems to point out that this is a very unique group of students consisting of adults with very minimum pre-requisite knowledge and experiences with regards to active learning. Apparently, the group's mix of academic achievements is very humble and their communication skills are very weak. These findings herewith support such phenomenon and the researchers such as [6], [7] have revealed the same in their research. According to [8] learners need additional learning aids such as visual tools.

In general, both approaches (that is, the NGT and the NSSE subset questionnaire) have unveiled unique results to this study and hence I am of the opinion that these methods are complementary to each other rather than detrimental. The NSSE survey was rather too structured and provided an opportunity for students to provide limited responses in accordance to the questions contained. However, it was very easy to administer and took relatively a very short-time than the NGT. The resources expended using the questionnaires were fewer and therefore meaning that the method is cheaper.

➢ Results from using LUCT student appraisal form

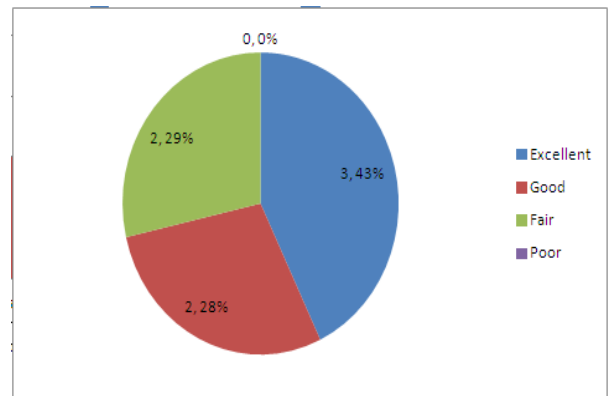Students' views on academic quality at LUCT

Fig 6: Students' views on academic quality LUCT

When analyzing figure 6, we can see that out of the 7 students involved, 3(43%) support the view that academic quality at LUCT is "excellent", 2(29%) affirms that academic quality at LUCT is "good" and none of the respondents think that academic quality is "poor".

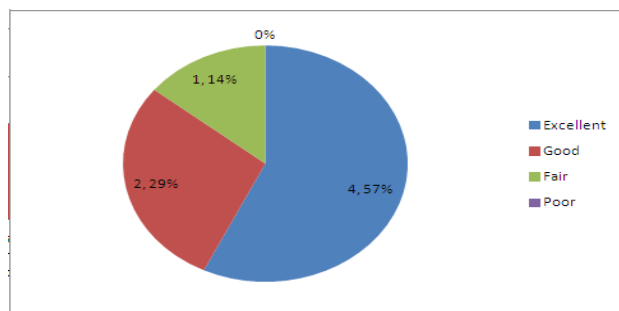➢ Students' views on the entire educational experience at LUCT

Fig 7:- Students' views on the entire educational experience at LUCT

When analyzing figure 7, we can see that out of the 7 respondents, (57%) support the view that the entire educational experience at LUCT is "excellent", 2(29%) affirms that the entire educational experience at LUCT is "good" and none of the respondents think that the entire educational experience at LUCT is "poor".

On the other hand, compared to the LUCT student appraisal form, the NGT can prioritize issues. In essence the NGT also enhances, "tolerance to potentially conflicting ideas" [9].

> *Discussion on LUCT appraisal form*

The results of the student appraisal form can be used to reinforce or reject some of the decisions that have been given in the NGT. The students were caught unaware on the student appraisal form, each student present would try to give his/her honest evaluation and the fact that it was applied and analyzed by a different person it holds more weight than when I personally apply it myself due to the fact that what students said was not influenced by my presence. There was no time to discuss each other's views. On the other hand, the students had no other choice, they had to answer the given questions, the same scenario as in NSSE questionnaire but my question was is this the way there were to evaluate themselves had they been given the liberty to use their own words?

From these evaluations I realized that the students gave positive comments, and the one on the lecturer was not clear, I decided to make further investigations on this since it was not identifying priorities on problem issues and also does not give the student a chance to point to the real problem. When I finished conducting the LUCT student appraisal form, the first thing which came to my mind was the nominal group technique will be the best of the three since it seeks clarification on suggestion and everyone is brought to the same understanding. Over and above, the three techniques are equally important because their use depends on what that you need to find out. If you want to prioritize the problem issues there is need to use the NGT. The main weakness of the NSSE and the LUCT student appraisal form is that both have subjective scales like very often, sometimes, never. The three can get the same answers that can be interpreted from different perspectives.

III. CONCLUSION

I would suggest that for educators to solicit valuable and exhaustive feedback from learners they should rather view these approaches studied herein as complementary rather than detrimental.

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