PERCEPTION OF POST REGISTERED NURSING STUDENTS REGARDING WRITTEN FEEDBACK: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

OBJECTIVES:

Feedback is an interactive process, where information is provided to someone for improving performance. In academic environment, feedback facilitates learning through regulating weaknesses of students. Current study is to report the practice of written feedback in nursing institutions in Peshawar.

METHODOLOGY:

This study was informed by relativist ontology, interpretivist epistemology and case study methodology. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, followed by thematic analysis.

RESULTS:

Our study found that, there is lack of written feedback system in nursing institutions in Peshawar. In case feedback is provided, it is ineffective and not based on actual performance of students in assignments; which is perceived by students as discriminatory and based on favoritism. Students reported that feedback is inadequate, inappropriate and delayed. It leads to general dissatisfaction among nursing students.

CONCLUSION:

Current practice of written feedback to degree level nursing students in Peshawar is deficient, counterproductive and does not improve students' learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *Feedback, Education, Nursing, Nursing Education Research*

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INTRODUCTION:

Feedback is defined as "information given to a learner about his or her performance of the learning task, usually with the objective of improving learner's performance"[1]. Definitions of feedback vary, but they all have a common, understanding that, feedback is iterative process which appraise students of their performance. Feedback enables students to understand their performance, relative to peers. Feedback facilitates learning through regulating weaknesses of students[2].

Getting good quality and timely feedback on assignments is a major part of learning process. Through corrective/negative feedback, students' attention is drawn to their weakness, while through reinforcing/positive feedback; they are motivated to further strengthen their competencies. Therefore, if properly provided, feedback can make students enhance their learning[3]. Feedback is either formal or informal. Written feedback represent the former while oral represents the later type. Evidence suggests that written feedback is more beneficial than verbal[4]. Written feedback

is given on tests, assignments or terminal papers. It can be given as marginal comments or on a separate sheet[5].Nursing, a pertinent discipline in medical education uses tests, papers and assignments to build students" understanding. In lines with guidelines from Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recently launched degree programs, including bachelors and master degrees. Currently, around sixty institutions in the province are running degree programs across different cities of the province. In total, around 275 students are enrolled in these institutions annually. Like all other disciplines, written feedback is vital in nursing education, however limited local evidence exists on this topic[5]. Current research was undertaken to have an insight into practice of written feedback at these nursing institutions.

METHODOLOGY:

Our research was anchored on a relativist ontology and interpretivist epistemological approach. On methodological grounds, we took case-study approach where each nursing institute was taken as a case. Our data collection method was in-depth interviews and field notes. Scientific and ethical approvals were acquired from Khyber Medical University. Purposive sampling was done, after administrative approvals from concerned institutions. Our recruitment criterion included (i) being a registered nurse with valid Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) license, and (ii) being enrolled in a degree program at one of the institutes. After securing an informed written consent, in-depth interviews were conducted through a semi-structured interview guide. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent of respondents. Field notes were taken. Interviews were written in verbatim. Inductive thematic analysis was performed. Initially, open coding was done. Codes with similar meanings were grouped into distinct categories. The codes and categories were read repeatedly, until themes emerged from our data. Our final sample size (n=9) was decided by saturation of our data.

RESULTS:

From our data analysis, three themes emerged. These were (I) Lack of feedback system, (II) Ineffective feedback, and, (III) Lack of

professionalism in giving feedback. These themes signify that students perceived a lack of proper feedback in their institutions. They reported being discriminated-against by teachers. This situation leads to dissatisfaction among students.

Theme I: Lack of feedback system

Under theme "lack of feedback system", three subthemes were identified. Sub-themes were (i) lack of feedback culture at all institutions, (ii) lapses in providing appropriate written feedback, and (iii) lack of priority to written feedback. As per participants" perspective, the feedback provided is poor, inadequate, inappropriate and often oral than written. According to our respondents, whenever they received feedback, it was in the form of ranking and grading and they did not get information about their weaknesses and strengths. One student said that: "We wrote assignments in each subject in each semester but didn"t receive written feedback on any assignment". Participant-5
Similar concerns were raised by another student saying that: "They (teachers) never gave feedback on assignments we submit. Teachers never called us, never returned or discussed our assignments, whether they found it good, bad or poor". Participant-4
Another student informed that: "I have almost completed my degree course here, but in my opinion; the element of written feedback is non-existing". Participant-1 About written and oral feedback, one student said: "Teachers usually give haphazard informal feedback, mostly verbal; there is no proper system of written feedback at our institute". Participant-2

Theme II: Ineffective feedback

It was reported by the students that the current feedback system in the institutes is ineffective. Under this theme, data was gathered where students informed that the feedback they received was not accurate and not based on their actual performance in the assignments. They informed that teachers did not give feedback on their actual performance in assignments, and in some of the cases rewarded students unnecessarily. The feedback they received was not descriptive in nature among students and did not provide ample feedback to non-favorite students, but rather

discouraging critique. Subthemes under favoritism were (i) teachers" bias, (ii) discriminatory practices, and (iii) emotional disturbance. One student informed that: "We put a lot of efforts and prepare assignments. [Our] assignments were appreciated by external observers, but not by the concerned teachers due to favoritism". Another student said that: "Sometimes teachers are biased. In some situations, when some students do their work effectively and properly but the teachers intentionally identify gaps and weaknesses in their work…while others who do not work properly were responded very well by the faculty and were given positive feedback". Participant-6

Students believed that teachers" attitude is discriminatory, based on their personal likes and dislikes. It leads to sense of insecurity among students.

Theme III: Lack of professionalism in giving feedback

Third theme in our data regarding written feedback was "lack of professionalism in giving feedback". It was evident by the students" experiences that teachers are not properly trained in giving feedback and hence give feedback to students without taking into count the principles of giving and receiving effective feedback. Students who worked hard neither get positive feedback, nor any reward or recognition. Students informed about their anger over rude behavior of faculty members. In this context, we had two similar sub-themes, including (i) unhappiness, and (ii) hopelessness. Students informed about lack of performance based feedback and absence of encouragement in the form of positive remarks. "In nursing year-1, I secured first position in the whole province but I didn"t get any feedback in the form of reward or certificate. I don"t have any written thing to prove my outstanding position…I have no documented evidence". Participant-7

Another participant shared her feelings in the following words: "Nobody told us that, „excellent you did very well"…these are the statements which can encourage students to work harder and struggle more". One student informed that: "We [students] are angry due to strictness of teachers…they behave very harshly and throw the assignments of students" faces in front of others. Due to this, students

are mentally disturbed". Another student informed that:
"It happened with other students…teacher throw their assignments to criticize their work…I tell them that Allah see the struggle and wouldn"t let your struggle go in vain". One other student expressed that:
"Teachers are harsh sometimes and give feedback in a very rude way; the behavior is not liked by students".

DISCUSSION:

Feedback is a vital and vigorous element in education[6]. It refers to helpful information in the form of appreciation or denunciation to an individual. That individual then utilizes the information to improve performance and make better progress in future actions[7]. In context of learning, feedback enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of students[8]. Despite this vital significance of feedback in harnessing the educational attainment of students, our respondents reported lack of any such feedback. Our respondents were unsatisfied due to poor practice of feedback on their educational assignments and learning milestones.

The timings, content and quality of feedback affect learning outcomes. If feedback is delayed or insufficient in details, it can badly affect the prospects of improving students" learning[9]. Timely and sufficient feedback was not the case in our study. Timely feedback with recommended actions enhance critical thinking of students[10]. Constructive and meticulous comments are more likely to make students learn better[11]. One participant in our study shared that, "we didn"t get written feedback till now…we wrote assignments and submitted but we didn"t get the feedback". Another student said that, "sorry to say, never got [written feedback] till now…if ever we got, it is only a numerical feedback and not descriptive". It is against good academic practices, as written, descriptive feedback creates collaboration between teachers and their students and enables students to take appropriate corrective actions[12]. Evidence suggests that effective feedback need to be frequent, adequate, clear and timely. Moreover, the content of feedback should be optimistic, reflecting the element of information for increasing learning proficiency[13]. Our respondents however

reported that the feedback they have is often biased, leading more to hopelessness than desire to improve. Our respondents shared that if they ever get feedback that is in the form of marks or grades. Black and William suggest focusing feedback on weak students, with rich description[14]. Mere grading and marking does not create the motivation for improving studies. On the contrary, only grading can decrease existing intrinsic motivation. It can increase worry and obstruct performance[15]. Similarly, excessive negative comments on assignment of students will have negative consequences[8]. Phrasing comments in positive tone has better impact on students[16]. It was not the case in our study. Similarly, our respondents shared that they did not have any reward for better performance. Appreciation and rewards can provide students with extrinsic motivation to do better[17]. Extrinsic motivation is a behavioral change that comes with external re-enforcing factors like a prize or appreciation[18]. Emergence of "favoritism" as a theme in our research is worrisome. Students hinted towards personal contacts between students and teachers, earning better marks for them. One of our male respondents said, "it is favoritism…favoritism means that the students who have better links with the teachers are ranked well". Another student shared that, "sometime there are student who are so poor that they cannot even speak in front of people… [But they] are rewarded brightly". This kind of favoritism is being reported in literature, based on gender, race and ethnicity[19,20].

LIMITATIONS:

Our respondents hailed from Pashtun ethnicity but interviews were conducted in national language i.e. Urdu. There could be some loss of details due to this limitation.

CONCLUSION:

Our study concludes that element of written feedback is either missing or inappropriate in nursing institutes at Peshawar. Feedback is mostly verbal and often includes negative, discouraging remarks. There is no structured feedback to help students in academics. Students feel discriminated. The scarce feedback is loaded with favoritism, making students discouraged and hopeless.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

For better student experience, we recommend that nursing institutes in Peshawar should promote written, quality and structured feedback. There is a need for faculty training on how to give effective feedback to students. Feedback to students should be gender-neutral with objective criterion and clear recommendations for improvement(s).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None

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