Students’ Feedback as Quality Management Tool for Effective Teaching - Do Academic Teachers Take Advantage of It?
A Pilot Study

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- Objective:
  Assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching is a challenge for academic institutions. Quality is difficult to define since it is subjective and dynamic. Teachers’ self-assessment, peer evaluation and institutional monitoring have been the standard approach in the past. Introducing evaluation of academic teachers by their students through surveys and providing feedback has become available. Feedback is defined as sharing of information on actual performance to help guide future performance toward a desired goal (1). This assumption is the basis for evaluation and feedback for students. Students rely on constructive criticism and effective feedback from their teachers. Feedback, from a behaviorist perspective, has been shown to reinforce or modify behavior. However, it is unclear whether this assessment also refers to students’ feedback on their teachers’ performance in an academic environment. In order to determine whether academic teachers see students’ feedback as quality management tool to modify and improve their performance, a prospective pilot study was designed.

- Methods:
  Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to determine how academic teachers from different disciplines (natural sciences including medicine, engineering, education) utilize students’ feedback as tool to validate and/or adjust quality of teaching. Feedback was provided through student satisfaction surveys which were routinely administered by all academic institutions without standardizing the content and were freely accessible to all academic teachers. A pilot study including 10 academic teachers, from non-profit (n=5) and for-profit (n=5) international academic institutions were involved in this study. The study was based on different items including teaching climate, access to feedback, factors (internal and external) believed to influence interpretation of feedback, strategies for improvement, etc. that were investigated by structured interviews (2,3), which were recorded, afterwards transcribed, and analyzed in a quantitative manner. Quantitative data were collected through a standardized survey. Survey reliability was assessed through test-retesting and determination of internal consistency.

- Results:
  Survey reliability and validity criteria were met in this pilot study. Comparing qualitative and quantitative findings indicated that there was remarkable agreement. Academic teachers were more inclined to regard feedback as constructive rather than an evaluation of their performance. The overall underlying notion was that striving for quality means that continuous quality improvement is required. There was general consensus that quality control of teaching was an individual responsibility rather than an institutional responsibility. Positive influence of feedback (e.g. ranked from valuable to useless) was more pronounced in academic teachers at for-profit organizations. There was a higher likelihood for implantation of structural changes rather than content changes reflecting students’ feedback with no difference between the groups. However, teachers at for-profit academic institutions were more inclined to include content changes as well which was different from the approach of teachers employed by non-profit universities.

- Conclusions:
  In summary respondents mentioned useful feedback associated with corrective measures. In general, academic teachers positively view students’ feedback but our pilot study indicates that implementation as quality control measure depends on the type of academic institution the teacher is involved with. It is unclear however, whether different approaches of quality control standards are demanded by for-profit versus non-profit academic institutions which will be further assessed by a full-scale study. In conclusion, an academic environment should be created where feedback is expected and desirable as an essential component of effective teaching. Measures to enhance the quality of teaching should take into account the teaching conceptions if they are to be effective, as teaching approaches are strongly influenced by the underlying beliefs of the teacher.

- References:
  (3) Interview und schriftliche Befragung: Grundlagen und Methoden empirischer Sozialforschung Grundlagen und Methoden empirischer Sozialforschung 2012.
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