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



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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 students 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

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gap between instructor and student, ultimately contributing to establishment of string 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”.

Assessments whether formative or summative are valuable and rewarding for the students as well as for instructors. The method of assessment always immensely influences learning of students. Assessment instruments used by the university teachers include essay tests, objective tests, projects, practical presentations and examinations and critical reviews (Chalmers & Fuller 1996, 44). Assessment plays a crucial part in what students propose to learn and it is believed that courses assessed in whatever way affect learning intention and strategy (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996; Ramsden, 1992). The work of Brown and Hirschfield (2005) is significant in identifying the students' perceptions of assessment. It was found that student think that purpose of assessment is to make students accountable for something, and assessment is a 'fun' activity through which academic value can be enhanced. The new wave of teaching methodology such as inclusion of a case-based approach to deliver higher education has raised some new issues pertaining to assessment methods and techniques. For example the study of Pearce (2002) highlighted a debate on the issue concerning methods of assessment employed in a lecture-based versus a case-based approach to higher education. For example, the students in a case based class expect grading to be based on class engagement with a particular focus on knowledge sharing and dissemination. The researchers, Roy and Banerjee, (2012) however discussed transitioning of business schools towards a participant-centred approach from a cultural paradigm. They highlighted some innovative techniques such as student participation in class, scenario development and interpretation, and some analytical tools to be employed by students in order to evaluate various case studies. Further, assessment in higher education is a strong element of communication among the primary stakeholders such as students and instructors. However, despite the varied techniques and tools used for evaluation, language of instruction, family system, and personal values are found to impact on student perceptions of assessment in an Asian context (Jackson, 2003).

2.2. Feedback on assessment

Feedback is provided to students in an effort to enhance their learning that ultimately drives a cognitive and behavioural change (Mory, 1992). Feedback is advantageous as it adds important information and confirms the beliefs which exist to help learners in shaping new beliefs (Butler & Winne, 1995). Feedback can be defined as a broader view of learner's performance on academic activities and is considered as a dialogue to enhance learning in academia (Askew & Lodge, 2000). Feedback helps in developing a relationship between academic parties; student (learners) and instructors (evaluators). Feedback is important element that functions to enhance student learning. However, feedback has been criticized and challenged as offering low quality (Black & William, 1998; Hounsell, Hounsell, Litjens, & McCune, 2005), lack of student engagement with feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2004), issues relating to faculty workload, (Carless, 2006; Glover & Brown, 2006) and lack of fairness perception about feedback (Holmes & Smith, 2003).

Timely feedback offers great value to students. However, if the feedback is not provided on time, it lasts negligible impact on student learning (Cowan, 2003; Race, 2005). Cowan (2003) further highlights the importance of timely feedback as something perceived as most effective feedback for students. He further suggests that it must be provided to them "within minutes". Assessment and feedback are issues which have incessantly been identified as important concern by the Quality Assurance Reviews and it is proposed that the enhancement in the feedback and assessment adds great value to student experience perceptions (QAA, 2004:27).

The QAA analysis of the institutional audit report (2006) points out as though the feedback practices are fair but still there happens to be certain issues related to the quality, timeliness and consistency of the feedback in the Higher Education institutions. The formative assessment provides students with useful insight regarding areas of academic improvement (Black & William, 1998; Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). On the other side, feedback is pivotal for faculty to identify the areas that need special attention in order to facilitate student learning process.

The feedback provided to the students must be fair and constructive so to be helpful and guiding (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996, p. 46). Moreover, the continuity in providing assessment feedback is also important for students to perceive feedback on assessment as 'effective'. Once the students are over assessed, the effect on student learning can prove to be negative (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996, 43). Therefore, students would perceive feedback as useful for them if they are not being over-assessed through feedback provided to them. Nichole and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) indicated that students have some goals in their mind that work as standards to measure feedback usefulness. The instructor must understand these goals to effectively deliver feedback on assessment. Contemporary researchers highlight the role of instructors in improving the feedback perceptions through spiriting student engagement (Bond, Czernkowski, & Wells, 2012). To understand the student perception feedback, it is vital to acknowledge what they actually do with feedback provided to them. Rust (2002) recommends engaging students with feedback on assessment as if they are not engaged with the feedback provided to them then the impact on their learning and understanding would not be satisfactory. Some studies have shown that students do not need feedback at all because they do not read feedback (Ecclestone, 1998; Hounsell, 1987). It is also found that many students are only concerned with earning the grade points earned and are less focused towards enhancing learning based on feedback. Lea and Street (1998) further stated that the feedback provided to the students is often not understood by the students and it is a major hurdle in the reception of feedback by students. A widespread study conducted by Maclellan (2001) revealed that many students view feedback process "as only sometimes helpful" because students perceive feedback as providing limited opportunities for academic advancement, is repetitive based on same grounds, and is delivered in a traditional way. This necessitates the need to make feedback timely, useful, and contributory to student goals. Mirador (2000) highlights conflicting expectations of students and instructors. The instructors are more inclined to enhance learning while students focus grades.

Currently the feedback has created dissatisfaction among students as they perceive it to be something unjustified and non-useful (Orrell, 2006). It has raised concerns among faculty, administration and students in answering the question; what type of feedback is expected by students in higher education? The question has been well answered by studies conducted in the West, however, an Asian and purely a Pakistani perspective is missing and needs attention (Blair, Curtis, Goodwin, & Shields, 2013). The researchers recommend conducting context-specific studies that add value to educational-pragmatism, ultimately enhancing stakeholder learning and motivation (Kashif et al., 2013). This is where current study contributes to the recent debate on improving the feedback quality, delivered by faculty to students.

3. Methodology

The qualitative methodology has been employed to unearth the student views concerning feedback on assessment. Qualitative tools help researchers to present a phenomenon in sufficient detail that facilitate in its understanding. As defined by Shank (2002) qualitative research is “a systematic empirical inquiry into meaning” (p. 5). Qualitative research is useful in identifying the interpretive knowledge about a society such as its social norms, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion. This was linked to the scarce literature available highlighting Asian and especially Pakistani context regarding feedback on assessment. The researchers employed a qualitative methodology due to the benefits provided by qualitative research.

The researchers approached a naturalistic-paradigm inquiry to internment student views of feedback on academic tasks. Further to this an exploratory research design was employed. The major advantage of this design is the fact that researchers are able to gain detailed, open, and non-controlled responses from students (Patton, 2002). Further strengthening the methodology, a focus group technique was adopted to facilitate detailed and focused responses from the respondents (Kenny, 2005). The data was generated through employing focus group discussions with students. Four focus groups were conducted to collect the data from 18 students. Each focus group included at least four students with at least one female student. Each focused group discussions lasted for about 1 h. The students were final year degree students, having experience of receiving feedback and they were selected as a sample, based on this fact. The focus group technique has been preferred over other techniques because it supports interaction among respondents, delivers detailed data sets with in-depth response, and is considered useful in highlighting student perspectives (Barbour, 2005; Patton, 2002). The students were recruited on a purposive sampling technique with eyeing on their year of study. Hence, all the students enrolled in university were regarded as population frame and volunteers were requested to take part in the study. The sampling technique allowed researchers to select only those respondents who have been able to provide detailed information about the phenomenon under discussion (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007). The focus group sessions were employed through a questioning route and for pilot testing one session was conducted to evaluate ‘ease’ of understanding of questions being probed. It was observed that questions posed are easily understandable and do not need any further adjustment. This process has been well recognized through academic literature and is highly preferred in academic qualitative research (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The focus group discussion was noted by co-researcher and students were posed to different questions during approximately 45 min per session.

The context of this study is a private sector university located in the largest Pakistani province in terms of population; Punjab. The University has been considered as a case study. Qualitative researchers recommend employing a case study methodology where a certain issue needs contextual grounding (Patton, 2002). This was well aligned with the needs of current study as feedback on assessment views, from a Pakistani perspective are unknown. The questions raised during focus group discussions were; “What do you understand by the feedback?”, “Which type of feedback is preferred by you?”, “What do you mean by effective feedback?”, “How has been your experience with the instructor providing feedback on assessment?”. Moreover, the discussion with students also made regarding the ‘timely’ and ‘fair’ feedback i.e. how students perceive timely and fair feedback? These questions were drawn from the work of Pokory and Pickford (2010) as a guide to conduct and brainstorm focus group sessions. The students also drew attention towards usefulness of feedback in improving their academic and professional performance. Furthermore, the role of teachers in feedback provision remained central issues. The approach regarding taking views from students, the sample size and technique have been validated through the recent studies conducted to unearth student feedback (Blair & McGinty, 2013).

The data collected as noted and some transcripts were prepared in order to serve data analysis purposes. Thematic analysis has been defined as a process of reading and re-reading the data very carefully in order to understand the hidden meanings, inherent in data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). It has been useful in studies where the construct has not been well defined and requires a detail-orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There were different steps followed while analysing the qualitative data collected through focus group sessions. Initially, the researchers noted all the responses in the form of transcripts and read the data in detail several times (Speziale and Carpenter, 2003). In the second phase, the researchers developed some focused notes, in order to understand the data (Polit, Beck, & Hungler, 2006). Thirdly, the researchers worked independently on the written transcripts and tried to come up with some keywords that were considered important to reach meaningful conclusions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This followed a debate amongst the researchers that helped in development of themes (Meadows, 2003). This led to repeatedly revising the identified themes and followed by many discussions with a core focus on highlighting the new ideas to life (Speziale and Carpenter, 2005). The results were shared with senior professor who did not suggest any further changes in the data developed. The methodology was ensured to deliver inter-coder reliability and outcome validity. The data analysis revealed eight themes that will be discussed under findings section below.

4. Findings

4.1. Defining feedback

The students were asked to share their own definitions regarding feedback on assessment, provided by their course instructors. The definition emerged from one of the groups is given under;

“Feedback is the response of the instructor to your work. It helps in understanding the standards expected by instructors and ultimately, leads us to understand the concepts and their applications”.

4.2. Theme 1 – Satisfaction with the feedback

There was no consensus, among the groups, on the satisfaction with the feedback. There were only few participants who expressed their complete satisfaction with the feedback. They identified several benefits of feedback which include: 1) feedback helps in identification of knowledge gaps; 2) it is useful in rectifying the errors; 3) it offers an opportunity for learning; and 4) it helps in improving performance (see statements in Table 1).

Some students were of the view that they were not having a satisfactory experience with the feedback. They believed that feedback provided was not justified and they were unable to understand what is required from them in reality. The nature of dissatisfaction also widely varied among students: 1) true feedback is not provided; 2) the feedback provided is mostly subjective; 3) it is usually meaningless; 4) rare; 5) it is never clear from the feedback that what is actually expected from instructor; 6) some instructors discriminate students in grading and feedback; and 7) it is rarely given in written form (see statements in Table 1).

In response to the nature of feedback received on assessment, some of the participants reported that only grades are assigned to them which at times are sufficient for their better understanding of concepts and their applications. However, some argued that a mere sharing of grades is insufficient and may create confusions and frustrations.

From the perspective of students, as emerged out of discussions, feedback is only effective when: 1) it clearly describes what is expected from students; 2) it highlights certain areas for improvement; 3) it recognizes strengths of students; 4) it emphasizes on learning of critical concepts and applications; and 5) it is provided in both the written as well as in verbal forms.

The students defined useful feedback as to which they are able to compare with their previous performance and are applicable. The discussion was also carried on as how feedback can help students in improving in-class performance? The responses were again varied as many students were aware of the basis used to evaluate their work hence, feedback on assessment was extremely important for them.

In view of the foregoing discussions and statements of the participants given in Table 1, there are seven dimensions of effective feedback which include: 1) Usefulness; 2) Justice; 3) Depth; 4) Clarity; 5) Guidance for improvement; 6) An opportunity for learning; and 7) Knowledge of evaluation criteria.

4.3. Theme 2 – Scope of the feedback

Many participants desired that scope of the feedback should not be limited to examinations, assignments and projects, but should also be extended to industry tours, guest speaker sessions, and research reports (see statement in Table 2). In other words, students expect feedback on almost all kind of activities related with teaching.

Table 1

Theme 1 – Satisfaction with feedback.

Sub-theme	Statements of the participants
Usefulness	“It is helping me in improving my academic status”. “It is very useful to gain feedback”.
Justice	“I found all of my instructors fair”. “The instructors favour some students. Despite having the same quality of work, I mostly got lesser grades as compared with my peers”.
Depth Clarity	“The instructors provide detailed feedback, although not written all the time, but it is useful”. “I do not find feedback useful unless being aware of what is being expected from me.” “The feedback is important but most of the times, instructor did not define clearly as what is being expected from us? This situation leaves us confused”.
Guidance for improvement	“The useful feedback is one which helps in identification and rectification of mistakes rather than merely criticizing the work performed. “Do not just criticize on our work but also suggest some improvements as how to make it better”.
An opportunity for learning	“The instructors must tell us as what to do and what not to do because otherwise the feedback will merely be a ‘feedback’ rather than an opportunity for learning”.
Knowledge of evaluation criteria	“In most cases, I observed that instructors do not explain their expectations in detail. But when the assignment is marked, then, in an effort to justify their grading, they explained as what was supposed to be done”.

Table 2
Theme 2 – Scope of feedback.

Theme	Statements of the participants
Scope of the feedback	<p>“I attended many guest speaker sessions but neither it [this activity] was graded nor was it taken up as an academic activity. This was so discouraging for me and for my friends. Finally, it left us demotivated to perform these activities in future”.</p> <p>“I was asked to attend various seminars and workshops. These events require a certain level of performance but are not evaluated and result in wasting the time”.</p>

4.4. Theme 3 – Demand for feedback

The students do proactively demand feedback unless provided by the instructor. However, some of the participants believed that it was primary responsibility of instructors to provide feedback to the students, whether demanded or not.

Demand for positive feedback exists but negative feedback is not always welcomed. However, a large number of participants emphasized that they need feedback, whether positive or negative. Some of the students consider the task of providing feedback to students as an obligation, while some participants highlighted that they needed to know the criteria on which their academic tasks were being evaluated (see Table 3).

4.5. Theme 4 – Continuity of feedback

The participants were also asked about the continuity of feedback on assessment. Their responses were contrasting. Some of the students were in favour of continuous feedback to enhance their learning. While others opined out that feedback should be provided at only critical stages of the semester (Table 4).

4.6. Theme 5 – Mode of feedback communication

Most of students strongly favoured the idea that feedback to students should be provided individually and in private as in this way they feel more comfortable in asking further.

Furthermore, one-to-one feedback was regarded as highly critical for effective learning and better performance of the students. The one to one feedback was also considered useful in rapport building with instructor. Some students were in favour of the group feedback and considered it contributing to enhance the learning of all students working in a group (see Table 5).

4.7. Theme 6 – Timing of the feedback

The timeliness of feedback was also considered important for university students. Most of the students affirmed that they got feedback on timely basis. Some argued that the true spirit of usefulness of feedback on assessment is its timeliness because, otherwise, it is of no use for them. A participant pointed out that if feedback is provided with considerable delay, then it is difficult for the students to relate feedback with their efforts. It is also important to point out that students find diminishing interest in feedback, if it is provided late (see Table 6).

4.8. Theme 7 – Competence of instructors

Some of the participants believed that instructors need to have relative competence in making assessments. Another important aspect was the role of instructor in improving not only the class performance, but also the quality of assigned work. The students viewed instructors to be knowledgeable, experienced, and willing to guide students in order to improve the performance (Table 7).

4.9. Theme 8 – Student–instructor relationships and feedback

The students drew attention to the quality of student–instructor relationship as they find it valuable to make the quality relationship with their tutors in the context of feedback. Many students were in support that there should be a mentor–

Table 3
Theme 3 – Demand of feedback.

Theme	Statements of the participants
Obligation on instructors	“Instructors are responsible for our learning and understanding so they should take initiative to provide feedback even if students are not asking for it”.
Need to know criteria for evaluation	“I take feedback positively even if I don't like it but I should know the grounds on which I am being assessed”.

Table 4

Theme 4 – Continuity of feedback.

Theme	Statements of the participants
Continuity of feedback	“Feedback must be detailed and continuous because it is imperative to learn about the mistakes”. “Feedback should be provided only for critical academic activities and in times when needed”.

Table 5

Theme 5 – Mode of feedback communication.

Theme	Statements of the participants
Mode of feedback communication	“Individual feedback is much more useful as it never lets me down in front of my classmates”. “I had a feeling of being personal when feedback is provided to me individually. It is more detailed as I tend to ask a lot of questions and instructor also feels more relaxing while providing me the feedback”. “Feedback should be provided to students in groups as each person should benefit from it”.

Table 6

Theme 6 – Timing of the feedback.

Theme	Statements of the participants
Timely provision	“The feedback should be fair and timely”. “I do not get timely feedback, at times, which is frustrating and does not help me in improving performance”. “If feedback is not provided timely, then it is difficult for me to relate feedback with my efforts”. “I find less or no interest in reviewing feedback, if it is delayed”.

mentee relationship between the tutor and students where students can share what they do not understand and the tutor can thus guide in an effective way.

The students having a good relationship with their tutors were greatly satisfied with the feedback provided to them and they credited it to their instructors.

The students felt that some of their instructors are not flexible in terms of building relationships with the students. It causes certain academic problems regarding feedback (Table 8).

5. Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to open up a debate amongst Asian and Pakistani academics with regard to feedback provided concerning student assessments in higher degree programmes. An exploratory approach was adopted by implying the qualitative methods and four focus groups sessions were held to collect data from higher degree students enrolled in a private university. The results of feedback are quite encouraging and it is important to note here that students understood the importance of feedback being provided to them by course instructors. This has been well highlighted through the work of Pokory and Pickford (2010) where data was collected from a British university and students acknowledged the importance of feedback provided to them by course instructors. The understanding of students with regards to feedback on assessment can be seen in the light of students being considered as customers. They are properly communicated with the assessment criteria that impact an overall grade.

Feedback is very important and a continuous process of improving student performance. Pakistani students believe that feedback is imperative in academic settings and surely enhances their performance. It supports the argument of Heywood (2000, 152) that feedback is something which helps a person to improve his/her performance levels and contributes positively towards learning in higher education. The students seemed desirous to understand the criteria and standards of assessment, employed by the course instructors while evaluating their work. These results are in line with the study conducted by Higgins and Hartley (2002) where authors suggested that provision of feedback should be considered as

Table 7

Theme 7 – Competence of instructors.

Theme	Statements of the participants
Competence of instructors in feedback	“It depends upon the ability of an instructor as how he/she provides guidelines about performing a certain task. It is also important that the work performed is evaluated instead of merely criticizing”. “The instructor must be experienced, knowledgeable, and initiative driven. A proactive approach should be adopted where an instructor guides students, communicating with them the different sources to perform the work. It will ultimately raise the performance levels”. “My instructor teaching the strategic management course is very experienced and brings a lot of material to the class in the form of case studies, articles, and research papers which help us in thinking differently about assigned tasks”. “To me effective feedback helps us to improve the performance, lets us know about the instructors' expectations, and enhances learning and relationships with instructors. It mostly depends upon as how well everything is being communicated to us by the instructor”.

Table 8
Theme 8 – Student–instructor relationship and feedback.

Theme	Statements of the participants
Expectations from instructors	<p>“I want my instructor to act as a mentor for me from whom I can learn and share my study related issues as well”.</p> <p>“I am always reluctant to ask for feedback from my accounting instructor as he is a very rigid and inflexible personality”.</p> <p>“I dislike the way my instructor teaches us in the class because he is highly inflexible and his core focus is always on meeting deadlines rather than enhancing our learning”.</p> <p>“The Instructors must be flexible, learning-centred, and willing to help and this is the only way I think feedback on assessment will create a real positive impact”.</p> <p>“I am always afraid of some instructors and hesitate in asking questions from them in the class because they are rigid and strict. This in turn, leads to poor performance in assessment units; quizzes, assignments, and other related academic tasks”.</p> <p>“The instructor should be amenable, easy to talk with and friendly as well. However, along with that stringent enough to maintain discipline in the class as it will surely enhance learning in the class rooms”.</p>

communication process and important facets of academic feedback must be communicated to students. Demand for the feedback definitely exists even in collectivist cultural settings, whether explicitly stated or implicitly asked for. It is very clear that feedback is valued by Pakistani students but they also stressed the fact that course instructors must provide timely feedback. Any feedback which is timely, considered useful otherwise, late feedback does not result in academic improvements. This is popularized through the work of Carless (2006) where ‘timeliness’ in provision of assessment feedback was considered imperative to student learning and satisfaction in higher education. Cowan (2003) further stressed the timeliness of feedback provision by arguing that instructors must try to provide feedback as early as possible. It has a cultural frame as well. As people in Pakistan score high on uncertainty avoidance that means they do not want to take risks in major field of life such as education (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In order to minimize the risks associated with degree completion and career growth, students expect feedback to work as a tool to enhance learning that will help them in completion of a degree smoothly.

Another perspective emerged from this study is fairness perception of feedback provided by the instructors. Students expect instructors to never discriminate among students on any basis; race, religion, and gender in particular. This fairness of feedback was discussed by Holmes and Smith (2003) and the results of this study support the notion that feedback must not only be timely, but fair as well. In a culture that scores high on Masculinity (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), the dominant social values are personal achievement, competition, and performance. Hence, everyone has been competing with others in terms of grades and reputation that leads to earning a good job in near future. That forms the logic behind students expecting instructors to be fair and non-discriminative.

Pakistani students considered formative assessment more important as compared with summative assessment in higher education settings. The students believed instructors to help them in improving the course performance on a continuous basis that will ultimately develop students as true learners. This has been in line with the research conducted by MacFarlane-Dick (2006) where students’ on-going performance assessments were valued. Another reason is that Pakistani universities are employing several new methods and criteria to evaluate student assessments. Many students do not have concrete understanding of those assessment tasks. Hence, the formative assessment will ultimately help not only in understanding the true nature of assessment item but will also develop an understanding to score better.

The instructor’s ability to provide feedback affects highly the perception of feedback by the students and it is believed that feedback will not enhance learning if it is misunderstood by students (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). These misunderstandings are generally attributed to lecturer’s inability to understand the students’ perspective and providing feedback in a way that is not desirable by them (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). There may be some instructors who provide feedback in a traditional way as their feedback is limited only to awarding grades (Weaver, 2006). This type of feedback is also important where grades are allocated to students but it also creates a disparity between instructor’s intentions behind provision of feedback and student’s interpretation of feedback (Lea & Street, 2000). As new techniques and methods have been emerging in academia, the ability of an instructor to keep him/her updated is pivotal to deliver feedback in a desirous way to students.

The student satisfaction with feedback has always remained an area of concern in student feedback studies. The results of current study reveal that students are not completely satisfied with the provision of feedback. Justice, clarity, guides for improvement, and identification of some knowledge gaps are the areas where students believe improvements must be made. For example, students think that instructors merely criticize the work and do not stress the need to suggest improvements. Another reason of this dissatisfaction has been the non-justification of feedback and resulting grades. The results of this study are in line with the study conducted by Hounsell et al. (2008) where researchers found some reasons that lead to dissatisfaction with feedback on assessments.

Pakistani students believed that feedback must be provided as a developmental process, on continuous basis. This domain of work in feedback has not been well documented so far, but the work of Chalmers and Fuller (1996) favoured this idea of providing feedback on continuous basis to students. This can provide many advantages such as; student engagement and satisfaction with feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2004); perceived usefulness and importance of feedback on assessments (McCune & Hounsell, 2005); and improving the student performance through feedback (Heywood, 2000). The students also

suggested providing feedback in the form of groups that has a pure cultural definition. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Pakistanis are a collectivist society where others' interests are also taken into account while making decisions. Hence, some students suggested that feedback must be provided in the form of groups. That will also serve a feedback to be 'justified' as delivered in front of whole class or a group of students. The criticism such as favouring students based on gender and homophile can be effectively managed.

The students considered instructor as the core behind feedback on assessment perceptions. They seemed to develop and grow relationships with the instructors in educational settings. The personality of instructor, his/her methods of learning, and the fairness and justice all was viewed from a 'relational' perspective. These are understandable in a society that scores high on collectivism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). However, in terms of evaluation and feedback, that will be a real challenge to impart student learning and evaluation in particular, the balancing act would be a difficult task. The rapport building studies are however a common phenomenon as the same results have been presented in earlier studies conducted in individualistic societies (Faranda & Clarke, 2004). These studies also verify the results of previous work conducted in a Pakistani context to enhance student motivation and learning. The role of instructors and influence of peers has already been highlighted in Pakistani context (Kashif et al., 2013).

Despite all the themes have been well grounded in previously published academic research, the nature of these results is different. There are certain cultural avenues highlighted through the findings of this study. The feedback as a relationship building opportunity with the instructor, focus on depth, clarity, and detail while providing feedback, group-based feedback provision to increase the vigilance and character of feedback, and expectations such as courteous as well as helping behaviour of instructor can easily be linked with well-established cultural paradigm of Asian as well as Pakistani society. A high score on collectivism and uncertainty avoidance can be linked with rapport building efforts and an expectation of detail orientation to minimize the academic and social risks of failure. Further to this, a high score on Masculinity translates students being more focused towards performing better through earning a reputation of a successful person in society. All these support the study of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005).

6. Conclusion

There have been several strategies proposed to academia that would ascertain the usefulness of feedback with positive impact on student learning, satisfaction and academic performance. The student satisfaction with feedback must be regarded as an important element in academic circles. This can be made possible through elements such as enhancing perceived usefulness of feedback, justifying the grading criteria, communicating clearly the outcomes of feedback, providing detailed feedback to students, and identifying knowledge gaps that help to enhance student learning. These elements have been emerged in Theme 1 and must be dealt with care to increase student satisfaction with feedback on assessment. The logic of proposing this proposition is the study of Hounsell et al. (2008) where student learning and high academic performance has been linked positively to feedback-satisfaction.

Scope of feedback must be acknowledged and should not be limited only to course-based assessments. Because studies in different universities are supported with industry tours, seminars/workshops, and guest speaker sessions, hence students believe that these activities must be graded through provision of feedback. This entails that students desire every academic activity to be assessed in order to enhance students' academic learning and performance.

Feedback on assessment must be continuous instead of a one-time activity. The students believed that continuous provision of constructive feedback enhances learning and helps in rectifying the errors made. The usefulness of feedback is also attributed to its timeliness as otherwise, gaps in working for that assignment or project may never be minimized. This strategy has also been proposed through the scholarly work of Race (2005) where the researcher stressed the need to provide timely feedback on continuous basis.

Instructors must be well trained to assess the student performance. They must incorporate their experience, knowledge, and initiative-drive approach to make assessment as higher learning and fun activity. The results of this study revealed that students consider their instructors to play a major role in enhancing the validity and perceived usefulness of feedback on assessment. This strategy has been well documented in literature through the work of Brown and Hirschfield (2005).

Although the study provided holistic and contemporary insights regarding feedback provided to students but it has certain limitations. The data has been collected from one university located in province of Punjab, Pakistan which limits the generalization of results. This can be justified by the fact that generalization was never been the purpose of this research rather the objective was to ignite a discussion of feedback on assessment provided by course instructors in Asian and specifically Pakistani settings. Pokory and Pickford (2010) adopted the same approach where they collected data from a single university, considering it a case. Another limitation of this study is that the student demographics were not identified and data is presented as a whole, non-discriminating the disciplines. Future studies are highly recommended to use quantitative methods to address this issue of student perceptions on feedback. The current study can be used as a ground study for quantitative assessment of feedback perceptions and the extent of student satisfaction with these eight identified themes can be constructed.

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