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From Feedback Receipt to Feedback Uptake: Feedback Literacy and Sustainable Assessment in a General Foundation Programme

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ABSTRACT

Assessment sustainability depends not only on the provision of feedback but also on learners' capacity to understand feedback, evaluate quality, manage their emotional responses, and use feedback for future learning. This mixed-methods study examined the relationship between student feedback literacy, engagement with feedback, and perceived assessment sustainability in a General Foundation Programme at a private higher education institution in Oman. Data were collected from 92 foundation-level students through a structured questionnaire and from 12 teachers through semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, one-sample t-tests, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. Qualitative interview data were analysed thematically. The results indicated that students reported moderately positive levels of feedback literacy, engagement with feedback, and perceived assessment sustainability. Feedback literacy was positively associated with engagement with feedback and perceived assessment sustainability, and it significantly predicted feedback engagement. Teacher interviews showed that feedback was commonly provided through written comments, verbal guidance, and peer review; however, student uptake was shaped by motivation, emotional response, understanding of criteria, and opportunities for dialogue. The study concludes that sustainable assessment in foundation-level education requires feedback to be designed as an active learning process rather than as a one-way transmission of comments. The findings suggest that feedback literacy can be strengthened through explicit guidance, rubric-based discussion, peer review, reflection tasks, and structured opportunities for students to act on feedback. The study contributes to assessment and feedback research by foregrounding feedback uptake in a foundation-programme context and

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by offering practical implications for educators working with academically diverse learners.

Keywords: Feedback Literacy; Feedback Uptake; Sustainable Assessment; General Foundation Programme; Formative Assessment; Higher Education

Introduction

Assessment in higher education has moved from its restrictive purpose of measuring attainment to taking on a development-oriented approach that contributes to learning, decision-making and academic independence in the future. While conventional assessment practices see students as receivers of marks and feedback, sustainable assessment focuses on learners' ability to take advantage of their assessment experiences in order to continue learning beyond the current unit or task (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Boud & Soler, 2016). In terms of sustainable assessment, students should be able to evaluate quality, interpret standards, make judgments and implement feedback in further learning activities.

Feedback plays an important part in the process described above. However, its presence does not mean that the student will improve. A student can receive a lot of comments but still have problems understanding what is being said; he or she may concentrate solely on marks or simply lack the skills and motivation needed to do something about his or her performance. Feedback literacy research takes care of this problem by stressing the importance of understandings, competencies and dispositions that make it possible to interpret feedback and use it effectively (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020). Thus, feedback literacy offers an interesting angle from which to analyze students' reactions to feedback.

General Foundation Programmes (GFPs) provide an important context for considering feedback literacy. In most cases, GFPs help students move from high school to university by improving academic English, math, information technology, study skills, and discipline preparation. Students in GFPs can be very diverse in terms of their academic preparation, self-esteem, language abilities, and knowledge about assessment in higher education. The diversity makes feedback necessary but also difficult because students need help, but they do not necessarily know how to understand the feedback, evaluate the quality of their own performance, or make necessary changes.

The research focuses on the issues of feedback literacy and sustainable assessment in the context of GFPs. Instead of looking at feedback as comments provided by the teacher, the research considers feedback as a learning process which requires the students' comprehension, involvement, and action. With the help of the combination of students' surveys and teachers' interviews, the research explores the relationship between feedback literacy and feedback engagement and sustainable assessment perception and how teachers see the obstacles and opportunities related to developing feedback uptake.

Research Problem

Despite the fact that feedback is regularly provided in foundation level classes, students do not make consistent use of it to help with their learning process. The main

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problem that arises from this is the distance between giving the feedback and using it. Students often just read the comments, focus on the marks, or wait for the teacher to correct everything without taking into account the role that feedback can play in self-regulation and future performance.

In the cases of foundation and GFP, the problem can be even more significant due to the transitional nature of the students. Foundation students are still forming academic skills and understanding of the institution's standards and requirements. Therefore, if the assessment system stays grade-focused, it will be difficult for them to develop evaluative skills and learn to self-regulate during assessment processes. This means that we have to look at both feedback teachers give and feedback students perceive.

Research Objectives

To examine students' reported levels of feedback literacy, engagement with feedback, and perceived assessment sustainability in a GFP context.

To investigate the relationships among feedback literacy, feedback engagement, and perceived assessment sustainability.

To identify teachers' perceptions of current feedback practices and factors affecting student engagement with feedback.

To propose practical implications for embedding feedback literacy within assessment design in foundation-level higher education.

Research Questions

What levels of feedback literacy, feedback engagement, and perceived assessment sustainability do GFP students report?

What relationships exist among feedback literacy, feedback engagement, and perceived assessment sustainability?

How do teachers describe current feedback practices and barriers to student feedback uptake?

How can feedback literacy be integrated into assessment design to support sustainable learning in GFPs?

Analytical Expectations

In order to guide the quantitative analysis, the following analytical assumptions were set:

The feedback literacy scores of the students would statistically significantly exceed the neutral point of the scale.

The feedback literacy variable would have a positive relationship with both the feedback engagement and assessment sustainability variables.

The feedback engagement variable would positively relate to the assessment sustainability variable.

Feedback literacy would be a predictor of feedback engagement.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant for three main reasons. Firstly, it adds to the growing literature on feedback literacy by focusing on this concept from the perspective of a foundation-programme setting in which learners are at the early stage of their

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education and need guidance. Secondly, it identifies the relationship between feedback literacy and sustainable assessment since learners' ability to understand and implement feedback could contribute to sustainable learning. Thirdly, it offers some practical recommendations for teachers, programme managers, and curriculum developers who seek to improve formative assessment approaches. In addition, this research is significant to higher education institutions that operate in a context where foundation or preparatory programs are used as a transition to university-level education. In the latter case, assessment has not only to certify readiness but also encourage the formation of learning strategies and confidence. Thus, the research outlines both students' and teachers' views on feedback literacy.

Definition of Key Terms

Sustainable assessment: Sustainable assessment means assessment practices that deal with the learning needs at present, as well as prepare students for any future learning demands. It emphasizes evaluative judgement, self-regulation, and the ability to learn continuously beyond any particular assignment or module.

Feedback literacy: Feedback literacy means the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to understand the feedback and make use of it to improve learning methods and future assignments.

Feedback engagement: Feedback engagement means the involvement of students with feedback, such as understanding the comments provided, making revisions to the work, and using feedback on future assignments.

Evaluative judgement: Evaluative judgement means the ability to make judgments about the quality of one's own work as well as others.

Dialogic feedback: Dialogic feedback means feedback as a dialogue-based process where both teacher and learners engage in clarifying meanings, negotiating criteria, and reaching a common understanding.

Literature Review

Sustainable Assessment and Long-Term Learning

Sustainable assessment emerged as a critique of assessment methods focused on performance, certification, and grading systems. According to Boud (2000), assessment should equip learners with skills for lifelong learning. Later, Boud and Falchikov (2006) related assessment to lifelong learning through emphasizing the importance of developing judgment skills that extend beyond the course objectives. In their turn, Boud and Soler (2016) revisited the notion of sustainable assessment, paying special attention to the importance of developing assessment practices that would prepare students for future learning.

The key feature of sustainable assessment is the ability to judge. The learner should be able to evaluate quality, compare his or her achievements with standards and make a decision regarding the next steps (Tai et al., 2018). If learners depend on teachers' feedback only, they become dependent on an external judgment. Sustainable assessment aims at developing the learner's ability to control and regulate one's progress. The issue becomes especially important in the context of foundation programmes, as it prepares students for undergraduate studies.

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Feedback as a Learning Process

The notion of feedback had traditionally been seen as an information given to the learners by teachers concerning their performance. According to Hattie & Timperley (2007), effective feedback is the information helping the learners to understand their goals, measure their progress towards achieving those goals, and take necessary steps afterwards. However, modern feedback studies have criticized such a transmission approach to feedback suggesting that feedback becomes effective only when interpreted and used by the students.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) associate feedback with the concept of self-regulated learning and suggest that feedback should help the students to define the criteria, to evaluate their own progress, and plan further steps for improvement. Similarly, Winstone et al. (2017) show that the idea of feedback receptivity means that the learners have to be actively engaged in this process.

Feedback Literacy and Feedback Uptake

Student feedback literacy offers a lens with which to understand how and why feedback can make a difference in the process of learning. Carless and Boud (2018) outline several dimensions of feedback literacy, namely appreciating feedback, judgement, management of affect, and agency. Molloy et al. (2020) propose an additional definition of feedback literacy as a learning-based construct involving seeking, interpreting and using feedback.

Student feedback literacy is not a personal quality but can be developed via a number of means like curricular design, classroom dialogue and practice. Intervention-oriented studies conducted in recent years have shown that students are able to develop certain skills related to feedback literacy when they are offered the opportunity to engage with criteria, reflection on feedback and planning revision (Little et al., 2024). In the context of GFPs this is especially important since students might lack the relevant experience.

Feedback in EFL and Foundation-Level Contexts

The role of feedback becomes more complex in the context of EFL and foundation programs because students are working on improving their language skills, academic structuring, reasoning, and self-confidence at the same time. Hyland and Hyland (2006) suggest that feedback for second-language writing is not just about error correction; rather, it is both interpersonal and motivational. If the feedback is viewed as a criticism or merely error correction by students, they would not engage with it or use the feedback for future assignments.

Students studying in foundation programs may have problems with comprehending feedback terminology, incorporating feedback into new assignments, and understanding rubrics. The environments of higher education institutions in the Gulf region often include GFPs which cater to students who have diverse educational backgrounds and different levels of preparation (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018).

Teacher Feedback Practices and Institutional Conditions

Teacher practice is a critical component in developing feedback literacy. Feedback is considered most effective for learning purposes when it is timely, clear, dialogical,

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and forward-looking. Dawson et al. (2019) note that good feedback is usually seen as something that is able to help learners utilize the information received to improve future learning outcomes. Henderson et al. (2019) add that the effectiveness of feedback depends on facilitating factors that include good design, engagement of learners, ability of teachers, and feedback culture.

However, even in the basic level of learning, where teachers provide plenty of written and oral feedback to their students, learners may need specific assistance in interpreting feedback. Peer reviews, guidance through rubrics, reflective journals, feedback plans, and revisions cycles are some of practical approaches that may help move from receiving feedback to making sense out of it. However, implementation of all these approaches requires coordination among different courses.

Research Gap

However, the present state of literature indicates the importance of sustainable assessment, feedback literacy and evaluative judgement in higher education. On the other hand, empirical studies on the connection between feedback literacy, feedback engagement and perception of assessment sustainability in GFPs remain rare. Most of the previous research focuses on the undergraduate students or Western contexts of higher education, while foundation programmes provide a distinct environment for learning.

In this respect, this study investigates feedback literacy and feedback adoption in a GFP. By combining student survey data and teacher interviews, this research can offer both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on the problem under consideration. This study does not attempt to prove causality but aims to reveal the associations and teacher practices that could be used to create sustainable feedback.

Methodology

Research Design

A convergent mixed-method design was used, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected in one larger phase of the research process and then merged during the interpretation of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire from the students, whereas qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews from the teachers. Both strands of data were then analyzed separately before being compared with each other to provide a fuller understanding of feedback literacy and assessment sustainability in the GFP.

In the quantitative strand, self-reported students' levels of feedback literacy, their engagement with feedback, and their views on assessment sustainability were assessed, as well as the relationships between the above constructs. In the qualitative strand, teachers' views on feedback, student engagement, and ways of embedding feedback literacy in assessment were assessed.

Research Context and Participants

This current research has been carried out in the context of a General Foundation Programme in one of the privately owned Higher Education Institutions of Oman, which is aimed at helping the learners develop their academic language, mathematics, information technology and study skills before going to undergraduate studies.

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A total number of 92 foundation level students majoring in English, mathematics, and information technology were the participants of this research. Purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the learners with various academic backgrounds from the GFP programme.

Teachers selected for the current research included 12 teachers with varying years of experience of teaching foundation level students, from three to fifteen years of experience. The selection criterion was participation of teachers in assessment and feedback practices.

Table 1

Participants of the Study

Participant Group	Number	Relevant Characteristics
Students	92	Foundation-level students enrolled in English, mathematics, and information technology streams
Teachers	12	Foundation-level instructors with 3 to 15 years of teaching experience

Instruments

Two instruments were used. The first instrument was a structured student questionnaire based on existing feedback and assessment theories. The questionnaire measured three constructs: feedback literacy, students' use of feedback and perception of the sustainability of the assessment practice. Responses on the scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree were obtained from the students for all the three constructs. Internal reliability of the constructs using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was above 0.85.

The second instrument was an interview schedule that was used in conducting the teacher interviews. The questions in the interview schedule addressed the nature of the feedback that the teachers gave to the students, reactions of the students to the feedback, hindrances to feedback use and measures that can be used to facilitate the sustainability of assessment process.

Data Collection Procedure

Approval from an ethical review board was obtained before the data collection process. The questionnaire for students was distributed through an online platform during two weeks. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were assured that the results of the survey would remain anonymous and would be used strictly for research purposes. Interviews with teachers were conducted face-to-face or online depending on the convenience of the participants. The interview duration was 30 to 45 minutes, recorded with permission from the participants, and then transcribed. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, their rights, and privacy.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was carried out using SPSS. To describe the nature and distribution of the three variables from the survey, descriptive statistics were used. One sample t-test was performed to compare mean responses against the neutral point

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of the five point scale. Correlation between feedback literacy, feedback engagement and sustainability of assessments was investigated using Pearson correlation while simple regression was conducted to predict the engagement with feedback using feedback literacy.

For qualitative interviews data, thematic analysis was carried out based on the method suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved repeated readings of the transcribed interview scripts to identify significant segments which are coded for similar codes that are grouped into themes. These themes were then reviewed against the data and re-coded for better labeling of the themes.

4. Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis showed that all three constructs scored above the neutral point on the scale. The highest mean was obtained for feedback literacy, followed by feedback engagement and sustainability of assessment.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Survey Constructs

Construct	Min-Max	Mean	SD	t vs. 3.00
Feedback literacy	2.10-4.80	3.68	0.63	$t(91) = 10.35, p < .001$
Engagement with feedback	1.90-4.70	3.54	0.67	$t(91) = 7.73, p < .001$
Perceived assessment sustainability	2.00-4.60	3.49	0.61	$t(91) = 7.70, p < .001$

This implies that most students think they can understand feedback and make use of it. It is clear from the mean values as well. The slightly low values of engagement and sustainability imply that the students realize the importance of feedback but are not necessarily translating it to learning behaviors.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among the three main constructs.

Table 3

Pearson Correlations among Survey Constructs

Variable	1	2	3
1. Feedback literacy	1		
2. Engagement with feedback	.61**	1	
3. Perceived assessment sustainability	.57**	.62**	1

Note. ** $p < .01$.

These results suggest positive and statistically significant connections between all the three constructs. There is a very high correlation between feedback literacy and engagement with feedback ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) and a moderate to high correlation between feedback literacy and perception of sustainability of assessment ($r = .57$, $p < .01$). At the same time, there is a positive correlation between engagement with feedback and perception of sustainability of assessment ($r = .62$, $p < .01$). Altogether,

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the results confirm the hypothesis that sustainable assessment depends on feedback as well as on its use by students.

Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression was conducted to test whether feedback literacy predicted engagement with feedback.

Table 4

Regression Analysis: Feedback Literacy Predicting Engagement with Feedback

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	p
Feedback literacy	0.65	0.09	.61	7.30	< .001

Model summary: $R = .61$, $R^2 = .37$, $F(1, 90) = 53.33$, $p < .001$.

Regression analysis was statistically significant and explained about 37 percent of variance in feedback engagement. This finding indicates that those who scored higher on feedback literacy were more likely to engage in feedback processes. The result can only be viewed as an indication of prediction, not as proof of causality, because of the cross-sectional nature of this study.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of teacher interviews generated three main themes: feedback availability, barriers to feedback uptake, and structured integration for sustainable assessment.

Theme 1: Feedback Was Available but Not Always Converted into Action

The teachers noted that methods such as written comments, verbal feedback, tutorials, and peer review were applied. However, it was found out that the students tended to read the feedback superficially, focus on their marks, or not implement the feedback to their future work at all. The above-mentioned theme reveals the fact that the main problem is not just the lack of feedback.

Table 5

Theme 1: Feedback Availability and Uptake

Key Finding	Representative Teacher Comments
Teachers used multiple feedback modes.	"I use peer feedback sessions alongside written comments; it helps students see different perspectives on their work." (T5)
Students often focused on grades rather than feedback content.	"Sometimes students focus on the grade rather than the feedback content, which limits the benefit of the assessment." (T2)
Verbal feedback supported immediate clarification.	"Verbal feedback during tutorials is more effective for immediate understanding than only giving written notes." (T8)

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Theme 2: Student Uptake Was Shaped by Motivation, Confidence, Emotion, and Criteria Awareness

The involvement of learners in feedback was found to be dependent on their levels of motivation, self-confidence, previous academic competencies, emotional reaction, and awareness of the marking rubrics. There were some learners who sought for feedback, while there were others who shunned feedback because of discouragement.

Table 6

Theme 2: Factors Affecting Student Uptake

Key Finding	Representative Teacher Comments
Students needed guidance to interpret feedback.	"Students often need guidance to interpret the feedback and know how to use it effectively." (T7)
Motivation influenced feedback seeking and use.	"Motivated students tend to seek feedback actively, whereas less confident students may ignore it." (T4)
Emotional response affected uptake.	"Some students feel discouraged by criticism and fail to engage constructively." (T6)
Prior skills influenced application.	"Students with stronger prior skills grasp the feedback better and apply it more consistently in subsequent tasks." (T10)

Theme 3: Sustainable Feedback Required Repeated, Scaffolded, and Dialogic Practice

Educators suggested that feedback literacy could be improved through practice, journaling, peer evaluation, discussion of evaluation criteria, and training in interpreting feedback. The emphasis was put on incorporating feedback literacy in a structured way instead of considering it an isolated post-assessment process.

Table 7

Theme 3: Integration for Sustainable Assessment

Key Finding	Representative Teacher Comments
Repeated practice supported long-term learning.	"Repeated practice matters for students' long-term learning, not just the immediate assignment." (T1)
Reflection helped students plan improvement.	"I integrate reflection journals so students actively think about feedback and plan future improvements." (T9)
Peer review supported evaluative judgement.	"Structured peer reviews help students compare their work and understand different perspectives." (T12)
Early training supported independence.	"When students are trained on feedback interpretation from early in the semester, they become more independent and self-regulated." (T11)

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Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative and qualitative results pointed to the same conclusion that there is an association between feedback literacy and higher levels of engagement with feedback. The survey responses of the students showed statistically significant correlations between feedback literacy, engagement, and sustainability, while the teacher interviews helped identify how these associations may arise.

Table 8

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Explanation	Implication
Feedback literacy was positively associated with engagement.	Teachers reported that students needed guidance to understand comments and criteria.	Feedback literacy should be taught explicitly, not assumed.
Engagement was associated with perceived sustainability.	Teachers linked repeated practice, reflection, and peer review with long-term learning.	Assessment design should include opportunities to use feedback in future tasks.
Feedback literacy predicted engagement.	Teachers observed that confident, motivated students were more likely to seek and apply feedback.	Students need strategies for managing feedback emotionally and practically.

Discussion

The findings have shown that there exists a strong connection between feedback literacy and students' feedback engagement in GFP. Students demonstrated moderate levels of feedback literacy, and such feedback literacy was significantly correlated with engagement and perceived sustainability of assessment. The findings agree with the claims by Carless and Boud (2018) about the need for particular competences in understanding and using feedback as well as with Winstone et al.'s (2017) views on active feedback reception.

Moreover, the study findings support the idea that sustainable assessment goes beyond the process of giving feedback. Instructors provided students with written, verbal and peer feedback, but found that students did not make use of feedback in a productive way. The findings confirm the difference between feedback reception and feedback uptake. A student can get feedback, but he/she cannot understand the feedback, deal with his/her emotions and use feedback in further learning. Thus, feedback literacy can be considered an important condition of making feedback educational.

The significant correlation between feedback engagement and perceived sustainability of assessment indicates that sustainability depends on proactive students' actions with feedback. If students ask questions, compare their work to criteria, improve their work on the basis of feedback, think about future actions, feedback becomes a part of learning cycle. This agrees with sustainable assessment theory that focuses on learning capacity and evaluation judgement (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Tai et al.,

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2018).

The qualitative findings shed light on the emotional aspect of the feedback. The teachers note that some students become discouraged because of criticism, and this affects their participation. This finding proves the theory that feedback literacy includes affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. When working with foundation program students, who demonstrate lower levels of academic self-confidence, the teachers need to present the feedback as advice for improvement but not as a judgment of one's skills.

There are some important consequences of these findings for the development of the GFP curriculum. Feedback literacy needs to be taught early in the semester and consistently by means of easy activities. The students can learn how to understand the comments, recognize the points for action, ask relevant questions, use the rubric, compare samples, and write an effective feedback action plan. The implementation of peer review and reflective journals will develop evaluative judgment. All these tools can help change the focus from grading to learning.

Conclusion

This research looked at the link between feedback literacy, feedback engagement and perceived assessment sustainability in the General Foundation Programme. From the results, it was evident that the students had moderate levels of feedback literacy, and feedback literacy was significantly correlated with engagement and sustainability. Additionally, feedback literacy significantly predicted engagement with feedback, accounting for 37% of the variance in student engagement.

Feedback was given verbally, in writing and through peers according to the teachers. However, the student's capacity to utilize feedback was based on motivation, confidence, emotional reactions, and knowledge of criteria. The results show that the feedback should not just be seen as a one way process, but should involve participation in learning.

The conclusion made in this research was that assessment sustainability in the foundation level education could be improved by teaching students to make sense of feedback, evaluate it and use it. Therefore, feedback literacy plays a major role in assessment sustainability because it makes the learner become autonomous.

Limitations

The research study was undertaken in only one GFP setting, and hence, the results cannot be extrapolated to other foundation programs.

The perception of students regarding feedback was self-reported; hence, it may not accurately depict actual feedback behavior or improved performance.

The research study was cross-sectional in nature; hence, only associations can be found using it and not causal relations.

This research study lacks direct examination of student drafts and teacher feedback and the final assignment. Future research may consider this aspect of the study.

Teacher interviews did provide a good background of the study context, but the sample size was small.

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Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice

Begin each GFP course with feedback literacy activities in order for students to appreciate the rationale behind feedback prior to getting feedback on their assessments.

Encourage the use of feedback action plans where the students select two or three actions they can take following feedback.

Conduct rubric discussions and annotated examples to assist students in comprehending the criteria used for the assessments.

Implement peer reviews and self-assessment activities that aid in the development of evaluative judgement.

Require short reflection journals following feedback activities to assist students in dealing with their emotions as well as planning for improvement.

Ensure consistency in the implementation of feedback activities in all GFP courses.

Recommendations for Future Research

Longitudinal approaches will help to explore how feedback literacy develops.

It is essential to carry out intervention studies to check whether certain actions aimed at increasing feedback literacy positively affect the feedback receipt and learning outcomes.

Studies should be conducted at several educational institutions to compare feedback culture in different foundation programme settings.

It is necessary to analyse students' drafts, feedback messages and revisions to assess the correlation between students' feedback literacy and use of feedback.

There is a possibility to study feedback platforms and learning management systems that can be used to support feedback literacy.

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