

INTEGRATING FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT IN STAFF TRAINING: CHALLENGES AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Igballe MIFTARI-FETISHI¹

¹Faculty of Education, English language Teaching, International Balkan University,
Skopje, e-mail: i.miftari@ibu.edu.mk

Abstract

The paper examines and discusses the importance of feedback and assessment throughout the academic year. It argues that both concepts should be interchangeably used by teachers in order to monitor two things: students' progress and success and the effectiveness of the course. The misconception tied to the necessity of feedback and assessment only at the end of the term, in midterms and exams is one that is also discussed. Hence, the main aim of the study is emphasizing the need for ongoing assessment, monitoring the process and progress and evaluating the outcomes and the gained feedback. The term feedback is used for both teacher feedback and correction and for student feedback on the course. The training with academic staff not only initiated the debate on the importance of gathering students' insights and comments but also helped in identifying key strategies for enhancing learning outcomes, staff engagement, and continuous improvement in professional development initiatives. Questions related to the debate are as follows: How do I understand the terms feedback and assessment? How do I implement them in my course? Provide examples and share with the others. etc. Participants shared ideas using the art gallery walk and summarized the features of the tasks by identifying the outcomes of the process and overall success of the tasks used in their courses. Findings highlight the critical role of timely, structured feedback and ongoing assessment in aligning training with the course goals and the academic needs. The paper also provides practical recommendations for designing effective tools (and tasks) that help the process of gathering results, emphasizing that a spontaneous ongoing procedure without student stress and anxiety and without the standard-based assessment criteria facilitates the process of learning.

Keywords: feedback, assessment, tasks, tools, professional development etc

I. Introducing feedback and assessment in the professional development of teachers

Teacher professional development in contemporary teaching falls into the category of accountability. It serves as an indicator of the teachers' tendency to step out of their comfort zone and be open to criticism, observations, feedback and assessment. It also pinpoints the distinction between theory and practice and what is effective and what not in teaching. I have continuously argued that teachers should follow certain guidelines for the improvement of their skills and should be open to transparency; that there should be a healthy relationship among teacher-colleagues and teachers and students and that continuous development of teaching skills (and abilities) helps teachers surpass the issues and challenges of contemporary teaching and the 21st century skills. I also argue that apart from trainings and seminars, the classroom and the learners can also help in identifying the gaps in our teaching methodology, as they are endless resources. Student-centered teaching and autonomous learning are only some ways that this can be maintained. Accordingly, the degree of how much we actually know our learners, their effort in learning and the level of knowledge is crucial in the process. Usually, teachers are focused on the methodology of teaching, in making instruction both enjoyable and effective and with this, less time is provided for feedback. In some cases, "feedback is even misunderstood by the learners themselves, due to it not being a

random classroom activity” (Miftari, F., 2022, pg. 83). Hence, student feedback and teacher feedback should be a random class activity as it provides insights, suggestions and space for mutual growth.

According to Gibbs & Simpson (2005) feedback should be provided due to the following reasons: correct errors, develop understanding through explanations, generate more learning by suggesting further specific study tasks, promote the development of generic skills by focusing on the evidence of the use of skills rather than the content, promote meta-cognition by encouraging students’ reflection and awareness of learning processes involved in the assignment, encourage students to continue studying (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005, pgs.19-20). Assessment is closely tied to feedback, due to the consistent focus on the “ongoing process-product” format. Watkins (2014) states that “assessment is essentially that part of teaching in which we collect information about the degree of learning that is taking place. Teachers can use that information to make further planning decisions to speed up, to review, to change the balance of the course, to provide extra practice or support for a particular individual and so on” (2014, pg.128).

With the purpose of establishing team-building and professional training within the academic community, IBU hosts various trainings and workshops under the Teaching and Learning Center. Different topics and skills are covered over a period of time and during the semester(s). Academic staff of various fields register for the trainings/workshops, which fall in the category of Methodology in teaching (i.e. innovative teaching, technology enhanced teaching, autonomous teaching, feedback and assessment, teaching the skills etc.) This provides colleagues of different departments and fields the opportunity to join in hands-on activities and round-table discussions. It also enhances collegial support and provides space for improvement and professional growth. The trainings also help in gathering feedback from the participants; hence, a two-way research is conducted: participants share insights and experiences on different topics and also observe and examine the trainers. They provide feedback on what they liked and did not and what areas need further improvement. They also propose topics for future trainings. Ongoing professional development of teachers is therefore very important to be established. Additionally, “Professionals—at all levels of the education system—working together, sharing knowledge, skills, and experience to improve student achievement, and [the] well-being of both students and staff. Collaborative professionalism values the voices of all and reflects an approach in support of our shared responsibility to provide equitable access to learning for all. All staff are valued and have shared responsibility as they contribute to collaborative learning cultures” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, as cited in Hargreaves, 2019, p. 614). We refer to this not only as professional development, but as *reflective teaching* and *classroom research*. We consider that feedback in the teaching and learning process has a two-way effect: it can be feedback on the learners (from the teachers) or feedback on the teachers (from the learners). Both aspects of feedback are very important, as they provide implications for improvement and also serve as indicators of the overall assessment of: the course, the teaching and the results. Accordingly, reflective teaching is defined as “an approach to second language (L2) classroom instruction in which current and prospective teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection (Richards & Lockhart, 1994b, p 1). The purpose of reflective teaching, is therefore to: expand our understandings of the teaching-learning process, to expand our repertoire of strategic options as language teachers, to take ownership of our own theories of language teaching as informed by teaching practice and to enhance the quality of learning opportunities we are able to provide in language classrooms (Murphy, 2014, pg. 614).

Overwhelmingly, the key to becoming an effective teacher is belonging to a professional community. By collaborating with colleagues in a professional community, all of us can benefit from collaborative professionalism (Montoya, 2023, p.658). When participating in a professional community, teachers receive feedback, advice, and support for facing pedagogical challenges. They also receive help for overcoming pervasive feelings of uncertainty and loneliness that often afflict teachers in their seemingly isolated classrooms (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Hence, continuous professional development is part of the ongoing process of re-formulation of theories and beliefs tied to learning; improvement of teaching methodology, action research and strategy planning.

II. Understanding the misconception of *A Good Teacher*

There is something very important that teachers and educators in the field should be able to distinguish: the good teacher, without pinning to them the traditional constraints of teaching. Previously, the good teachers were those that had the least successful learners in the classroom, those that had the most failures in exams and those that disregarded the skills and the abilities of their learners i.e. the stricter, the more authoritative and respected they were. Being part of such an experience, for each and every unsuccessful event, I was used to pointing the finger at myself; it was my fault to have failed or received a low mark on an exam and never the professors. It took me quite a long time to really understand that behind the “false image” of good teachers, there was a misconception tied to its’ roots. The same misconception led us all astray; the teachers were proud of themselves and the students were disappointed of themselves. There would have been a solution and a different story, if and when, both parties had *reflected* on the process. As modern-day approaches to teaching teach us, success and failure are dependent and independent of various factors. The teacher’s manner of teaching can create a disbalance in what works and what doesn’t with the learners and the learners’ skills might also interfere in the overall success. Kemmis & McTaggart (1989) describe *action-research* as a “form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (p 2). However, this was never conducted. There was no actual reflection on the process, hence, there was no actual growth. Accordingly, there are many good reasons for teachers to conduct classroom research. The processes involved in data collection and analysis can help them discover patterns (both positive and negative) in their interactions with students. They can discover interesting new puzzles and answers, both of which can energize their teaching (Bailey, 2014, p 609). They can modify their teaching and can monitor their overall success with the learners’ comments and results. Another perspective of professional development is “*formative feedback from peers*” which refers to many ways in which a teacher may collaborate with others to gain a deeper understanding and awareness of the teaching-learning process i.e. consulting colleagues when examining materials, such as five-minute papers focus group discussions, retrospective field notes and survey responses” (Murphy, 2014, p.621). Hence, professional development is not only an ongoing process of events, it is rather “how” teachers plan these events, how they proceed within the given circumstances and how they define achieved and expected outcomes. At the end of the day, good teachers are those that achieve most of their prior set goals and continue to support other teachers that are at the beginning of their teaching careers.

III. Implementing theory into practice

By sharing our experiences and synthesizing the results-in other words-working together-we can do more to improve schools than any one of us can do alone. Joyce, B. The door to school improvement

The main aim of this paper is to point out and suggest the importance of continuous development in the field of education and teaching. Emphasis is therefore put on the long-term development and expertise needed in education and on the forms of practice that can be implemented in the region i.e. sustaining teacher awareness and initiative on staff training, feedback and assessment. Additionally, questions of relevance in the study are understanding the terms professional development and accountability in education. The first term refers to professional growth, while becoming aware of the fact that reflection and feedback are the core to the overall success. Joyce (1991) identifies five dimensions of institutional improvement that teacher development can contribute to:

Collegiality: creating a culture through developing cohesive and professional relationships between the staff (and the wider community), in which “broad” vision-directed improvements as well as day-to-day operations are valued.

Research: Familiarizing staff with research findings on school improvement, teaching effectiveness and so on, which can support “in-house” development

Site-specific information: enabling and encouraging staff to collect and analyze data on students, schools, and effects of change-both as part of a formal devaluation and informally.

Curriculum initiatives: collaborating with others to introduce change in their subject areas as well as across the school curriculum

Instructional initiatives: enabling staff to develop their teaching skills and strategies through, for example, generic teaching skills, repertoires of teaching methods and specific teaching styles or approaches (1991, pg. 59) whereas *accountability* refers to the actual pressure that teachers have from the demands of the profession, the changes in education and the reforms altogether.

Additionally, a teacher learning framework of three types of teacher knowledge as proposed by Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) consists of the following types of knowledge: knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice, and knowledge-of-practice. They further explain the teacher knowledge framework as follows:

Knowledge-for-practice refers to how the researchers generate formal knowledge and theory that the teachers use to improve their practice. Here, teachers are expected to learn from coaches who help them with a particular teaching model. Distinctions exist between expert teachers and novice teachers as well as between competent teachers and teachers who do not have enough content or methods for being able to teach effectively. *Knowledge-in-practice* places value on practical knowledge possessed by teachers without distinguishing knowledge generation and knowledge use. Teachers are seen as competent professionals who problematize situations in their classrooms and make new sense of these situations by connecting them to previous experiences. Knowledge and learning are socially constructed with experienced teachers guiding novices through the practical and intellectual path of a mindful teacher. *Knowledge-of-practice* is when teachers investigate their practice by interpreting and interrogating knowledge and theory produced by others. Within their inquiry community, teachers learn by generating local knowledge that theorizes and constructs this knowledge and by connecting it to larger social, cultural, and political issues. Knowledge and the knower are indistinguishable with knowledge being seen as transformative and, also, as constructed collectively among local and broader communities

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).. Additionally, some basic conceptualizations regarding teacher learning according to Richards & Farrell (2005) are as follow:

- teacher learning as skill learning;
- teacher learning as a cognitive process;
- teacher learning as personal construction and
- teacher learning as reflective practice (pgs. 6-7).

Hence, teacher learning goes beyond examining one's own actions in the classroom, beyond reflecting on one's actions, and beyond identifying one's practices within a community. Teacher learning occurs when teachers work together as part of a community by taking a problem-posing stance where they question their own practices and assumptions and then take leadership roles to transform the curriculum, classroom, and school. (Montoya, 2023, p.661)

IV. Methodology

The methodology is described according to the order of events and how the training was conducted. Hence, it is divided into two perspectives. In the theoretical perspective, we begin by identifying the main concepts of the training and open a discussion regarding the importance of feedback and assessment. During the practical perspective, participants are divided into groups, they share a technique with group members and then chose only one from the whole group to share with the others (the one they consider as the most practical, most interesting or most effective). Participants in the training are a total of 20, divided into four groups of five. Due to the nature of the training and the outline being in the format of a workshop, the instruments used are: brainstorming and identifying main concepts, group discussions, share a technique, and the Art Gallery walk.

The theoretical perspective

The first part of theory consisted of a brainstorming activity regarding the main concepts of feedback and assessment (See table 1). During this task, the staff participants were asked to read the statements and to choose either agree, disagree or strongly agree for each one, providing argumentative feedback at the end. They were also asked to share their thoughts and opinions regarding the statements, the frequency of assessment and feedback during their courses as well as their importance in education.

Table 1. Identifying the main concepts (feedback and assessment)

	Agree-why?	Disagree-Why?	Strongly Agree-Why?
Feedback among others, is intended to provide learner autonomy.			
Effective feedback is a combination of praising and criticizing students work.			
Peer feedback is more effective than teacher feedback.			
Assessment is not testing.			
Formative assessment is more accurate than summative assessment.			
Assessment refers to record keeping and monitoring.			

Additionally, staff participants engaged in round-table discussions and brainstormed on their responses (which were shared within the group). The question and answer session further elaborated the terms, namely participants answered two main questions:

Q1. How I understand feedback and assessment?

Q2. How I implement/apply them in my courses?

Regarding the first question, there was a variety of responses; for some, feedback was only one-way and they referred to it according to the teachers' perspectives, for others, it was the result of an activity, provided by teachers to the students. The fields in education and humanities referred to feedback as both teachers and students' feedback and were more open towards self-reflection and criticism. Assessment for some was a separated tool, while for others, feedback was part of assessment. Regarding the second question, the implementation differed; some applied only tests and quizzes, while others provided learners with project-based learning and ongoing assessment techniques. Randomly chosen opinions from the obtained responses are as follows:

P1. Feedback motivates improvement and clarifies expectations. Assessment evaluates what you know and what you can do.

P2. Through the semester vs final grades.

P3. Assessment is when we give the students points.

P4. Monitoring, providing continuous feedback and communicating with students about their improvement.

P5. Continuous process, implementing it all the time.

P6. Asking questions, peer feedback, peer review and many quizzes.

P7. Work through project.

P8. Lecture with a gap and reflective teaching.

During this phase, summarizing and pinpointing the most important issues in feedback and assessment, together with the challenges that are encountered within the different fields of study was the main focus. Discussing these matters with colleagues and developing new theories on how

to assess more frequently is a must at higher education. Hence, it was concluded that both terms were understood to a certain level, however, were not practiced as much, due to certain circumstances, such as: large groups, time-constraints and also the dependency on the one-shot exams at the end of the semester.

The practical perspective

The staff participants were afterwards divided into groups. The groups were field-focused i.e. categorized by similarities in their fields of study (economy and engineering, law and political sciences, education and languages etc.) The basis of this classification was specifically on the differences that each field has in the matter of analysis and in assessment measurements. The hypothesis stated at the beginning is that social sciences and humanities apply various feedback and assessment techniques, whereas the more exact fields do not necessarily do so (more innovative compared to less innovative). The participants in the groups were given the task of sharing an example with the group members. Afterwards, they were asked to choose one example from their group to share with the class i.e. the Art gallery walk. As you may notice, group 2 and group 4 provide a variety of tasks that are used for feedback and assessment, which are more innovative and ongoing, whereas group 1 and 3 have a more traditional approach to assessment and feedback. The prior are staff teaching in the fields of humanities and social sciences. The courses in methodology, pedagogy, psychology, measurement and evaluation etc. play a crucial role in their choices for teaching, assessment and feedback compared to the latter.

Table 2. Art gallery walk

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Peer review	Reflective feedback	Lecture with a gap	Student Q/A
Short quizzes, midterm review	Reflective mapping		Teacher feedback on areas of needed improvement/praise
Interactive questions during lectures for providing feedback for current/previous lecture.	Self-evaluations/ after class points		Student reflections on their own work Exit ticket

V. Discussion of the results

The training experience intended to foster a life-long professional development strategy concerning the issues of feedback and assessment. Students continuously require input, feedback and suggestions for improvement; they see this as reflection, support and growth. Additionally, teachers in the field of education use various techniques to help students understand strong and weak points. The main aim is in understanding that ongoing feedback and assessment are better indicators of individual growth than a one-shot exam at the end. The participants argued that such activities are time-consuming and hard to manage, as the fields of study differ and due to the large number of students in their groups. Those with smaller groups, additionally had more expertise, as they believed that ongoing assessment helped them better develop their plans and curricula's and that student feedback helped them change their methodology and perspectives in teaching course content. Additionally, this discussion led to some relevant issues: are teachers afraid to leave their comfort zone, are they aware of how and when to implement feedback and what are the challenges within staff training? Participants stated that they were in fact uncertain at times and that they

mostly referred to their own experiences i.e. they lacked ongoing assessment and were used to the same traditional approach, implying that in certain fields, it is difficult to know what skill to focus on at certain times (which differs in languages, for example). The most random challenges encountered with staff-training usually align with a tendency to take the more interactive activities as childish and not serious, again resulting in the misconception tied to the teaching methodology and what is required nowadays. A large number of the academic staff rely heavily on their previous experience and to the strict traditional classroom environment, without initiating change.

VI. Challenges at higher education

Following the staff training experience, some challenges were noticed, such as:

- The misconception tied to feedback. (not regarding feedback as a two-way process)
- The importance/relevance of ongoing assessment on the learners.
- The large groups that cannot be monitored throughout the course.
- The time-consuming theory.
- Lack of staff training in teaching etc.

Additionally, academic staff belonging to fields of education such as, FHSS, FEDU provided various feedback/assessment techniques, in comparison to those belonging to FEAS, FLAW, FENG. The theory that fields of study which do not have the educational methodology courses in their curriculums lack the expertise in the concepts of feedback and assessment is true and correlates with the practice i.e. those that teach in the fields of humanities and social sciences are more eager to participate and express interest in various hands-on-activities. (compared to the latter that do not see any importance in this regard). This group also refuses to part-take in interactive activities as they are regarded as not serious and there is usually a hesitation caused by such an approach. It was noted that some staff did not wish to take the Art Gallery walk due to feeling childish and requesting more demanding tasks, while others who were not used to such an approach found it quite interesting and wished to take-away skills for adapting activities with their students. The debate on whether teacher professional development is a skill or is learned through practice, is never-ending, and unfortunately, traditional teaching theory is usually found in between the innovative teaching methodology. Hence, the comfort zone which is previously mentioned plays a crucial role in this perspective.

VII. Limitations and Future Recommendations

The paper provides some insights and experience on core issues tied to the overall success in a course, in teaching and in learning. The main aim was to point out some factors that heavily contribute to a lack of transparency and ongoing feedback and assessment. Whether it is previous education and experience, a different field of study or a course with many participants, teachers should find ways on how to provide feedback. Additionally, they should provide learners with different opportunities to develop their potential, skills and competencies. Learners want to be heard and observed everyday and not only on the day of the exam; they want to be taught and encouraged and they need feedback to achieve their designated goals. Teachers at higher education must understand that their professional growth means stepping out of their zone of comfort and that reflective teaching, feedback and assessment help in gaining the overall insights on course content, methodology of teaching and the overall success of the course. The 21st century skills require interactive classes, technology, innovative methods combined with the traditional ones;

they prefer more hands-on activities than the frontal teaching approach, an approach which, for some teachers, unfortunately remains to be the ultimate goal. These teachers do not wish to change their perspective nor their theory of teaching, they do not wish to adapt nor transform and usually deny flexibility. Such trainings and academic gatherings display our differences and our similarities. They help establish the community within the institution and foster life-long learning.

References

- [1] Bailey, K.M. (2014). Teaching English as a second or foreign language, Chapter 38: “Classroom research, teacher research and action research in language teaching” (pgs. 601-612). National Geographic learning, Heinle Cengage Learning.
- [2] Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. *Review of Research in Education*, 24(1), 249-306. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X024001249>
- [3] Gibbs, G. and Simpson, C. (2005). Conditions under which assessment supports students’ learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher education*, 1, pp3-31
- [4] Hargreaves, A. (2019). Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations, and effects, *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(5), 603-621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1639499>
- [5] Joyce, R. Bruce. 1991. The doors to school improvement, *Education Leadership*, May.
- [6] Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1989). Action research. *IATEFL Newsletter*, 102, 2-3
- [7] Murphy, J.M. (2014). Teaching English as a second or foreign language, Chapter 39. Reflective teaching principles and practices. (pgs. 613-630). National Geographic learning. Heinle Cengage Learning.
- [8] Pineda Montoya, D. (2023). Promoting Collaborative Professionalism Among Pre-Service Teachers. In V. Canese & S. Spezzini (Eds.), *Teaching English in Global Contexts, Language, Learners and Learning* (pp. 657-667). Editorial Facultad de Filosofía, UNA. https://doi.org/10.47133/tegc_ch54
- [9] Richards, J. C. & Lockhart, C. (1994b). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [10] Richards, J. C. & Farrell, T.S.C. 2005. Professional development for language teachers, *Strategies for Teacher Learning*, Cambridge Language Education
- [11] Stevkovska, M., Idrizi, E. & Miftari, F. I. (2022). Contemporary issues in language teaching. Edited Book. New trends in feedback and assessment. Chapter 4, pgs. 81-104. International Balkan University, Skopje, North Macedonia
- [12] Watkins, P. (2014). *Learning to teach English*. Second Edition. Delta Publishing.