

Written Assignment feedback: Its
Effectiveness in Students' Studies
– Experiences of IDL Students;
KNUST

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INTRODUCTION

- Education, whether it is at a distance or not, depends upon two-way communication.
- In distance education there is a growing need for, and appreciation of, sustained two-way communication in the process of analysing and developing knowledge.
- Meeting the demands of an educational transaction at a distance is dependent upon communication technologies which provide frequent and regular interaction between teacher and learner, as well as among learners

Introduction (cont.)

- In distance education systems, learner support services play an instrumental role in making two-way educational communication possible.
- The main objective of learner support services is to motivate learners, keep them on the right track, encourage them to make use of the facilities provided and above all facilitate their learning.
- According to Hui (1989), learner support may be defined as the support incorporated within the self-learning materials, the learning system and **assignment marking**.

Introduction (cont.)

- Tutor-comments play a crucial role in most schemes of distance education.
- The distance learners' face-to-face contact with their tutors being relatively minimal, teaching has to be carried out mainly by means of "comments" on assignment responses.
- Most of the help which a distance learner gets in terms of academic support is the tutor's comments on the assignment responses.

Problem Statement

- How do tutor comments on written assignments affect the studies of distance learners of IDL: KNUST?

Objectives of the study

- To find out whether marked students' assignment responses come with tutor comments.
- To find out the types of comments written by tutors.
- To find how these comments affect the studies of the students.

Methodology

- 120 postgraduate and 110 undergraduate students were involved in the study
- Simple random sampling was used
- Observation
- Questionnaire
- Data was analysed using SPSS
- Simple percentages were used

Results and Discussion

- The results from the questionnaire indicated the following:
 - Undergraduates
 - 58.3% were of the view that assignments are not marked promptly and given back to them
 - 66.7% indicated that the marked assignments do not have any tutor comments apart from the marks
 - 61.1% ascertained that the feedback serves as incentive for learning

Results (cont.)

– Post-graduates

- 58.3% indicated late return of marked assignments
- 65.8% were of the view that the marked assignments have no tutor comments
- 61.7% indicated that they are motivated by the feedback from the marked assignments

Results (cont.)

- Observations made on some marked assignment scripts
 - Only marks were given
 - Some had “good” or “very good”

Discussion

- Marked assignment responses are not promptly returned to the learners.
- This is in bad taste as feedback needs to come while learners are still mindful of the topic, assignment or performance in question (Brookhart, 2008)
- When marked assignment responses are given to learners at a later time, the feedback becomes pointless to the learners.

Discussion (cont.)

- Marked assignment responses come with grades but no tutor comments.
- Every graded activity should include meaningful feedback particularly to each individual learner
- A tutor needs to specify why the work was done well or explain what the learner could do to make improvements (Bender *et al.*, 2006)

Discussion (cont.)

- In this study, most of the learners were of the view that they were motivated to perform better despite the fact that only grades were on their assignment responses.
- Butler and Nisan (1986) have indicated that grading alone does not motivate learners, however grading should go with comments and that makes learners perform better and become motivated.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, it was ascertained from the study that no comments or hardly any comments are given.
- This does not augur well with distance learning
- The students do not benefit from the assignment response as a mode of two-way communication.

Recommendations

- A set of assignments should be given to the students at the beginning of the semester, with their deadlines/submission dates
- Tutors should be schooled on how to write comments on the assignment responses
- All these possibilities are visualized as healthy steps towards a really effective teaching and learning transaction