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Student feedback delivery modes: A qualitative study of student and lecturer views

Clare Killingback^{a*}, Dawn Drury^b, Preeti Mahato^c, Jonathan Williams^c

^a University of Hull, Hull, UK

^b University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

^c Bournemouth University, Bournemouth, UK

*** Corresponding author:** ckillingback@hull.ac.uk

Tel - + 44 (0)1482 463641

Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Hull

Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX

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Abstract

Background: Student feedback on assessment is fundamental for promoting learning. Written feedback is the most common way of providing feedback yet this has been criticised by students for its ineffectiveness. Given the wide range of feedback modes available, (written, audio, video, screencast, face-to-face, self and peer-feedback) a better understanding of student and lecturer preferences would facilitate recommendations for optimising feedback delivery. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences and preferences for summative feedback modes of physiotherapy students and lecturers.

Methods: A sample of convenience was used to recruit participants from one undergraduate physiotherapy programme in the UK. A total of 25 students were recruited for three focus groups and five lecturers for semi-structured interviews. Focus groups and individual interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview guideline and carried out by a research assistant who was not involved in teaching on the programme and therefore unknown to participants. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis.

Results: Three themes were developed in relation to student and lecturer experiences of feedback to date: the importance of dialogue; the value of feed forward; and feedback disparity. From the student perspective, three themes were identified supporting their feedback preference: the importance of human connection; added information from non-verbal communication; valuing the lecturer view. From the lecturer perspective, two themes

were identified around feedback preferences: challenges of spoken feedback and the importance of self-assessment.

Conclusions: This study identifies challenges around selecting optimal feedback modes due to the lack of student-lecturer consensus. Students preferred lecturer-led modes, providing the highest quality personal interaction with lecturers (face-to-face, screencast, video, audio). Lecturers most often advocated for student led feedback modes (peer or self-assessment) as a means to students valuing the feedback and developing reflective skills.

Student feedback delivery modes: A qualitative study of student and lecturer views

Introduction

Providing students with feedback on assessment is a fundamental aspect of promoting student learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Dowden et al., 2013). Feedback evaluates the quality of the work but should also provide guidance on how to improve (Quality Assurance Agency, 2012). However, research suggests that both students and lecturers are consistently dissatisfied with the current state of affairs, with a gap highlighted between the feedback given and the feedback that students act upon (Cartney, 2010; Evans, 2013; Hunukumbure et al., 2017). In response, many higher education institutions have sought to address this gap by improving the quality of written feedback provided to students (Glover and Brown, 2006). Written feedback is the most widely used feedback method (McCarthy, 2015). Despite these attempts to improve written feedback, students remain critical due to the vague nature of the comments, their difficulty in understanding the feedback, and a lack of constructive feed-forward (Duncan 2007; Boud and Molloy, 2013).

Others have chosen to explore alternative feedback modes as a means of enhancing student feedback. These alternative modes include audio, video, podcast, screencast, face-to-face, self or peer feedback. Literature reviews of alternative feedback modes such as audio feedback suggest that these modes offer a pastoral role through facilitating a sense of care and more authentic connections between the learners and lecturers (Dixon, 2015). This was further supported in a recent qualitative literature review of tertiary student's perceptions of audio,

video, podcast and screencast feedback modes (Killingback et al., 2019). These feedback modes promoted a sense of belonging through the individualised and personal comments as well as promoting greater comprehension from the non-verbal aspects of communication such as body language, tone of voice and inflection (Killingback et al., 2019).

The use of alternative feedback modes have been trialled through experimental research studies across a range of disciplines. For example, mixed-methods research studies on audio feedback from the disciplines of education; developmental writing; business management; and nursing programmes found that audio feedback can enhance the student experience (Ice et al., 2007; Sipple, 2007; MacGregor et al., 2011; Gould and Day, 2013). Although challenges were also raised by some students in terms of difficulty in locating mistakes in their work when audio feedback was used (Sipple, 2007). Cavanaugh and Song (2014) in their case study of audio versus written feedback involving seven students from an online composition course found that the content of comments varied in audio and written feedback. Audio feedback led to more global suggestions for improvement, whereas written feedback were more likely to contain micro-level feedback and editing corrections (Cavanaugh and Song, 2014).

In their mixed-methods study involving 126 education students, Henderson and Phillips (2015) found that video-based feedback methods were valued more than written approaches. Video feedback was reported to be more individualised, personal, supportive, caring and motivating as well as being detailed and constructive. Feedback studies in education technology courses noted similar positive experiences with video feedback (Borup et al., 2014), however, some anxiety over watching feedback was expressed by some students, along with challenges in terms of matching video comments to text-based assessments (Henderson and Phillips, 2015).

Feedback through the media of screencast (technology that enables a digital recording of the computer screen where the student's assignment is displayed, with the addition of audio or video comments by the lecturer) has resulted in positive views. In a survey of 124 business and accounting students, at least 91% reported that screencast feedback was clear and easy to follow with 86% stating that it was more personal than written (Marriott and Teoh, 2012). Thirty-four undergraduate mathematics students also reported positive experiences of screencast over written feedback as it provided a richer experience (Robinson, Loch, and Croft, 2015).

Removing the technological barrier, Chalmers and Mowat (2018) used focus groups to explore face-to-face feedback in a study with 20 first-year undergraduate biological science students. They found that face-to-face marking was a positive experience that allowed feedback dialogue and provided lecturers with the opportunity to explain and justify why marks were given.

Evans (2013), in her literature review on assessment feedback in higher education noted that there are mixed opinions regarding the value of peer assessment. Some view it as being motivational and enables students to engage in their own learning, whereas others see it as a way of reducing the heavy lecturer workload by offloading some of the assessment burden to students. From the student perspective, in a qualitative study involving 45 undergraduate social work students, there was a strong emotional component associated with peer-assessed work. Emotions ranged from feelings of anxiety in giving feedback to anger towards those who had not participated fully in the process of providing feedback (Cartney, 2010). Within the same study, other students commented on the positive use of feedback to enhance learning. Similarly, in an undergraduate biology course, it was found that both peer and self-assessment methods were useful in helping students reach their learning goals (Orsmond et al., 2004). Indeed, the development of self-assessment skills are viewed as important in supporting lifelong learning (Boud and Falchikov, 2007). Research suggests that students have the ability to self-assess reasonably accurately (Karnilowicz, 2012). However, it is difficult for students to develop self-assessment skills and they often require scaffolded support (Evans, 2013).

It is evident that there are a wide range of feedback methods, each with distinct positives and negatives, thus making the choice of feedback mode a challenge. To this end, these methods are often trialled by academics without initial input from students and the wider teaching team. Thus, the overall aim of this study was to explore physiotherapy student and lecturer summative feedback experiences to date and understand how this can be used to inform decision marking around selecting optimal feedback modes to enhance the student and lecturer feedback experience. In order to achieve the aim of the study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the experiences of undergraduate physiotherapy students and lecturers on summative written feedback to date?

2. How do the experiences of undergraduate physiotherapy students and lecturers inform their views and preferences for a range of summative feedback modes (written, audio, video, group podcasts, screencast, face-to-face, peer, and self-assessment)?

Methods

Study design

A qualitative methodology was used to explore feedback practices on the physiotherapy programme. The study was located within a critical realist paradigm. Critical realism embraces a complex view of reality and is aware of the influence of agency and structural factors prevalent in human behaviour (Clark, 2008). Ontologically critical realism assumes reality to exist but “only imperfectly apprehendable because of basically flawed human intellectual mechanisms and the fundamentally intractable nature of phenomena” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Epistemologically, critical realism has been referred to as modified objectivist (Christie et al., 2000). The kind of knowledge produced to some extent is dependent upon the questions we ask in relation to the world around us and unavoidably a reflection from the researcher’s own perspective (Danermark et al., 2005; Maxwell, 2012). As such, a reflexive approach was taken to address any epistemological conflicts. The focus groups and semi-structured interviews permitted the meaning of feedback to be studied from the perspectives of students and lecturers in-depth in a naturalistic setting (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

A sample of convenience was adopted to recruit two types of participants. Student participants were recruited from three cohorts of physiotherapy undergraduates from a Higher Education Institution in the UK. Lecturer participants were recruited from the academic team who deliver teaching on the undergraduate programme. Participants were recruited via email and face-to-face invitation. An information sheet about the study was presented to participants and informed written consent was gained prior to the study starting. For clarity, the participants who were students in this study will be referred to as students and participants who were lecturers will be referred to as lecturers. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from xxxxxxxxxx University Research Ethics Committee (ID15371).

Data collection

Data were collected from April – June 2017. Student focus groups were carried out in a classroom at the university and semi-structured interviews with lecturers were carried out either over the telephone or face-to-face at a convenient time and location. Focus groups were 33-41 minutes in length and semi-structured interviews were between 15-36 minutes. They were conducted using an interview guide and carried out by a research assistant (PM – a female postgraduate researcher trained in qualitative methods) who was not involved in teaching on the programme and therefore unknown to the participants. It was important that the researcher involved in data collection was not a member of the teaching team due to the potential power relationship that can exist between students and staff. No one else was present besides the participant and research assistant.

Data analysis

The audio-recorded focus groups and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012) was used in the process of data analysis to increase the transparency of the analysis process and provide an audit trail (Saunders et al., 2012). CK and PM inductively coded the data. DD and JW independently cross-checked sections of the qualitative data analysis by comparing the codes and themes to the transcripts. Any disagreements with regards to the coding or themes were discussed in order to reach a consensus. This assisted in the definition, refinement and interpretation of themes (Barbour, 2001). Participants were sent a copy of the study findings so they could provide feedback.

Results

Study context and participant demographics

The physiotherapy programme under study was an NHS-commissioned undergraduate physiotherapy programme with an average cohort size of 26 students. A total of 25 students were recruited for three focus groups. These included one group of Level 4 (first year) students (n=9, 9 females, mean age 24 years, age range 19-32 years); one group of Level 5 (second year) students (n=8, 5 females, 3 males, mean age 27 years, age range 20-42 years); and one group of Level 6 (third year) students (n=8, 6 females and 2 males, mean age 25 years, age range 21-44 years). A total of 5 lecturers (all female; mean age 48 years, age range 38-68 years) were recruited for semi-structured interviews.

Research question 1: Experiences of feedback to date

Three themes were developed in relation to experiences of feedback to date: the importance of dialogue, the value of feedforward, and feedback disparity. Student and lecturer views are reported together.

1. Importance of dialogue

Students highly valued the opportunity to discuss marking and feedback with lecturers, regardless of year group. This desire for dialogue broadly fell into three sub-themes: understanding the marking criteria; the marking process; feedback post assessment.

Understanding the marking criteria

From the student perspective, one of the main challenges with feedback was that they felt they did not understand the marking criteria. This made it difficult to comprehend how they were being marked and subsequently found it challenging to match the feedback with the assessment criteria.

“I think the main thing that we struggle with, with the feedback, is that we're not really sure what they're marking in the first place.” (Level 6, Female).

Having the marking criteria broken down for each assessment in advance would have helped overcome this challenge.

“I think we should have marking criteria's for each assessment and assignment and we should be told about them ahead....” (Level 4, Female).

Lecturers were cognisant that understanding the assessment and marking criteria can be challenging and “it takes a lot of interpretation” (Lecturer 3). Oftentimes lecturers felt this was because students did not understand the abstract terms used in assessment, such as analysis, synthesis, or clinical reasoning. Working with the students in understanding these concepts was seen as being important by the lecturers.

“I don't think we spend enough time with our students explaining what they [assessment criteria] are and how to do them...so they don't know what we're looking for and so they don't know how to do it.” (Lecturer 1).

The marking process

Students reported a lack of understanding in the marking process potentially leading to a lack of trust between students and lecturers. For example, students perceived that at times there was a duplication of feedback comments by lecturers. With written feedback in particular they felt it was too easy for lecturers to replicate a standardised response resulting in the feeling of depersonalised feedback. Lecturers were only too aware of the student's negative viewpoints of duplicated comments:

“As a marker, you end up copy and pasting the same comments across because the same things repeatedly apply and they talk to each other and then they think that you've not, that the feedback is not specific to them.” (Lecturer 1).

Feedback post assessment

Students felt they needed dialogue not just on the marking criteria and process, but also opportunities to discuss post assessment feedback. Students recognised their views may be in conflict with the lecturers around feedback and would have welcomed the opportunity to ask questions, however oftentimes the feedback marks the end of the student-lecturer interaction losing the opportunity for feedback dialogue.

“If there is something that I am questioning or can't quite understand, there isn't that opportunity to voice those concerns or just questions. So sometimes, yeah, I felt that that it'd be nice if there'd been a conversation.” (Level 4, Female).

Lecturers were aware of the lack of opportunities to dialogue with students post assessment,

“Often due to the structure of the year in that you don't see the students at the end of semester two.” (Lecturer 2).

2. Value of feed forward

There was a strong consensus from students that they felt their feedback did not contain sufficient feedforward. They wanted to know how to improve. This was not necessarily related to how they could have improved that specific assignment (although there were elements of this) – they wanted to know how they could translate improvements into future assignments.

“I tend to find a lot of the comments just say good. And that doesn't tell you how to improve it just says good.” (Level 5, Male).

In the context of the Level 6 students, there was a desire to align feed forward to life after university when they move into clinical practice. This was particularly relevant for practical skills exams.

Lecturers were aware of the importance of feed forward to students. One of the challenges around delivering feed forward was that the programme employs a range of assessment methods. The skills required for one assessment does not necessarily apply to the following assessment which can make it difficult for students since *“they are of the impression that if they do well in an essay, that they will do well practically. They don’t realise that the skills are different.”* (Lecturer 3).

3. Feedback disparity

Students perceived there to be a lack of consistency regarding the quantity, quality, and content of feedback from different lecturers marking the same assessment.

“I think in that practical skills one there was quite a lot of disparity when we all compared feedback that we had. Some people were like, “Oh, I got a good feedback,” someone’s like, “Oh, I got all bad feedback,” but the grades might not be that different. And I think it depended on the person you had marking you...” (Level 4, Female).

Students proposed having a clear structure to feedback guiding lecturers to allay some of the inconsistencies with the quantity of feedback provided by different lecturers. This viewpoint was shared by one of the lecturers who felt that:

“...it would be nice to move to a model where there’s a bit more parity about how we give feedback and it informs future assignments.” (Lecturer 4).

Students also noted a disparity in the markers understanding of the marking criteria. This was often dependent upon the markers contribution to the delivery of the module material. For example:

“Particularly on these sorts of modules where we’re talking about one particular person teaching us for the whole course. And then if someone else comes in and

marks it who's only taught us for a very small amount of it, they don't have the same sort of insights into what we've been taught and the way we've been told to do things.” (Level 5, Female).

From the lecturer perspective, they felt that students were more focused on their marks than on the actual feedback provided. Lecturers commented on the time and effort spent crafting feedback which they felt students failed to fully engage with due to being grade focused.

Research question 2: Views on preferred feedback modes

Due to the disparity on views, student and lecturer perspectives are reported separately.

Students

From the student perspective, three themes were identified supporting their feedback preference: the importance of human connection; the added information from non-verbal communication; valuing the lecturer view.

1. Human connection

Students preferred to receive feedback in a more personalised way with face-to-face being highly valued: *“it's just down to talking the old-fashioned way and actually sitting there and going through it”* (Level 5, Female).

It was the human connection which was of great importance: *“there's just something about, as you said, the human connection”* (Level 5, Female). Face-to-face was seen as being a dynamic, high quality interaction which would have provided the opportunity to dialogue about feedback and ask for clarification and detail.

Students were aware of the challenges around the practicality of time for face-to-face feedback. Furthermore, they understood that feedback can be emotive with the potential for some students to spend their face-to-face time arguing about grade rather than understanding feedback.

2. Added information from non-verbal communication

Students preferred feedback modes which allowed them to hear or see the feedback provider. This was preferential as there was less to misinterpret, facilitating greater depth of insight and understanding into what was being communicated through tone and body language.

“I think all of the ones we put at the top are ones, where you can either see body language or you can hear...And it would sound more genuine...you can tell a bit more from the tone.” (Level 5, Female).

3. Valuing the lecturers views

Students were aware that they had a preference for modes where the lecturer delivered the feedback since the lecturers were seen as being the experts on marking so gave weight to their viewpoint. Lecturer’s views were also preferred to their peers since students understood the challenge of providing honest peer-feedback.

“When we’re peer assessing or self-assessing we’re a bit nicer to each other so we’re not necessarily giving the whole truth. We’re trying to be positive and kinder than if we were the lecturer.” (Level 6, Female).

Lecturers

From the lecturer perspective two themes were identified around feedback preferences: challenges of spoken feedback and the importance of self-assessment.

1. Challenges of spoken feedback

Lecturers had mixed views on their preferences for the feedback modes which required spoken feedback. There was an awareness of the need for confidence with audio, video, screencast and face-to-face methods. A level of skill would be needed to articulate feedback, particularly when it came to delivering negative feedback. Concerns were also raised of the added time which might be required with these feedback modes. Others preferred the personalised nature of video or audio feedback as it was *“...important for students to see our expressions and, you know, to feel that we’ve actually read it and we’re talking to them.”* (Lecturer 2).

2. Importance of self-assessment

In contrast to the student views on feedback, lecturers had a strong preference for self-assessment. This was seen as being more student focused, more meaningful for students, and a valuable reflective skill: *“I think self-assessments are really good because I think that makes the student really go over and reflect on their assignment.”* (Lecturer 5).

An alternative lecturer viewpoint was that students were not attending university to mark their own work. Rather, the expectation was that they were there to have their work marked by academics/experts. As such, self or peer-feedback in particular could be challenging:

“they don’t want someone who was, you know, they know is drunk the night before and marking some work of theirs where actually they, you know, they want us, they see us as the all-knowing so we need to be the ones giving them the feedback to help them improve” (Lecturer 2).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore student and lecturer feedback experiences to date from one UK Higher Education Institution and understand how this can be used to inform preferences and decision making around selecting feedback modes which enhance the student and lecturer feedback experience. This study has three main contributions to make to this complex phenomenon of feedback delivery.

Firstly, the findings from this study highlight the fact that both students and lecturers would like to see more dialogue in relation to assessment feedback. This dialogue is at present notably absent. The importance of assessment dialogue has been well documented in the literature as being pivotal in student learning (Nicol, 2010; Dowden et al., 2013; Douglas et al., 2016). If there is to be a shift from assessment *of learning* to assessment *for learning* then students need to have opportunities to learn about assessment in a similar way to which they would learn about subject content (Carless, 2006; Douglas et al., 2016). To enhance learning, the role of lecturer-student feedback dialogue is essential and such dialogue can lead to substantial improvement of the quality of student assignments (Nicol, 2010).

The lack of feedback dialogue pre and post assessment in this study means that lecturers are not aware of how and if their feedback is being used, and students are unaware of the potential contribution the feedback can make to their learning. This was similarly reported by Orsmond and Merry (2011) who noted in their phenomenological study of biology students

and lecturers that feedback provision by lecturers and feedback utilisation by students could be enhanced through discussions between lecturers and students.

Additionally, students viewed feedback as lacking in detail or feed forward which left them unsure how to improve. This study identified a particular challenge to feed forward in the range of assessment methods being employed; written assignments, practical assessments, objective structured clinical examinations, online exams, multiple choice exams, group presentations, individual presentations, poster presentations, clinical assessments, and reflective portfolios. Such variety aims to facilitate the development of well-rounded health care professionals with a range of skills which enhance their employability. However, the inconsistent nature of the assessment method perhaps fails to enable students to build on one specific skill set such as written assignments. This highlights all the more why assessment dialogue is important in a programme with a range of assessment methods. One assessment does not lead neatly into the subsequent assessment and students need help in understanding that different skills are required for different assessments. After all, “assessment is too important for us to assume that students are on the same wavelength as we are” (Carless 2006, p. 231).

But this also raises the issue that lecturers were aware of the student concerns about feedback, yet had not acted on these concerns. Further research would be needed to understand this in depth but the authors would suggest that this may be attributed to the frustrations aired by the lecturers that students were more concerned about their marks than specific feedback comments. If lecturers perceive this to be the case, then there could be a reluctance to exert further effort in investing in dialogue or alternative feedback modes if they do not feel students will engage with the feedback. Nevertheless, this study shows that students do care about their feedback and engage with it, thus challenging the lecturer views of the grade focused nature of assessment marks. Perhaps student participants in this study were particularly conscientious, as similarly reported by Higgins and colleagues (2002) in their 3-year investigation of the meaning and impact of assessment feedback. They noted that their students recognised the importance of grades but also displayed an intrinsic motivation to seek feedback that would help them engage in deep learning: the conscientious consumer.

Secondly, findings from this study note that there is a lack of consensus on student and lecturer views in relation to optimal feedback modes. What this study emphasises is the student preference for modes which are lecturer led (rather than self or peer led) and for

modes which are personalised to draw on the human connection. Students wanted their feedback to be genuine and hearing the voice of the lecturer or seeing them as they delivered the feedback was thought to give them greater depth of insight into understanding the feedback and provide that human connection. This desire from the students for personalised, human connection may well reflect an extension of the desire for dialogue around assessment feedback more broadly; dialogue as a form of connection (Killingback et al., 2019).

Some lecturers were acutely aware of the power of this connection and the risk of getting it wrong if negative feedback needed to be communicated. Lecturers were also aware of the high level of communication skills they would personally need in order to use alternative feedback modes. Therefore, although students may have a preference for alternative modes, perhaps the individual lecturer needs to consider whether they possess the cogent communication skills necessary to execute the delivery of such feedback effectively.

Alternative feedback modes such as video, audio, screencast have been found to raise the quality of the feedback experience and can promote a sense of belonging and enhance the lecturer-student relationship (Chalmers et al., 2014; Killingback et al., 2019). Literature suggests that the quality of the lecturer-student relationship in the context of feedback is important from the student perspective. Lecturers who are able to put students at ease, who were flexible and personable, meant that students found it easier to engage with feedback (Pokorny and Pickford, 2010). If students perceived the lecturers to be credible, feedback was more likely to be perceived as useful (Poulos and Mahony, 2008). This highlights the complex dynamic role of the student-lecturer relationship in feedback and raises further questions as to whether lecturers need to have built an initial level of relationship or credibility with students prior to utilizing alternative feedback modes or whether the use of alternative modes helps build the sense of belonging and credibility.

Thirdly, in this study, alternative feedback modes such as self or peer-assessment were preferred by some lecturers yet least valued from the student perspective. Self or peer-assessments are more student-centred in their approaches such that the student is not the passive receiver of feedback but is actively involved in its construction (Nicol, 2010). Self or peer assessment leads to a shift in control from the hands of the lecturers to the hands of the students, encouraging students to reflect more deeply on their work, applying the assessment criteria and making evaluative judgements (Nicol, et al. 2014). It was the notion of reflection which the lecturers valued in regards to self-assessment in this current study. This was seen

as having the potential to increase the meaningfulness of the feedback but also as a means of enhancing reflective skills – a core aspect of continuing professional development (Health and Care Professions Council, 2018). However, students had strong preferences for lecturer led feedback since lecturers were seen as being the experts on marking. Peer feedback was not seen as being legitimate since there was a lack of trust with peers not being as honest with providing feedback. This clearly raises some challenges in selecting optimal feedback delivery modes which work for both students and lecturers.

In order to understand some of the reasons for the disparity in feedback views it is important to consider the wider learning context. There has been a shift in teaching and learning in higher education away from the more traditional behaviourist learning theories to constructivist approaches. However, thinking about feedback on assignments has not undergone the same transition (Shepard, 2000). Nicol and colleagues (2014) build on this thinking in their study of peer review with engineering design students. They recognised that students need to not only take an active role in constructing meaning from feedback but indicate how peer review processes, where feedback is produced, is just as important for learning as the receipt of feedback. The ability to provide quality feedback is a key graduate skill (Nicol et al., 2014). A large meta-analysis has suggested that students self-assessing has the greatest single effect on their learning (Hattie, 2009). This would bring us full circle back to the importance of assessment feedback dialogue, since students would struggle to self or peer assess until the marking criteria were made clear.

The overall findings from this study highlight the dichotomous viewpoints of students and lecturers. Lecturers with the desire to introduce optimal feedback modes to enhance student and lecturer experiences of feedback are left in a quandary. A pragmatic approach would be to trial student led feedback modes of peer and self-assessment for formative learning and lecturer led modes for summative assessments. In this way, students would take an active role in constructing meaning, but without the pressure of summative grading. The findings of the current study suggest it is important for lecturers to take time to listen to students, reflect on current practice, and ensure open dialogue with students to optimise this important aspect of their learning.

Strengths and limitations

The strength of this current study is that both the student and lecturer views are considered from an emic perspective. Including students from three cohorts facilitated a range of views from different stages of study.

Limitations include the challenge of students and lecturers commenting on alternative feedback modes without experiencing those modes. However, the student and lecturer perspective was sought to enable an evidence-informed approach to be taken with selecting the most appropriate mode and to promote agency. A further limitation was that the research team were unable to organise a focus group with lecturers due to participant availability. This meant that the lecturers were not exposed to the views of their peers potentially limiting the range of data available compared to students. Additionally, this study is limited to one institution of a single healthcare programme (physiotherapy) which may reduce the transferability of the findings. There were a limited number of participants who consented to be involved in the study thus it was difficult to ascertain whether data saturation was reached.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences and preferences for feedback modes of physiotherapy students and lecturers. This is important in supporting Higher Education Institutes in making evidence-informed decisions around which feedback modes to utilise with a view to maximising the student and lecturer feedback experience. This study found that from both the student and lecturer perspective there was a desire for dialogue around assessment. This was important in helping the students understand the marking criteria, provide transparency in the marking process, and promote conversations post-assessment to clarify any points of misunderstanding.

This study raises challenges around selecting optimal feedback modes since there was a lack of consensus on student and lecturer preferences. Students preferred lecturer led modes where they could have the highest quality personal interaction with lecturers (face-to-face, screencast, video, audio) whereas many of the lecturers were advocating for student led modes (peer or self-assessment). Further development and research is needed into whether student led modes should be engaged in formative assessment processes to promote the acquisition of these reflective skills for lifelong learning, with lecturer led modes reserved for summative assessments.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests

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